See Me, Hear Me: From Teacher Belief and Pedagogy to Classroom Practice for Indigenous Students.

Jacky Lovegrove

2010
Being a report of an investigation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Murdoch University I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any institution.

Signed ……………………………………………………. 
See Me, Hear Me: From Teacher Belief and Pedagogy to Classroom Practice for Indigenous Students.

Abstract

This research examines the links between teachers’ understandings, professional learning and government policy with regard to improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent in a metropolitan school in the southern suburbs of Perth Western Australia. This particular school has had a ten percent Indigenous cohort since it was founded and has an Aboriginal Education policy in place. While the focus on Indigenous education has been on closing the gap for students of Indigenous descent, research has tended to focus on the students rather than investigating the knowledge base of teachers. In this study, the specific focus is on a group of metropolitan teachers and the system rather than the students themselves. This study critiques what research and policy deem to be good practice for the time period between 2003 and 2006 then goes on to investigate if these programs and strategies are actually being utilised in professional learning and classroom practice.

Carspecken’s (1996) five stages of a Critical Ethnographic Case Study provide the platform from which to critique and observe the culture of the school. The teachers at the school agreed to be part of an in-depth investigation of their beliefs, knowledge base and classroom practices. Twenty-six teachers completed the study questionnaire, with five teachers participating in the follow-up interview. Using themes developed from the questionnaires and interviews, classroom observations were utilised to support or interrogate teacher perceptions. Analysis of the data gave a voice to these teachers, putting forward the changes they thought needed to be developed at a school and systems level to help them improve opportunities for their Aboriginal students.

This research indicates that the Case Study teachers believed there were ways to improve their access to professional learning and knowledge of programs and cultural aspects that would help improve the literacy opportunities for their Aboriginal students. They felt that the links between major professional learning strategies, such as Getting It Right Literacy, and the programs highlighted as good practice by the Creating a Vision document (2001-2004) needed to be made clearer. They commented on the number of programs that came into the school professional reading section of the library without professional learning strategies. Giving these teachers a voice draws attention to their needs and concerns. Moreover, through this thesis, their combined voices provide an alternate perspective to the issue of improving literacy outcomes for Aboriginal students.

One of the most important messages this study gives to the system is that the Case Study teachers do not believe they have acquired enough information or professional learning to adequately assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with literacy in their metropolitan classrooms. Neither funding nor the ability of Aboriginal students to learn were seen as key issues. Rather it was the distinct lack of articulation among policy, funding and professional learning, in addition to the failure to make Aboriginal Education part of core business, that is highlighted by these metropolitan teachers.
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Chapter One

See Me, Hear Me: I am part of your classroom

(translation by Kim Stanley)

We went fishing with his uncle. We went out the back of the Island. We got lots of fish. Marcus got the big one.
Next weekend his uncle’s taking us to the bush to get kangaroos. We will have awesome fun. We will go in the ute.

This is the transcript of a simple conversation between two male students in a primary school. It sparked a series of comments by their teachers. For many of them, it was a shock: it could not happen, as these were students in a metropolitan school. From the teachers’ point of view, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students spoke English just like them, though at times they thought it was bad English. For some teachers, even the thought that Aboriginal English (AE) was spoken at home, let alone the Nyoongar language, was an issue to come to terms with, limiting the breadth of their approaches to literacy programming. This attitude to the use of AE by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at home and school was deeply entrenched. This issue of AE being spoken by students within the school was later highlighted in a staff meeting based on the Commonwealth Australia (2006) Success for Boys Project module 5 Indigenous boys, where staff members discussed the issues they felt needed addressing when implementing programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As a result of situations like the preceding conversation and peer discussions I developed the aim of this Case Study research. Having previously spent time working in the Kimberley taking part in or delivering professional learning, I wondered if the same degree of access to professional learning was available for metropolitan teachers, as it was to the teachers in the Kimberley and Pilbara. During my time as a P-3 Literacy Net Consultant for Catholic Education, in 2001 and 2002 (my
secondment from the State Education system was to help introduce the Literacy Net program to country schools state-wide) I noted that teachers working in the Kimberley or Pilbara in Western Australia had ready access to professional learning, in programs which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in literacy through their educational systems’ workshops. The issue of Standard Australian English (SAE), Aboriginal English (AE) and the many dialects was covered by strategies such as the Kimberley Literacy Strategy, Making the Jump and the English as a Second Language (ESL) Bandscales. As I needed to increase my knowledge to fulfil the requirements of my position, I became involved in some of these programs/strategies. It should be noted that an opportunity to become involved in these programs/strategies had not made itself available to me in metropolitan schools prior to this study. These experiences also informed my research questions.

As a participant investigator, I endeavored to become more informed about the beliefs, knowledge and use of programs/strategies from a metropolitan teacher’s point of view. Intertwined into this information, I explored the extent to which these programs/strategies underpinned planning in literacy classrooms, especially in light of the amount of funding and supportive programs identifying best practice and pedagogy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in this area.

Interwoven into this was the fact that fifty three percent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population were now living in urban or inner regional areas, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census (2006). This being the case, I was curious about the equity of accessibility to professional learning for all teachers, in the area of improving literacy outcomes for Indigenous students. In light of these factors, I decided to focus on a group of metropolitan teachers to gain insight into some of their beliefs, understandings and issues in regard to closing the gap in literacy for students of Aboriginal descent.

1.1 Statement of Purpose
For this reason, the purpose of this thesis was to focus on a group of teachers from a metropolitan school and their opportunities to access professional learning in the area of literacy with the aim of empowering these teachers in improving literacy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This was extended to explore
teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge of current professional learning packages (highlighted in Chapter Three) and how these perceptions impacted on their ability to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the area of literacy. I gave them the opportunity to voice their concerns and/or support for current programs, policy and professional learning to build a picture of the teachers’ requirements for empowerment in this area.

The information gathered enabled me to gain an insight into the chosen metropolitan school. The school was in Perth, Western Australia and has had a ten percent Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander student population since it was opened. The students in the chosen school came from a variety of clans/cultural backgrounds and were part of a multicultural school population. The staff in the school came from a wide variety of backgrounds, years of service, cultures and teaching strengths. For the previous eighteen months to two years prior to the commencement of my research the school had been building teachers’ awareness of issues pertaining to Indigenous students and their families in regard to enhancing their education, through the Department of Education (DoE) Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document. With the above emphasis in the school it was an ideal time to look at teacher knowledge and beliefs in their ability to improve literacy outcomes for the Indigenous students in their school. To build a bigger picture centered around the chosen school I collated information for this thesis that covered policy, research and the school emphasis relating to a three-year time span from 2003 to 2006. Also included is an update on issues based on this time frame where they provide comment on recurring issues or change in a positive direction.

1.2 Significance of the Study
The aim of this thesis was to dissect policy at Local and National levels with respect to professional learning for teachers, in the area of improving literacy outcomes, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in a metropolitan school. Once the intent of policy documents had been established, this thesis overviewed the programs and attached professional learning for the programs reflected in the DoE Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document, Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) Getting it Right Literacy (GiRL) strategy and other specified programs used to meet literacy outcomes in Western Australian schools.
Based on discussions, teacher feedback and a questionnaire, comments were developed on the effect of said professional learning at programming and planning levels for the classroom during the concluding chapters. I looked for programs that teachers believed maintained sound professional learning practices that led to them developing teacher knowledge in and reflection of classroom practice. By establishing an understanding of which programs teachers believed:

- increased the knowledge of teachers/educators to empower them to help students to achieve their outcomes in literacy;
- created a better balance among knowledge/culture/language

and, those which teachers had not seen or had not used, some suggestions were developed in regard to the accessibility and influences of the current professional learning packages/strategies as promoted in the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) document, *Walking Talking Text* the *ESL Bandscales*, and the *Getting It Right Strategy- Literacy* (these are outlined in Chapter Three). Thus this research is significant because it examines the extent to which professional learning packages actually impact on classroom practice in the metropolitan area, according to the Case Study teachers. In relation to Indigenous education this is an area that is under researched as many studies look at remote and rural areas.

1.3 Key Influences

I developed a brief critique of the current research in the following areas: policy, professional learning and language to help to contextualize my research questions. Intertwined across these areas are comments on funding both from a researcher’s and Government point of view. These areas have been fleshed out in Chapters Two and Four.

1.3.1 Policy

Policy has played a major role in highlighting the issues embedded within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. The *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (1996-2002) that was developed in November 1995 by the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) stated that there was a need to promote, maintain and
support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

This was supported by two of the goals stated in *The Adelaide Declaration* (1999) on *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA). This declaration stated that there was a need for all students to understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The policy suggested that all students understood and acknowledged the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possessed the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.

Even with these issues highlighted, current reports based on the 2009 National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results (as reported by Hiatt, December, 2009, in The West Australian) showed that according to Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard: ‘…indigenous students continue to have achievement levels substantially behind the achievement of non–indigenous students’ (paragraph. 7).

Over the last decade, in an attempt to address some of the directions/issues in Indigenous Education, the Department of Education and Training Western Australia (DETWA) *Aboriginal Education and Training Operational Plan (2005-2008)* focused its activities more closely on requiring education and training providers to monitor and evaluate progress, reporting on their achievement of outcomes to the Australian Government thus acknowledging their responsibilities for how Indigenous education and training funding were being utilised.

Through the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together- Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity)* Act 2004 and current policies, for example, the DETYA *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (NIELANS), the Australian Government directed resources towards those areas it felt had the greatest need, in particular remote Australia where gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous
student outcomes are at their widest. Even though a large proportion of resources was
being directed into remote communities, surely an argument could be made for
directing more resources into up-skilling teachers in metropolitan areas due to the
increased population of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders living in urban
situations.

With the introduction of an outcome focused curriculum (overseen by the Curriculum
Council in Western Australia), the Education Department of WA, through its Social
Justice in Education policy (1991) highlighted the need for a commitment by all
teachers to ‘social justice in education through the achievement of optimal
educational outcomes for all students’ (p. 5). As many school populations in Western
Australia are very multicultural and include students with a variety of capabilities, the
impact of this documentation has taken a diverse pathway, possibly watering down its
overall effect.

With a system based on improving outcomes, I conclude this initial preview of policy,
by taking a look at ‘The Yes Minister Factor: Policy and Practice in Indigenous
Education’ by Wyatt, Partington and Godfrey (2001) who conclude:

Government policies express the desired outcomes for Indigenous education and, especially in the case of the (NIELNS) report, correctly identify the strategies that must be implemented to achieve those outcomes. However, the Yes Minister factor has a significant influence on innovation. When those who are expected to implement the changes have reasons for not doing so, or when there are insufficient funds to make things happen, a considerable gulf can develop between what is striven for and what is actually achieved. There is a strong danger in the present circumstances of Indigenous education that the Yes Minister factor will come into force to inhibit the desirable changes expressed in the NIELNS report. To avoid this requires considerable effort in the implementation stage, to change attitudes, to foster alliances and to disseminate knowledge about appropriate strategies.

…Short term interventions will not be successful and effective, implementation of change requires long term and consistent approaches. A benefit of such approaches is that teachers will be more attuned to the
cultural needs of Indigenous students and a culturally inclusive
curriculum should be a corollary of the implementation of the NIELNS
report. However, without adequate funding, such hopes have limited
tenure. (Conclusion paragraphs)

This researcher queries if it was in fact, adequate funding or innovative use of funding
that was needed. McGlusky and Thaker (2006) state that the coordination of
professional learning proved to be an issue in their study looking at issues for
Vocational Education Teachers (VET) in regard to providing programs for teens and
young adults of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. If policy, funding and
coordination of professional learning were linked/streamlined then maybe guidelines
could be developed to formulate a pathway from policy to funding a project to
professional learning. An example of this might be the requirement to produce a
project outline, inclusive of links, to current policy and professional learning
available either as a Department of Education Strategy (for example The Getting It
Right Strategy) or an online strategy such as Dare to Lead. This would enhance the
chance of teachers at the chalk face hearing about and maybe accessing such
professional learning.

1.3.2 Professional Learning
From this initial look at policy, I needed to take a closer look at what the research
stated about professional learning. What were the issues and implications, with
respect to assisting teachers to develop their knowledge, in regard to improving
outcomes in literacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

A discussion paper by the Indigenous Students In Early Childhood Services and the
MCEETYA Taskforce (June 2001) on Indigenous Education emphasised that goals
were needed to gain achievement of educational equality for Australia’s Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander people. A draft set of professional standards for
accomplished teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was
formulated. The discussion paper did not discriminate among rural, remote or
metropolitan students. It was formulated for all teachers. Therefore, all teachers
should have access to professional learning both to achieve and comply with these
standards.
The Commonwealth of Australia (2006) *Success for Boys Project* goes on to highlight the concept that it is easier to implement strategies, principles or policies if you are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee or have maintained a good relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during your life and thus have a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge frameworks, culture and linguistics. What does this mean for other teachers? How does the system help bridge the gap?

Taking this a step further from a quality assurance point of view, which the MEECTYA Taskforce suggested was an integral part of policy, there was a presumption that teachers, who are knowledgeable in their subject and have good professional judgment, would be effective and have a sound background in issues pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. From a national accountability point of view, it was suggested that the best indicator of teaching effectiveness was the ability to achieve equitable outcomes for all students in terms of national benchmarks. Note these benchmarks were based predominantly on Australian mainstream cultural practices and Standard Australian English (SAE).

In the current *Indigenous Boys Module* (from the Commonwealth Australia, *Success for Boys Project*, 2006) the suggestion was that if we are to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within whole school communities, there must be an opportunity to reframe the attitudes and perceptions of all staff, students and communities.

A personal accountability develops [over time] as teachers and support staff are able to see where and why Indigenous perspectives have been omitted within the school context and they can [then] assist in rectifying this. (Resource 9. p. 1)

Taking into account the preceding research, one may ask whether there was a need for professional learning programs to support both quality assurance and teaching effectiveness to have any impact on change?

Was the quality lost with the concern that teachers were limited to and predominantly utilized their own social justice and background knowledge as a means for developing
learning situations without understanding or melding the background knowledge, learning styles and cultural aspects of their students? Without an awareness of the historical, cultural and linguistic/language background of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, new strategies and programs to addresses literacy may be less effective. Adding an Aboriginal perspective seemed an issue, as teachers appeared to be uncertain about how to incorporate these perspectives in their everyday teaching curriculum. Revisiting this concept in 2009 led me to find a site established by the Department of Education Western Australia assisting teachers to develop Aboriginal Perspectives across the Curriculum (APAC), which helped address some of the concerns I had during 2003 –2006. I wonder if teachers and schools were also aware of this site. My concerns in regard to developing an Aboriginal perspective and professional learning are discussed further in Chapter Four and the data chapters.

These issues surrounding Aboriginal culture/Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge were illustrated when I attended a workshop given by two presenters (one Aboriginal, one non-Aboriginal) at a venue in Perth. My fellow participants were equally divided between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We were looking at the issues and strategies to assist with the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into everyday schooling. The atmosphere in the workshop was tense due to certain statements being made. For example, a group of Aboriginal spokespeople made comments that non-Indigenous teachers were doing things that upset their students and communities. It was implied that this was intentional. Other non-Indigenous participants became quietly upset. They had attended the workshop to increase their knowledge and understanding and felt this was a harsh judgment. I began to wonder if there were assumptions being made by both parties. In my opinion, some Aboriginal people may believe teachers have enough understanding of their culture and language to avoid disrespectful actions and comments, but was this really the case or had the education system assumed they had given their teachers enough professional learning to avoid these situations?

This issue was heightened when the cultural diversity of the current teaching population was taken into account. Many teachers have grown up with little or no background in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history or language(s). The implications of this for one teacher from the Case Study school are
discussed later, as she volunteered to be interviewed, expressing issues and tabling concerns.

Thus, looking directly at professional learning, the question arises whether sufficient efforts had been made to help teachers bridge this gap in their knowledge and understanding or whether there was an assumption that the programs themselves would fill the requirement? Research by the Board of Studies in NSW (2002), *How we learn, what we need to know*, states that one of the common challenges:

… is that understanding of cultures and history of Aboriginal people is not widespread in the educational system. Without that understanding, the development of effective educational programs and partnerships is impossible (p. 18).

Although this statement may seem extreme, I wondered if there was a genuine feeling amongst teachers in metropolitan schools that they did not have the knowledge/cultural understandings to create a truly inclusive situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their classrooms.

The degree of professional learning undertaken by teachers and its effectiveness at the classroom level was explored in the context of the *Plan for Government Schools* (2004-2007) produced by the Department of Education and Training, Government of Western Australia. It stated under Point 4 *Employing the most powerful teaching strategies*, that:

… Teachers will renew and build on their skills continually and be supported in developing their professional expertise. Targeted professional development will concentrate on the skills teachers need to respond in schools to emerging economic, social and technological conditions. High-quality professional development in pedagogies, curriculum and assessment will support teachers. Teachers will optimise students’ learning using information about their performance to drive curriculum planning and pedagogy and to make changes where they are shown to be necessary (p. 6).
This statement assumed that teachers and schools knew and were aware of areas they needed to address, had the funding for these areas and/or could access the expertise to effectively initiate and maintain change.

The Department of Education and Training, WA *Plan for Government Schools* (2004-2007) stated:

…Teachers and other staff will be supported to create learning environments that stimulate and challenge students to achieve optimum learning.

The principles about learning and teaching described in the *Curriculum Framework* are based on shared beliefs about the learning environment all schools should provide and contemporary research and professional knowledge about how learning can be supported (p. 8).

With the above statement being about policy and how teachers and other staff were being supported, why was the research still saying educational achievement was unacceptably low for this group of people?

It is possible that McGlusky and Thaker’s (2006) research in regard to Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses pinpoints one of the reasons. They stated:

While attention has been drawn to the need for professional development for teachers and trainers working with Indigenous students, there has been no coordinated effort to supply them with practical information in relation to literacy and numeracy support (p. 17).

**1.3.3 Funding**

Maybe it was this lack of a coordinated approach to professional learning that was causing its downfall rather than a lack of funding. Continued funding has been utilised in the development of programs to enhance literacy and effective pedagogy. In a media release from Dr Brendan Nelson, then the federal Education minister, it was stated that the Howard Government would provide ‘…$128.1 million for on-going and new strategies. It is envisaged that this will help further accelerate the achievement of Indigenous students in regard to educational outcomes’ (April 5,
Accordingly, it should be noted that we have policy and funding. But without a coordinated effort, was it an assumption that this knowledge reached teachers and underpinned practice and planning in the classroom? Are the programs included in the policy/funding indeed culturally and developmentally appropriate with real-life applications? Or do many of these programs end up sitting on shelves in school professional reading or library sections collecting dust?

From the perspective of working in a metropolitan state school with a more than ten percent Aboriginal and Torres Strait student population, if I had wanted to access these programs I would firstly have had to have an interest, and secondly, have had to investigate when and how I could access them. Due to the smaller numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students in metropolitan schools, it did not appear to be an automatic part of professional learning as it was in remote or rural areas. The notion that professional learning in this area for these metropolitan primary school teachers was probably dependent on their individual school priorities and funding opportunities is investigated through the questionnaire and interviews.

1.3.4 Language
As this thesis is developed in the context of teachers’ beliefs and knowledge regarding their ability to improve literacy outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there was a need to include discussion in regard to current research on Standard Australian English (SAE), Aboriginal English (AE) and the Aboriginal dialects. It has been established that SAE is the power language in Australia as it is the dialect of English utilised in business, law and education. However, research (Eades, 1993 and the Department of Education, 2002 Ways of Being Ways of Talk) shows that AE and dialects are important markers of Aboriginal cultural and linguistic identity. These are languages/dialects which Aboriginal people use to identify with each other to express a distinctively Aboriginal worldview. Aboriginal English uses different rules determining how and when to speak, as well as how to behave in different communication contexts. It has rules that generate different word and sentence forms from SAE.

As a minority group, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have their own worldview, but the education system has developed in such a way that their students
need to develop an awareness of the non-Aboriginal worldview in order to succeed. This does not imply that there is a balance and that non-Aboriginal students’ have the same necessity to develop an awareness of the Aboriginal worldview. For most of the time, non-Aboriginal students are not aware of Aboriginal worldviews and society does not encourage a development of such awareness despite the Adelaide Declaration’s intention that all students should learn about Aboriginal cultures.

In current research, the role language plays in valuing all students was well documented but ‘…evidence suggested the devaluing of Aboriginal students’ home talk by teachers’ (Malcolm, Haig, Konigsberg, Rochecouste, Collard, Hill and Cahill 1999 p. 25), was not an uncommon practice. With Aboriginal English being part of the cultural capital of many Aboriginal students, the importance of valuing and merging these understandings needs to be incorporated into teacher knowledge and the formation of user-friendly curriculum materials and learning outcomes.

Malcolm et al. (1999) describe the need to approach AE understandings through a more holistic and integrated approach. In section three of the Australian Government Department of Education Science and Training, What Works, The Work Program (2005), Improving outcomes for Indigenous Students, the authors expand on this, with comments that suggest:

- further work needs to be undertaken by exploring more inclusive teaching styles and the impact of Indigenous cultures on classroom interactions and processes, and at the same time avoiding any consideration of Indigenous learning styles. Every child has their own learning style and the Taskforce is of the view that these learning styles are not dependent on whether the child is Indigenous or non-Indigenous (paragraph 22).

Studies into Aboriginal ways of living and learning have cited the work by Harris (1980, 1984) who described traditional learning styles among Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. These styles encompassed real-life, context-specific and person-orientated learning characterised by observation and imitation and personal trial and error. Harris, (1994) goes on to state with conviction, that: ‘... if teachers adopt teaching approaches which suit Aboriginal kids, everyone in the class will
benefit or at least not be disadvantaged (p. 128). Despite Harris’ work there is no real
evidence, however, that the preferred learning styles of Aboriginal students are
grounded in their culture. Hughes and More (1997) developed four bipolar continua,
which describe preferred learning experiences. At one polarity, the Global learner
understands the task best when the overall concept is presented first, through an
overview, introduction or finished example, while opposite analytic end, is the comfort
zone for learners who prefer information presented in small pieces and gradually built up
to the whole (Hughes and More 1997 p. 29). Research by Harris (1984) and Hughes,
More & Williams (2004) suggest that Indigenous learners are more likely to cluster
towards the global end of the spectrum. They want to understand the purpose for a task or
skill acquisition from the outset. Added to this the What Works (2005) team pointed out
each child has its own way of learning regardless of cultural background.

Utilising the above ideas Yunkaporta’s, (2007-2009) draft report on Aboriginal
Pedagogies at the Cultural Interface further explored these suggestions, developing a
project that not only engaged with Aboriginal learning processes, but also engaged
educators in a dialogue at the common ground between Indigenous and mainstream
pedagogies. He developed an eight ways Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework (p. 10)
adding land and community links to ways of learning. (see Figure 1)

In developing knowledge and confidence with these issues teachers could then assist
in protecting the language/culture from inappropriate correction, misunderstandings
and erosion. If they intertwined strategies which engaged students’ individual
needs/backgrounds and showed an appreciation for language and worldviews, surely
this would be a good start to increasing opportunities to enhance the literacy outcomes
for students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.
The previous comments have only touched the surface of what is a well-researched area. My issue was not that the information was lacking, as I felt that the research that had transpired was progressing to a more in-depth understanding and portrayal of the differences and commonalities between SAE, AE, other dialects and ways of learning. The literacy approaches/strategies that were suggested in the research were comprehensive and provided a wide variety of options for teachers to utilise.

### 1.4 Aims of the Study

To encompass the above issues and assist in protecting Aboriginal languages and culture meant teachers needed to be accessing professional learning to generate a knowledge base that extended their worldviews. But was this happening? The Case Study broached these issues as part of the questionnaire and interviews by addressing the following questions:

- Did the metropolitan classroom teachers in this study feel they had enough access to the information and strategies in this area? (Could they identify students using AE?)
- What variety of professional learning was available to them (cultural/language/learning strategies)?
Were better links needed between policy, professional learning and funding to develop professional learning of a sustainable/supported nature?

A brief look at the chain of responsibility for said professional learning, acknowledged at Central Office, District Office, School, Teacher and Community level was investigated. The last aspect was explored as professional learning was noted as important in many policies, but the policies did not state how, when or by whom this professional learning would be delivered.

In re-stating the aims of this study, I have endeavoured to link policy, professional learning, language and funding together, to look at perceived teacher knowledge and the assumption that best practice, as referred to in National and Western Australian policy and programs, were in fact influencing classroom practice.

Therefore, this study endeavours to establish a keyhole view into the beliefs of a group of metropolitan teachers, their access to current professional learning and the understandings/beliefs that underpin their classroom practice. It focuses on the area of fostering literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous or Torres Straight Islander descent in a metropolitan school with a greater than ten percent cohort of Indigenous and Torres Straight Islander students.

1.5 Research Questions

In light of the preceding research, the draft key competencies (for teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) and policies (at National, State and Territories levels), the focus questions for this Case Study attempt to provide insights into the following areas:

1. Have teachers’ acquired enough information/professional learning in their eyes to adequately assist Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students in literacy in their metropolitan classrooms?

2. How does this professional learning or lack of it in their eyes impact on their classroom structure and planning?
In establishing which programs had professional learning, and of those, which teachers had or had not seen relevant programs, some suggestions (based on research and teacher feedback) are provided in the concluding chapters as to how professional learning could be utilised. These suggestions relate to the following:

- How to increase the knowledge of teachers/educators to be better able to help students to achieve their literacy outcomes;
- How to provide avenues/suggestions to create a better balance between knowledge/culture/language;
- How to help with the liaison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults in order to overcome incidents caused by a lack of knowledge rather than a deliberate slur or misunderstanding;
- Why there is a need to create a more transparent link between policies, funding and professional learning, enhancing teacher opportunities.

In establishing this keyhole view into what was happening at the classroom level, I decided to use a Case Study perspective to gather data through a questionnaire on teachers’ perceived knowledge of current programs, professional learning attended, when and where (remote, rural, metropolitan) and if they utilise the program(s) in their planning. Comments were extracted on what impact they saw these programs/strategies had and how they employed them (if they did) in their classroom programming.

I also investigated if the teachers had identified any strategies in the Getting it Right Literacy (GiRL) project or Creating a Vision (2001-2004) policy that had assisted them to help improve the literacy outcomes of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The questionnaire was extended through teacher interviews on the programs and their understanding of the issues pertaining to literacy learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

As a researcher I have critically analysed teacher beliefs, policy and documentation using a triangulated approach of interviews, questionnaires and some school data. The Case Study was developed with the intention of creating a format from which
discussion could be initiated. I have endeavoured to highlight some of the issues from a metropolitan school teacher’s viewpoint. If teachers were to be the change agents they needed to be confident they had the knowledge and strategies to improve literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

1.6 The lens through which this project is viewed

It should be noted that this thesis is written through the eyes of a new Australian citizen who has lived and taught in WA for twenty years. This meant I did not have the Australian school based history or the experience of growing up in Australia to begin my journey into understanding the issues surrounding the dilemma of improving literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Thus my knowledge about this topic was based on recent experience, research and an interest in Indigenous cultures.

With an interest in integrated classroom practice developed around equal education opportunities for all, I found gaining information and accessing professional learning regarding issues for Indigenous students, in the area of literacy, seemed easier if you worked in a rural or remote situation. Working in a metropolitan school, with a more than ten percent Indigenous student population, I chose to challenge the assumption that metropolitan teachers knew about the programs highlighted in current WA education policies and/or that the teachers were utilising them in classroom planning. Extending this, I chose to challenge the idea that metropolitan teachers had the knowledge to adequately assist and improve outcomes in literacy for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent in accordance with current policy. I also challenged the idea that teachers knew what an Aboriginal perspective was and how to implement this perspective across everyday curriculum.

I am aware that I am coming from a middle class, white, adult point of view with the added component of being a practising classroom teacher. With this in mind, I openly state up front that my journey down the path of knowledge in regard to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was only just beginning. It was because accessing this journey had proven to be difficult that I began to wonder how the journey was for other teachers in metropolitan schools, and if they cared or
whether the system just threw words at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education through policy and professional learning with no follow through.

1.7 Overview of the chapters

Chapter Two discusses and overviews policy and documentation that the research uncovers both at National and Western Australian levels. It focuses on issues pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy programs and the professional learning associated with them. Using the Department of Education WA Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document the research briefly outlines the responsibilities designated to the different tiers in the state education school system for professional learning.

In Chapter Three an overview of the programs reflected in the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document, Walking Talking Texts, the ESL Bandscales, and the Getting It Right Literacy Strategy will be given. This contextualises the case study in that it outlines the breadth of programs/strategies available to teachers in the area of literacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It also demonstrates the necessity to see how much of this readily available material was actually reaching the teachers who are in the best position to empower and motivate students.

Chapter Four provides a literature review on professional learning techniques and relates these to current practices in the area of literacy. Further to this overview, an in-depth examination of what current professional learning might look like for metropolitan teachers trying to improve literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent was developed.

Chapter Five gives an overview of the Case Study school, its policy, and education achievements in the area of literacy and socio-economic background.

Chapter Six outlines the theoretical and methodological approach that informs the thesis and explicates what I have done and why I have done it.

Chapters Seven and Eight explore and discuss the data obtained through the questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations and school based data. This focus
endeavours to highlight a group of metropolitan teachers’ point of view with regard to current policy and research.

Chapter Nine develops conclusions and makes suggestions for future professional learning in the area of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in literacy, based on the findings, teachers’ beliefs and current research. Some of the suggestions made in this chapter began to take effect in 2007 and as such a brief comment about them will be made.
Chapter Two
See Me, Hear Me: Mapping policy in Indigenous Education
Policy plays a major part in unpacking the concepts of this thesis. The links to professional learning and improving the literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent start their journey here, at least on paper.

2.1 History
In establishing a reference point for the start of this journey into policy, I decided to use a timeline dating forward from the 1967 Referendum to the current day. This established a point from where the Commonwealth government of the day had influence in the proceedings regarding policy for Aboriginal/Indigenous Education.

During 1975, the Commonwealth Schools Commission established a standing committee to advise it on Aboriginal education. Members were selected by Indigenous people from across Australia. It was called the Schools Commission and this became the Aboriginal Consultative Group (ACG). The Committee recognised that education needed to be considered in a wider context and recommended the establishment of consultative groups in each state.

This was followed by the formation of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) in 1976–1997. The Commonwealth Schools Commission assisted with funding state Education Departments to form their own AECGs. The National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC), which emerged from the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), produced the first Indigenous education policy in 1980. It emphasised cultural heritage and the importance of Indigenous studies for all Australian people. It fostered the concept of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being involved in managing their own education.

During the late 1980s the Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force report, also known as the Hughes Report (1988) recommended a national policy to address inequities and problems in Indigenous education. This started a push for a unified approach to improving education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The findings became the basis of Australian Government DEST National Aboriginal and TSI Education Policy (NATSIEP) later renamed the National Indigenous Education Policy (NIEP). Following on from this report was the release of the 1989 Hobart
Declaration on Schooling. This declaration was introduced by the Australian Education Council, now the Ministerial Council on Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, (MCEETYA) and it outlined ten agreed national goals.

These ten national goals underpinned the National Aboriginal and TSI Education Policy (AEP) in 1990, which worked towards equity in Aboriginal education and now contained twenty-one agreed national goals for Indigenous education. Included in these goals was a push for change in Indigenous education and training. This policy was adopted by all Australian governments promoting the urgent need to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians and was later updated to become the MCEETYA Adelaide Declaration in 1999.

In a matter of a decade, strategies such as the Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (now IESIP), the Aboriginal Education Direct Assistance Programme (now IEDA), the Adelaide Declaration (1999) National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century (introduced by MCEETYA and superseding the 1989 Hobart Declaration) and the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) (2000) were in place.

The MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education was formed in 1999. It was developed from the AEG and through the amalgamation of a number of COAG councils. The MCEETYA council has formulated several reports, which influenced many of the changes during the time of this thesis. In a current MCEETYA document The Australian Directions In Indigenous Education (2005–2008) the council critiques policy and practice by stating that:

Historically, the policies and practices of Australian governments were predicated on the supposed inferiority of Indigenous Australians. This has contributed to a tendency for systems and schools to devalue the educational potential of Indigenous students and to overlook the cultural, linguistic and social capital they bring to the classroom. While this deficit view is now contested, the perception that Indigenous students are to blame for their poor educational outcomes lingers on. Disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has
come to be viewed as normal and incremental change seen as acceptable (p. 18).

Research by McGlusky and Thaker, (2006) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2000+) Dare to Lead Project, supports that deficit model is continuing to hold sway. In fact they suggest that most studies on the effectiveness of policy initiatives to increase Indigenous outcomes have been based on mainstream policy assumptions of success. These comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous performance overlooked Indigenous philosophies about success and portrayed negative perceptions of Indigenous outcomes at an educational level. While studies such as Bourke et al. (1996); Ham (1996); Anderson et al. (1999) and Malone (1999 in Walker, 2000) call for a broader notion of success, and other performance measures, I believe that moving away from the notion of mainstream success can only be fully achieved by increasing teacher awareness that success can be understood differently from their own perceptions of success. There is a need to empower teachers in this regard in order to change current practices and move towards a more inclusive style of education for all students.

The directional move in policy highlighted by the MCEETYA policy document The Australian Directions In Indigenous Education (2005–2008) and the Department of Education document AETOP: Our Vision (2005-2008), had their way paved by policy formulated in the late 1990s. In April 1999, an historic commitment to collaborate on improving Australian schooling was made by the state Education Ministers. DETYA’s National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2000-2004, p. 10), The National Goals for Schooling (1999) stated that:

Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students.
Schooling should be socially just, so that…Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to, and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students and that schooling should be socially just, so that…all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
While the research leads us to believe policy is moving away from a *deficit model* and that we are well on the way to building a platform for improving outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, statements such as these have been included in policy both at a National and State level from the 1990s and still we see a gap between policy and practice.

Although we see a change in the focus over the duration of these policies, these policies also demonstrate that concerns have been voiced for nearly four decades. It would seem the degree of *change* created by these policies has not significantly influenced the level of outcomes achieved by students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, as the current day Government still finds the achievement levels for Indigenous students unacceptable. Thus the West Australian Opinion Editor Zoltan Kovac (2009) stated that, ‘the Education Department has acknowledged a failure to achieve the aims of its four year plan to improve Aboriginal education’ (p. 20). Adding to this view, Olds (2009) in ‘Indigenous Education’ (p. 29) discusses the damning picture that Emeritus Professor Helen Hughes and independent researcher Mark Hughes gave in their report ‘Revisiting Indigenous Education’ (1994) about how individual states were hampering the improvement and advancement of Indigenous education.

The former Director General, Paul Albert, through the DoE Aboriginal Education and Training Operational Plan (AETOP) - *Our Vision* (2005–2008) WA, joined these voices by stating that ‘the current lack of achievement by Aboriginal students can no longer be tolerated …’(p. 2). They went on to outline the State’s current plan to make a difference. Due to the ‘current lack of achievement’, the AETOP - *Our Vision* (2005–2008) and other MCEETYA influenced policy documents were trying to initiate a change in direction towards a more equitable and inclusive approach to issues pertaining to education for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

Given this *lack of achievement*, in the course of this thesis, I will look a little deeper, and discuss the following:

- The influence(s) this change of direction has had on improving student outcomes in literacy;
• Whether or not Case Study teachers actually know about and understand the implications of current policy;
• If the information formulated at the policy level influence change at the classroom *chalk face*;
• Were professional learning for teachers factored into these policies?

In endeavoring to answer these questions, information was extracted from the literature and the questionnaires, interviews and discussions obtained from the Case Study teachers. The information from the literature is intertwined into the rest of this chapter and information generated by the teachers is developed through the concluding chapters tying together teacher input and research.

### 2.2 Policy and the inclusion of Professional Learning

Alongside the issue of policy change runs the issue of funding to provide for its initiatives. Funding guidelines imposed a complex set of parameters for applying for funding for most policy initiatives. At a Commonwealth level, a major change was initiated in the area of funding, with the *National Goals for Schooling, Schools Assistance (Learning Together–Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity)* Bill (2004) replacing the *Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes* (SAISO) Programme (2001) with a new DEEWR *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs* (LNSLN) Programme (2005). The new funding was to provide for programs such as:

• early intervention programs; literacy and numeracy, including student assessment and student achievement reports;
• students with disabilities (SWD);
• teacher professional development;
• and resource materials (p. 6).

This meant professional learning was given a guernsey at the funding level. However, as professional learning became the major focuses for this thesis, investigating how professional learning intertwined with policy and funding provides an insight into what was or was not helping to improve literacy outcomes, at the National level as well as the local (Western Australian) level.
The current MEECTYA (2005–2008) document *Australian Directions In Indigenous Education* states:

> Many researchers working in Indigenous education have continually highlighted the importance of the quality of engagement between the teacher and the student as having the most profound effect on success (p. 27).

This document goes on to highlight the importance of professional learning through recommendations eight and nine:

8 Ministers agree that quality teaching in primary and secondary schools is essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous students while fostering in them a strong sense of identity as successful learners and as Indigenous Australians.

9 To give effect to recommendation 8, ministers commit to:

9.1 provide by 2010 pre-service and in-service professional learning accredited by teaching accreditation authorities to:

   a. ensure that school leaders and teachers have the cultural understandings to significantly improve outcomes for Indigenous students;
   
   b. enable teachers to explicitly teach literacy to Indigenous students, including those for whom Standard Australian English is a second language or dialect; and
   
   c. enable teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that result in high levels of academic expectation and achievement by Indigenous students across all learning areas; (p. 28)

These recommendations added to the case that professional learning should be highlighted as an essential criterion in policy documentation.

While the common thread between policy and professional learning had been highlighted in policies since the 1990s, it did not appear to have happened earlier, with professional learning often shown as a stand-alone or add-on exercise. That was the responsibility of the school or the teachers themselves (this is highlighted in the discussions in Chapters Eight and Nine). Further, the MCEETYA (2005–2008)
document Australian Directions In Indigenous Education proclaimed that by 2010 they wanted to ensure that professional learning would be:

9.2 … a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a principal and incorporated into performance agreements of existing principals; that professional learning at 9.1(a) is a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher; and that professional learning at 9.1(a), (b) and (c) is incorporated into performance agreements and/or duty statements of existing teachers (p. 10).

There appeared to be a long way to go to enable this to happen, as I suspected the issue of gaining said professional learning goes deeper than just mere words on paper. Even when professional learning gained a mention or was identified as a key focus area, the how, when and by whom, was often left to be assumed by the reader.

2.3 Linking National and State policy

In discussing the current directional change at the National level, there is also a need to map out the local Western Australia policy documents which had affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. In many cases, these had been developed as a result of National directives and to gain the State’s portion of the National funding pool.

These links between national and state policy are evident in the current Department of Education and Training’s major policy framework, the AETOP - Our Vision (2005–2008) document as it reflects the eight priorities (see p. 27) for education endorsed by the MCEETYA council. Such links had been encouraged between Local and National policy since 1993 when the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) amalgamated a number of ministerial councils to achieve a more coordinated approach to policy making. This merger of several existing ministerial councils enabled MCEETYA to be formed.

This National/State link was made known across the most recent policies influencing the Western Australian Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Education primary school sector. Table 2a: West Australian Policy Overview shows the policies influencing WA surrounding the time period of this thesis.
Table 2a West Australian Policy Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy/Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Anti- Racism Policy (Ed. Dept. WA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001- 2004</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Strategy-Creating a Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>The Aboriginal Literacy Strategy, National Goals for Schooling (AEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2007</td>
<td>Plan for Government Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2008</td>
<td>Ministerial directive based on Creating a Vision, and National Aboriginal and Policy Our vision (AETOP) - 8 steps (MCEETYA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–2008</td>
<td>Australian Directions In Indigenous Education (MCEETYA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preceding the (AETOP)-Our Vision (2004-2007) document, in 2001, was the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document. It was also strongly influenced by MCEETYA’s National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1999) and the twenty-one goals of the AEP. The Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document, with an attached Ministerial directive, was the document in place for the data collection period of this thesis.

It focused on the following eight priority areas:

- improving Indigenous literacy;
- improving Indigenous numeracy;
- increasing the employment of Indigenous Australians in education and training;
- improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students;
- increasing Indigenous enrolments;
- increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents and community members in educational decision making;
- increasing professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education; and
- expanding culturally inclusive curricula.

Once more, as one reads through the outlines of these priority areas, there appears to be an underlying assumption that the need for professional learning (development) is
either a hidden part of the overall picture or needs only an obligatory mention as in the focus area, *increasing professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education.*

In further unpacking the *Creating a Vision* (2001 –2004) document, it is clear that it provides well-developed strategies for literacy, but on closer inspection, the professional learning focus strategies were predominantly for upskilling Aboriginal people. While I think this was an imperative strategy, I strongly believed there is a need to have a Key Focus Area that included upskilling all education workers in issues relating to Aboriginal Education. Again, although this was interwoven into the document, I felt a more prominent push needed to be promoted even if the *Creating a Vision* (2001–2004) document was to be strongly linked to the Plan for Government Schools 2004-2007.

The reason I felt so strongly about this, was that Western Australia had a very multicultural teaching workforce, many with exemplary skills, of an average age of forty-seven years in 2005, who may or may not have had any background in the knowledge areas that would assist them to help Indigenous and non-Indigenous students appreciate separate and overlapping worldviews. In the current teaching environment, how did we (teachers) get the skills and from whom?

Continuing on, the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) document, with its ministerial directive, was developed at a time when Ministers at a National level agreed to provide a clear framework for the improvement of school literacy and numeracy standards based on the key elements of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Plan* (2005 – 2008) and its LNSLN goals (DEEWR Australian Government Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2005 – 2008 p. 136). Their key elements included professional learning. They acknowledged that professional learning was needed to support the key elements of:

a) Assessment of all students and  
b) Intervention …to address the needs of all students identified as having difficulty  
c) Data collection/measurement…
This occurred at the same time as the push for inclusive classrooms, but the links to
the actual professional learning in inclusivity and the key elements for improving
literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent were at best implied rather than
made explicit.

As I wrote the first drafts of this chapter, I began to wonder; if a policy providing
national direction was available, then maybe a more openly identified strategy for
professional learning to address key elements for all teachers could be included. This
would allow for documents such as the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) policy and its
updates to be visibly linked to national directives rather than the reader searching for
the links. Another option I thought about was making explicit the links in current
local documents, for example, the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) policy and *Plan for
Government Schools* (2004–2007). By doing this, avenues for professional learning
and literacy could be highlighted and the *by whom?* question would gain more clarity.

On reviewing this issue of linking current documents, I found the recently released
update for *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) document, the AETOP–*Our Vision* (2005-
2008) document, has linked Key Objective 2: Motivated and capable workforce of the
Plan for Government Schools (2004–2007), in a highlighted box on page two. This
‘promotes professional learning, the development of professional knowledge and
expertise’ (p. 2).

Even the spelling out of pre-service and in-service professional learning for teachers
by accredited teaching authorities, by the year 2010, in the MEECTYA document
*Australian Directions In Indigenous Education* (2005–2008) was a basis on which
policies could link future directives. To me, showing visible links between documents
at a State/National level is a step towards making Aboriginal Education a *built in*
component to education rather than a *bolted on* aspect. If the policy makers can
portray Aboriginal Education as being part of core business, surely it would help.

2.4 Linking the Issues

Developing the issues further into linking policy, professional learning, literacy and
funding, I found that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace
linking funding to programs that were initiated via ‘collaboration between school
education authorities, parents, teacher professional associations, principals, national
literacy and numeracy organisations and higher education institutions’ (p. 111).

During the same time period the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs
NIELANS strategy (2000-2004), encouraged education providers to adopt approaches
that had been shown to make a real difference in teaching students of Indigenous
descent. Accordingly, extensive resources were made available through recurrent
funding programs via the State, Territory and Commonwealth. The impetus was
designed to provide extra support to aid in the improvement of educational outcomes
for Indigenous students. In reading this, it appeared that all bases were covered.
However the policy did not seem to require resource providers to declare how
teachers firstly learnt about their resources secondly used their resources effectively
and finally knew what implications their resources had to offer for assisting with
improvements of the outcomes in literacy for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander descent.

Alongside the concern that the policies and practices of Australian governments have
been historically predicated on the supposed inferiority of Indigenous Australians, as
discussed by MCEETYA through the Australian Directions In Indigenous Education
(2005–2008) document, was the concern that the resources and strategies have
cau sed inadvertent consequences. These being that the said programs and strategies
led to dependence on short-term solutions and in many cases had not reached the
whole teaching force. The pathway to change has been, and still is, disjointed.

Reinforcing this is the issue highlighted in McGlusky and Thaker’s (2006) research:
While attention has been drawn to the need for professional
development for teachers and trainers working with Indigenous students,
there has been no coordinated effort to supply them with practical
information in relation to literacy and numeracy support
(p. 17).

The above statements also link back to the concern for how, when and by whom said
professional learning was delivered. For this reason, in the light of the current push
for professional learning for all teachers in the area of education for Indigenous students, to be part of a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher by 2010 there was a need to further investigate:

- If a coordinated approach was beginning to evolve?
- How the Case Study teachers felt about current professional learning practices and what suggestions, if any, they had in regard to their being able to meet the professional learning requirements by 2010?

Some insights into these and previous questions are woven into the final chapters.

2.5 Across policy areas

Leaving specific policy for Aboriginal Education, it should be noted that, The DET Plan for Government Schools, WA (2004 –2007) has an emphasis across the board, on professional development and literacy. It states:

*Teachers will renew and build* on their skills continually and be supported in developing their professional expertise. *Targeted professional development* will concentrate on the skills teachers need to respond in schools to emerging economic, social and technological conditions. *High-quality professional development in pedagogies, curriculum and assessment will support teachers.* Teachers *will optimise students’ learning* using information about their performance to drive *curriculum planning and pedagogy* and to make changes where they are shown to be necessary (Theme 4, p. 5).

In continuing to explore this policy at the systems level, I felt it was necessary to show that the Plan for Government Schools, WA, (2004-2007) had a focus on *the need to value teacher expertise and knowledge* and the extent to which it impacted on improving student outcomes. The following statements emphasised that teachers are a critical in a child’s learning success and teachers’ knowledge in how to engage students are essential. Thus the *Plan for Government Schools* outlines the following:

- Effective pedagogy that was *purposeful, challenging and connected to a student’s experience*, stage of development and *background*;
- Learning programs that acknowledged and built on where students were at with their learning;
- *Culturally and developmentally appropriate* programs, and had
• *Real-life application* (p. 8).

If these were more closely aligned to Aboriginal Education policy or vice versa and also included a statement about the avenues available to ensure that *policy direction* is achievable then maybe schools and teachers would have a better understanding of what *is expected*. At the time of conducting research for this thesis, responsibility for the outcomes, focus areas and strategies, in the *Creating a Vision Document* (2001-2004) and the *Plan for Government Schools* (2004-2007) was taken on by different players (State, Regional, school and/or teachers). This adds to the uncertainty and confusion.

In Table 2b, I have tried to portray a systems picture of where I felt the responsibilities fell during 2003 - 2006. Using this as a starting point for a discussion on who the metropolitan schoolteachers thought were responsible for policy/strategy/program implementation provided an insight into how they believed professional learning and policy were linked. This was an area where teachers could shed some light into ways they thought their ability to access professional learning to meet policy requirements could be improved.

Developing these links further one needed to ask the question: *How did these policies relate to Indigenous education at the classroom interface?* Even though these policy factors had been established at national or systems level, what impact (if any) did they have for teachers or groups of students that were in minority groups? These aspects and others are explored further in the discussion chapters following the deliverance of the questionnaire and interviews.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/ Focus</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Responsibility (Dept of Ed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Sustainable change and improvement in education plans</td>
<td>*Strategic initiatives to integrate Aboriginal programs into mainstream education practice</td>
<td>♦ ♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure Aboriginal Strategy is incorporated into the development and implementation plans at District Level</td>
<td></td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of an effective Aboriginal and advisory network</td>
<td>*Employ more Aboriginal people at District Level to assist with dissemination of Aboriginal Strategy</td>
<td>♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish processes to identify best practice in Aboriginal education related to Key Focus Areas</td>
<td>*Monitoring, auditing and reporting by Principals, District Directors and Aboriginal Advisory Network</td>
<td>♦ ♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Focus Area 2 Conductive Hearing Loss</td>
<td>*Improved planning relating to students *Increase number of professional learning sessions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff on impact and programming for students with conductive hearing loss</td>
<td>♦ ♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Focus Area 4 Literacy</td>
<td>*Promote and demonstrate recognition and valuing of Aboriginal ways of learning, and aboriginal cultural differences as strengths *Use support programs to assist achievement of outcomes: - ELAN, ELAS, Literacy Net, ILLS, Solid English, Deadly Ways to Learn, Stepping Out, Distance Learning materials for Remote Communities *Develop language /literacy programs to assist SAER *Develop performance methods and assessment measures, and a baseline data system</td>
<td>Initially then left up to ♦ ♦ ♦</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Focus Area 7 Indigenous Employment and Professional Development</td>
<td>*Increase Aboriginal people in part-time and fulltime employment in mainstream education through EEO diversity plan *Anti- Racism Policy</td>
<td>♦ ♦ ♦ ♦</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adapted from the Plan for Government Schools (2004 –2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/ Focus</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Responsibility (Dept of Ed)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central Office</td>
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</table>
| Professional Learning | * Teachers will renew and build on their skills continually and be supported in targeted professional development  
* Will concentrate on the skills teachers need to respond in schools to emerging economic, social and technological conditions.  
* Will establish high-quality pedagogies, curriculum and assessment skill to optimise students’ learning  
* Help teachers to use information about their performance to drive curriculum planning and pedagogy and to make changes where they are shown to be necessary. | ♦ | ♦ | ♦ |
| Building assessment literacy  
Assisting schools and teachers to enhance their skills in collecting, analysing and using student performance information for improvement purposes involves (p13) | *Extending the support offered to schools in the analysis and interpretation of assessment data  
*Introducing a Teachers’ Data Club to assist teachers in interpreting assessment data  
*Establishing a professional development program to improve assessment practices in classrooms  
*Implementing moderation processes that are strongly underpinned by professional development and support materials, to increase comparability and consistency of teacher judgments. | ♦ | ♦ | ♦ |
| Key Objective 2:  
Motivated and capable workforce (p9) | *To promote professional learning; develop professional knowledge and expertise; and ensure all staff are valued and supported. | ♦ | |
| Supporting success in the early years  
Raising standards of achievement in the early years will involve: (p13) | *Deploy 200 specialist teachers across the system under the Getting It Right literacy and numeracy strategy to assist teachers to identify students who need extra assistance with learning and create supportive programs  
*Exploring evidence-based identification and interventions for children 0-8 years who are at high risk across all developmental areas | ♦ | |

At a systems level the DET *Plan for Government Schools (2004 –2007)* states that, by the end of 2007, there was an expectation for: -
...all schools to provide Aboriginal perspectives across all learning areas and provide cultural awareness training for staff as outlined in Creating the Vision, with the intention of preventing institutional racism and promoting schools as welcoming places for Aboriginal students (p. 18).

Taking into account all the previously mentioned policies and keeping in mind the implied focus on professional learning by the WA Plan for Government Schools (2004–2007), the MCEETYA policy documents and Creating a Vision (2001-2004) documents, one might ask what their impact was, how their effectiveness was being measured and where do we proceed to next? Again, was there a co-ordinated push to ensure the policy information and attached programs/strategies were in fact proving useful at the classroom level? Reiterating McGlusky and Thaker’s (2006) research:

While attention has been drawn to the need for professional development for teachers and trainers working with Indigenous students, there has been no co-ordinated effort to supply them with practical information in relation to literacy and numeracy support

(p. 17).

This researcher believes a co-ordinated approach was yet to be developed between policy and professional learning. However, some advances in this area have begun to be put in place in the Department of Education’s AETOP- Our Vision (2005-2008) document. Here we see the roles set out for the schools, Districts and Central Office. Once again, professional learning was not actually specified in these roles, though surely it could have been. In this one step, perhaps the issue of a coordinated approach to professional learning could have started to evolve.

2.6 Funding

Building on this uncoordinated approach to professional learning, I want to revisit the issue of funding. According to Mellor and Corrigan’s (2004) statement in the Commonwealth of Australia Report

...despite funding to Indigenous education ($1.5 billion in supplementary funding across all sectors during 2001–04;
DEST, 2000), the seemingly intractable gap in primary school level Australian Standard English literacy and numeracy achievement between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people remains great and is publicly acknowledged (see ABC, 2003, February 7). While 77% of Indigenous students met the minimum benchmark for reading in 2000, this compares unfavourably with the 93% of non-Indigenous students who achieve the benchmark. …Of greater concern is the increase in the gap, which grows to 25% in reading and 27% in numeracy by Year 5 (p. xviii).

This seemingly intractable gap and the Howard Government’s (Dr Brendan Nelson, Media Release, 2005) promised to provide $641.6 million over 2005-2008 under the IESIP strategy (of which $128.1 million was to be directed to on-going and new strategic projects to further accelerate the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians). One would hope that, alongside the new directions driven by the MCEETYA documents, a new approach, or at least a more creative approach, to funding could be developed. Without a means of putting information into a form that creates change at the classroom level, policy and funding are stabbing at issues in the dark.

The continued mention being made in Indigenous education policy about the need to better equip teachers to teach students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent was damning. When organisations such as the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education state (via Senator Tierney, 1999) that there is ‘almost non-existent preparation of teachers to teach in schools with large Indigenous populations’ and go on to say that ‘…meaningful, significant improvements in indigenous educational attainment at all levels could still take a generation, given the experience of the last ten years of the Aboriginal and Islander Education Policy…The job is still ahead of us in indigenous education’ (p. 3-4). Agreeing that the ‘job is still ahead’ is one thing with which this researcher concurs.

It was partly due to these issues that I found my current journey necessary. I have endeavored to portray suggestions from the research and Case Study group to initiate discussion to highlight not only the need to improve outcomes for the students of
Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander descent but to focus on how all the players might begin to develop a more coordinated and transparent approach to the issues.

In taking this road, I hoped to create a focus on the huge assumptions made with regard to teacher knowledge of cultural aspects, pedagogical practices, literacy strategies and Indigenous worldviews. There needed to be research into what teachers actually knew, their beliefs, classroom practice (if it was different for students in rural, remote and urban situations) and how these possibly differed from what policy and funding were telling us. In this instance, the focus was on urban situations and although I have not attempted to answer any questions for rural or remote situations, this research may have implications for others looking at these situations.

If there was a need for a major focus on professional learning, I suggest that no amount of programs and funding thrown at fixing the child through policy, will work. Such programs can show potential, as teachers who have the understanding and knowledge often implement them. According to the DETYA *National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (2000-2004) research ‘…There is a need for retraining of and continuing professional development for teachers working with Indigenous students’ (p. 29). This will become essential if teachers are to meet the 2010 requirements of the MCEETYA document, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education* (2005-2008) item 9.2 (p. 10), in order to gain a teaching position.

Currently all the research seems to point to a mismatch between policy and professional learning at the classroom level. The Case Study outlined in this research can only serve to open the door to these issues, starting from what was written on paper (policy) to what actually happened in classroom (pedagogy and practice) from the point of view of metropolitan teachers.

Having outlined the mismatch between policy and practice, in the following chapter I will outline the programs and strategies highlighted by the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) document in Literacy, including the area of conductive hearing loss, the programs and strategies listed as part of the professional learning package for *Getting it Right Literacy* (GiRL) teachers’ project and provide an overview of the current Aboriginal Literacy Strategy.
In Chapter Four, I will go on to explore what research has to say about professional learning and Aboriginal ways of learning, as opposed to policy. These two chapters have references relating back to policy and its requirements. They also put forward challenges to policy makers. The issues developed from Chapter Four contribute to discussions in Chapter Nine by way of conclusion.
Chapter Three
See Me, Hear Me: Programs to inspire or not

As discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on programs and strategies directly linked to the West Australian Department of Education policy for the time period covered in this thesis (2003-2006). The investigation into policy, prescribed programs and strategies, such as those in the Department of Education and Training WA Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document, provide an insight into what was available for the Case Study teachers to access over the duration of this study.

In particular I focus on the following areas within the document:
Key Focus Area Two: Conductive Hearing Loss (Do You Hear What I Hear? Program, plus its CD ROM), and predominantly,
Key Focus Area Four: Literacy represented by programs and strategies such as the English Language and Numeracy Program (ELAN), Early Literacy Assessment Strategy (ELAS), Literacy Net, Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ILSS), Solid English, Deadly Ways to Learn, and Distance Learning Materials for Remote Communities.

The initial focus is supported by an overview of the professional learning package for GiRL (Getting it Right Literacy) specialist teachers. The GiRL strategies included First Steps, Two Way Literacy and Learning; Deadly Ways to Learn and Ways of Being, Ways of Talk, 100 Children go to School Project and Making the Jump. GiRL specialist teachers were expected to share the information gained from their professional learning package in the area of literacy with their school peers. As the Case Study school had a GiRL specialist, I explored this link through informal discussions with teachers, the questionnaire and teacher interviews. The comments and information were utilised in the development of suggestions linked to the GIRL specialist role and the role of the GIRL specialists’ mentors in the concluding chapters.

To complete the overviews, an outline of the new Aboriginal Literacy Strategy is incorporated. This initiative was delivered to schools in the Pilbara and Kimberley starting in 2005 and extended to other areas as funding became available.
Creating a Vision (2001-2004) programs

3.1 ELAN (English Language and Numeracy Program)

Jarrad’s English Language and Numeracy Program for Aboriginal Students (ELAN) was introduced into Western Australian schools in 1991 as an extension of the First Steps program. Its objectives included extending teacher understanding of the literacy and numeracy skills needed by Aboriginal students, improving monitoring, accessing and reporting for these students and developing or adapting materials to enhance the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in literacy and/or numeracy.

The program involved appointing a teacher in the school who had had training in First Steps and Aboriginal learning styles, cultures and best practice in ESL (English as a Second Language). This coordinator helped to:

- make links to a whole school development plan;
- develop and collate appropriate material;
- implement appropriate language and numeracy programs;
- monitor and report on progress of the program;
- increase teacher knowledge through professional development on appropriate strategies and best practice.

In the majority of cases, the ELAN teacher was appointed to rural or remote schools.

3.2 ELAS Early Literacy Assessment Strategy (Education Department of WA)

ELAS was a program designed to specifically monitor the literacy development of Aboriginal children under the Early years literacy policy and practice scheme introduced in 1998/1999. It was based on a study which had backtracked Aboriginal students to help gain a better understanding of their needs.

The ELAS Project was a one-year project funded through an Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) grant designed to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

The objectives of the project were:

- to develop a screening procedure which allowed for early identification of Indigenous students with actual or potential difficulties in literacy learning;
to determine the appropriateness of the Literacy Net (see 2.3) as a monitoring and assessment tool for Indigenous pre-school and P-3 students; and
- to develop intervention processes.

There were issues with the Literacy Net due to it being based on SAE thus relying on teachers to take into account cultural, linguistic and socio-economic variables that may impact on their Indigenous students’ literacy development, and recognize the importance of their home languages. Hence an action research model was developed for the schools that joined the ELAS project. Their collated data was used to report on progress to the children, their schools, and communities and as a whole group to the Department of Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) which was the Commonwealth funding body at the time.

It was hoped that the project would influence:
- Teachers’ approaches to and understanding of research about Aboriginal children, Aboriginal families and relevant assessment techniques;
- Teacher understanding of what good literacy teaching looks like in these communities; and
- Teachers’ reliance on commercial products or at least equip them with skills to critique these products for relevance for their student cohorts.

3.3 Literacy Net (Education Department of Western Australia 1997 – 2002)
The Literacy Net was developed to identify students having difficulties in literacy learning at an early age. Initially it had a focus on oral, reading and writing literacy skills and strategies. Viewing was not included, but there were steps in place to develop this area in accordance with the Curriculum Framework for Western Australia. It was based on a moment in time, looking at a minimum developmental stage for a student at a specific time in their schooling, for example, the end of term one in Year One. The program tried to gain a picture of where the student was at and acted as one component to help teachers put strategies in place if a student was having difficulties.
When I was a consultant in the Kimberley for Catholic Education, my colleagues and I adapted the recording tools on the P-3 *Literacy Net* to include an H as well as the ✓ and *. The ‘H’ was to show when students had skills or strategies in their Home Language but were not code switching enough to give them a ✓ in Standard Australian English (SAE). This meant that teachers, with the help of their Aboriginal Teacher Assistants (ATA’s), could now see if students had skills in SAE, their home language or had not developed such skill as yet. In turn these helped with their programming.

**3.4 ILSS (Indigenous Language Speaking Students) 2005-2008)**

The ILSS Program was designed to target Indigenous students, who rarely hear English until they arrive at school and access formal education for the first time. On the *English as a Second Language* (ESL) Bandscales, these students showed an English language usage below level one (or equivalent). The program aimed to provide intensive English language tuition to eligible students. It was a government-funded project.

ILSS looked at the areas of:

- Creating rapport - Working with Aboriginal students;
- Strategies for ESL students;
- Adapted strategies;
- Recognising able learners;
- Personal Pronouns/Singular - Plural/Prepositions;
- Tense - Past/Present/Future.

The objective of the program was for Indigenous students to attain the ability to undertake *Level 1* English (ESL Bandscales) in oral interaction after their first full year of intervention. In the majority of cases, this funding went to rural or remote situations.

**3.5 Solid English (Western Australian Education Department. 1999)**

The *Solid English* materials were developed to help give teachers more scope to develop innovative and culturally appropriate ways to enhance literacy and language learning in Western Australian schools. They stemmed from a collaborative base of
linguists, Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), researchers and teachers.

The materials had been developed to embrace the current outcomes focus and link to the curriculum framework through a focus on non-standard dialects of English. They aimed both to give teachers an understanding of the cultural capital Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students brought to the classroom and ‘…to find a way of making schooling work for everyone’ (R. Cahill, 1999, p. 9).

They provided teachers with insights into language, dialect and cultural differences, giving them suggestions to enhance general classroom strategies and language teaching strategies. It looked at generalisation and assumptions made by teachers, showing culturally sensitive and practical ways to support inclusive and supportive practices for students whose socio-cultural background were different from the teacher’s.

### 3.6 Deadly Ways to Learn (2000)

The Department of Education Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, with funding from DETYA, developed the *Deadly Ways to Learn* (2000) project during 1998 and 1999 through *Indigenous Education Strategies Initiative Program* (IESIP). Its purpose was to enhance outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through a two-way bidialectal approach. It addressed the need to establish rapport borne of mutual respect between home and school. One of its aims was to empower all concerned:

‘Two-way bidialectal education involves being aware of and capitalising on cultural and linguistic diversity’ (P. Browne in Deadly Ways to Learn, 2000, p. 1).

This program incorporated strategies that were drawn from English as a Second Language (ESL) and SAE as a Second Dialect (SAESD). Aboriginal culture and worldviews were interwoven through the material. Due to inclusivity being an integral part of this program, it could be used for Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and ESL students. The strategies were organised into three sections: teaching about language,
teaching through language and teaching language. There was an effort to gain social congruence between home and school so the students knew what was expected of them.

3.7 Distance Learning Materials for Remote Communities
There were a variety of institutions that delivered distance-learning materials. The School of Isolated Distance Education (SIDE) was the centre for distance learning within the WA Department of Education. The formation of SIDE resulted from the amalgamation of the Distance Education Centre and the five Schools of the Air. The role of these facilities was to help cater for a large and diverse student population ranging from Pre-primary to Year 12. Their demographics lay from Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland, Meekatharra, and Carnarvon to the Kimberley (Derby). As part of their design, they provided kits of written and audiovisual materials customised for distance-learning students. Although these were written with remoteness in mind, as a researcher I would like to see further investigation into their relevance for Indigenous students in remote communities. It should be noted that from 2004, WestOne took over the writing and distributing of these distance-learning packages. With the research-based writing their authors had to deliver it would be interesting to note if these packages change, taking on board programs mentioned in current policy, in the future.

3.8 Do you Hear What I Hear? (Department of Education and Training in Western Australia and the Department of Education, Science and Training nd)
This program comprised a set of materials to enhance the awareness of Conductive Hearing Loss (Otis Media) and its issues for Indigenous students. There were teacher support materials, a CD-ROM, and student resources included in the kit. The set of materials had been developed by the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia and the Department of Education, Science and Training through the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy Funding. It was available in all Western Australian schools and the resource could be used to provide a starting point to enable schools to further develop and extend the program as a community approach. It could be used as a professional learning package for schools and communities.
3.9 Getting It Right Literacy Strategy (Western Australian Department of Education and Training)

The *Getting it Right* strategy concentrates on the early years, but not to the exclusion of older students who need help. It targets certain groups with levels of literacy that lag behind those of the general population. The professional learning provided to specialist teachers reflects the needs of these target groups, with significant attention given to:

- teaching ESL in mainstream settings;
- valuing and building on first language or first dialect; and
- making the features of Standard Australian English explicit for all students.

The professional learning drew on research (in which the Department has been involved) into Aboriginal English and second dialect acquisition including *Two Way Literacy and Learning, Deadly Ways to Learn* and *Ways of Being, Ways of Talk*.

The Specialist Teachers (STs) used their professional learning to plan with classroom colleagues, work collaboratively in classrooms, model teaching strategies and support the implementation of effective learning and teaching programs for students experiencing difficulties with literacy learning. The Specialist Teachers have intensive training over a two-year period and regular in-school visits from a *GiRL* supervisor/mentor.


The ABC of Two-way Literacy and Learning was a Professional Learning Programme promoting bidialectal two-way education practice throughout Western Australian schools. Its aims were to:

- **Accept** Aboriginal English at school by recognising and valuing it, and allowing use of the dialect in appropriate situations;
- **Bridge** to Standard Australian English, that is, to build upon what students already know, and provide explicit instruction in what they do not know and need to master the standard dialect;
- **Cultivate** Aboriginal ways of learning by utilising the strengths of Indigenous learning styles and culture.
The program utilised a train the trainer model, on two-way principles, to provide professional learning about the implementation of two-way bidialectal education at a school (including Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers), district office and central office level. It was used to assist in the development of two-way bidialectal education curriculum materials and to provide specialized input to Aboriginal English research within the Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research at Edith Cowan University.

3.11 Ways of Being, Ways of Talk (Western Australia, Education Dept, Edith Cowan University (Centre for Applied Language and Literacy Research) 2002). Ways of Being, Ways of Talk looks at how Aboriginal English (AE) has evolved as a separate dialect in this country providing a better understanding of how Aboriginal English and Australian English differ and why it was important that everyone acknowledges AE as a legitimate language. The program consists of a series of four, fifteen to twenty-minute videos, supported by scripts and resource papers. The videos are designed to assist teachers wishing to engage students in the critical analysis of language difference and literacy helping to break down the myth that Aboriginal English is a deficient way of speaking.

Maza discussed the Ways of Being, Ways of Talk program on the Message Stick web site and made the following statement:

The way we speak English is a distinct part of our culture and identity. It has been shaped by our history, put simply; we speak the way we do because of what we have been through. It is a marker of who we are as a people. Children who grow up speaking home talk should be able to take that dialect into the classroom… instead they are often expected to start from scratch and learn flash talk. This program also looks at how many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have mastered the art of code switching - they change the way they talk, depending on who they are talking to (Sunday 13 October 2002).

Maza reflections highlight the importance of language and context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alongside the misunderstandings that have been generated in regard to home talk and flash talk. The Ways of Being, Ways of Talk program enables participants to learn about and reflect on the use of language,
providing a platform on which participants start to build their understandings of language usage and cultural capital with the intention of making education more appropriate and effective for students who speak Aboriginal English, using an inclusive approach that would benefit all students.

3.12 Aboriginal Literacy Strategy Overview (Department of Education WA)
The strategy was designed to ensure that students were immersed in a rich text environment and that their teachers provided them with a range of focused, evidence-based and engaging learning experiences which lead to improved English literacy (SAE), with a particular emphasis on Reading, Writing and Speaking and Listening outcomes. This Aboriginal Literacy Strategy was initiated following the findings of Albert (2005), which stated that:

Western Australian literacy data indicates more progress towards closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students than is evident elsewhere. The fact remains, however, that some Aboriginal students lag a long way behind the general population. In 2003, less than 40% of year 7 Aboriginal students attained WALNA results that indicated reading levels at or above the National Benchmark. (NITL Submission No. 286)

In particular, it was noted that the data showed significant low levels in literacy for rural and remote Indigenous students. As a result, a focus in this area was commenced at the start of 2005. Albert (2005) goes on to declare that:

The fundamental basis for the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy is to develop and train personnel to deliver a consistent and sustained literacy program in target schools, regardless of constantly changing personnel (NITL Submission No. 286).

At the time of the Case Study, this program was only available for Pilbara and Kimberley Districts, not metropolitan schools.

3.13 A Time for Talk (Department of Education Western Australia, 1998)
This program has a resource pack with two books and a video. These showed samples and profiles of Standard Australian English in the early years of schooling. There
were samples that enhanced prior knowledge for both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students. The three components of the package were the:

- Oral language Instructional Manual;
- Sampling and Profiling tasks; and
- Instructional video and classroom activities.

The sampling and profiling materials provided a developmentally based framework, which linked assessment tasks for monitoring students to their oral language development in the K-3 years. The sampling and profiling package could be used for whole class screening, group or individual assessments.

The data collected could be used for individual monitoring of students at educational risk, or as part of a school management information system.

**3.14 100 Children Go To School Project (Hill, S. 1999)**

The 100 Children Go To School project related to and informed the National Plan (DEETYA, 1998) in several ways. These were in the areas of:

- having a strong focus on the vital early years of schooling;
- assessment by their teachers (all children would be assessed in their first year of schooling);
- early intervention for students having difficulty; and
- information for parents about their children’s education.

In the *100 Children Go To School Project*, Hill (1999) stated:

> It is important that policy is informed by research that combines measurable outcomes, which are related to the contexts of students’ everyday life. For this reason it is vital that early literacy pedagogy, assessment tools and intervention programs not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach but be tailored to meet local community requirements. In communities disadvantaged by poverty and other social and material inequalities, additional resources support and strategic local initiatives are required (Conclusion, para. 2).
Other Programs utilised in Western Australia

3.15 *Making the Jump* (Berry, R. and Hudson, J. 1997)

*Making the Jump* was designed to further enhance teachers’ understanding of what was involved in the teaching of Standard Australian English as a second dialect. It builds on the ideas introduced in the earlier publication of FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools). It provided a theoretical base for teachers and practical ways of extending these concepts/strategies in the classroom. Although its primary aim was to provide resources for teachers in the Kimberley area of Western Australia, the strategies/issues developed could be easily adapted to other Indigenous dialects and local situations. It encouraged the use of Standard Australian English (SAE) while valuing the student’s home language. Making the Jump:

- highlighted cultural issues, for Non Indigenous teachers in particular;
- revisited and extended the code-switching stairway concept;
- developed practical ideas for enhancing the ideas of *the standard language* based on students’ current knowledge;
- focused on strategies for areas that research had shown to cause the most difficulty for Indigenous students and provided a Diagnostic Assessment Sheet to assist teachers;
- provided twenty-two specific ESL/ESD games to enhance language used at a classroom level.

The activities and concepts were trialled and refined over a two-year period in the Kimberley area.


This program was published in 1995 to help improve oral English of second language speaking Aboriginal children (particularly in rural and remote areas). The program aimed to develop and improve children’s oral English skills. Each child in the program was assessed twice a year to gauge their improvement as they worked towards attaining *Level 1* in the English as a Second Language profiles. The benefit of the program was the provision of opportunities for students to build their repertoire of spoken and written English in context before, during and after planned activities, with students gaining confidence through:

- shared learning experiences;
• scaffolding;
• jointly constructed texts;
• explicit teaching in areas such as grammar, tense etc.; and
• group negotiated texts.

It enabled consistent teaching and learning programs to be established through clear programming and planning by teachers, through the use of the whole school approach as outlined in the program.

3.17 FELIKS (*Fostering English Language In Kimberley Schools*) (Catholic Education Office, 1994).

The FELIKS approach focused on teaching Standard Australian English as a second dialect. The focus of FELIKS was the Code-Switching Stairway. It served two purposes.

It served as the framework for describing the approach, which was then used to plan language activities in the classroom. Along-side this, it identified English features which have proved difficult for Aboriginal students. These were addressed through explicit teaching, involving the use of specifically designed and adapted games. Berry and Hudson (1997), stated that:

The areas of difficulty identified are: prepositions, singular/plurals in nouns, singular/plurals in verbs, tense, personal pronouns, questions,
possession, word meaning and sounds. By focusing on code-switching skills (the ability to switch between two or more languages or dialects according to purpose and audience) the FELIKS approach drew attention to the separation of languages and the need for mastery of both. Students were supported in becoming aware of the need to learn a different language or dialect. The focus was not on teaching Kriol or Aboriginal English but on using the home language as a jumping off point for teaching Standard Australian English (p. 1).

3.18 ESL Bandscales (Kimberley Version) (From the Kimberley Education website 1994) ‘Kimberley Bandscales for Aboriginal ESL/D Students’ (index page). The Kimberley ESL Bandscales for Aboriginal ESL/D Students were adapted from the National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia’s English as a Second Language (ESL) Bandscales.

The English Outcomes and Standards Framework (OSF) suggested that, for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who were in the early stages of learning English as a second language, the ESL Bandscales provided small step-by-step descriptions of achievement of language proficiency. The Curriculum Council’s English Student Outcome Statements (1994 on) could then be used when language proficiency was appropriate.

The Kimberley Bandscales for Aboriginal ESL/D Students were adapted from the ESL Bandscales to reflect the language development of Kimberley Aboriginal students who speak English as a second language or dialect (ESL/D). The documents provided Kimberley teachers with a resource to monitor language learning and plan for individual progress.

3.19 Summary
Many of the previous programs and strategies have been developed in their own right and have made impacts at different levels and in different geographical areas in Western Australia. They have been threaded together for this research through the policies governing good practice in Western Australia between 2003-2006. As such, one would expect the teachers in this Case Study to have had some knowledge or
understanding of these programs/strategies. If the teachers did not have a sufficient level of knowledge or understanding, how could they be inspired to change practice? If the pathway to gaining new knowledge and understanding was fractured it would not matter if the programs/strategies were inspirational or not, they just existed.

This said it remained to be seen if effective ways of disseminating this information to general classroom teachers had been achieved or if other/new avenues needed to be investigated. As a result of this, this particular Case Study focused on ascertaining if the information from the policies, strategies/programs highlighted as good practice, had indeed reached metropolitan classroom teachers and, in these teachers’ minds, had affected classroom practices.

It could be assumed that if teachers were accessing professional learning with regard to the strategies/programs highlighted, then they would have a knowledge basis on which to achieve the requirements of current policy but was this really the case.

To investigate these issues data was collected to ascertain the knowledge of the teacher group regarding the strategies and programs outlined in this chapter via a questionnaire, discussions, observations and interviews. Teachers’ comments on their access to professional learning were collected. These were extended to include the types of professional learning the teachers felt were successful and those types of professional learning they felt could be utilised to further their access to knowledge in this area. These comments included the means, the duration, the follow up, the links to other professional learning and the assistance from School, District Office, and Departmental level. The teachers’ suggestions are highlighted and discussed in the final chapters and helped develop a picture of whether the Case Study teachers’ believed they had acquired enough information/professional learning in their eyes to adequately assist Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students in literacy in their metropolitan classrooms. Their comments also helped create an understanding of how professional learning or lack of it in their eyes impacted on their classroom structure and planning producing some suggestions for further development or change in this area.
The next chapter takes a more in-depth look at what the research has to say about professional learning and Aboriginal ways of learning. From this platform a description of the Case Study school is discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Four
See Me, Hear Me: Professional Learning, Ways of Learning, Language pragmatics and use - what the research says
Alongside policy and availability of programs and strategies, this chapter goes on to investigate the research dealing with professional learning and some of the implications of this for Indigenous education.

With children’s learning experiences in their early years playing a crucial part in the building blocks for future learning and life chances, how did researchers place themselves in regard to enhancing professional learning for teachers to meet this huge task? Over the past two decades, researchers have taken several different positions in relation to what constitutes good practice within the parameters of professional learning.

For the purpose of this study, I have decided to use the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) database definition of professional learning (known not so long ago as professional development). According to their thesaurus, professional development refers to ‘activities to enhance professional growth’ while professional learning moves the focus to teachers becoming ‘active learners’. Hirsh, S (2009) states that:

the new definition calls for every educator to engage in professional learning at the school as part of the workday. Professional learning should tap the expertise of educators in the school and at the district office; with support from universities and other external experts who help local educators address needs specific to their students and school improvement goals. (Abstract)

Activities brought together under this umbrella might include peer collaboration and peer coaching or mentoring, inservice education, continuing education, curriculum writing, individual/group learning or action research. Following are a few positions put forward by researchers to orientate the reader before visiting what this might mean for teachers with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students in their metropolitan classrooms.
Researchers such as McLaughlin (1990) and Wise (1991) suggest that professional learning designed to facilitate change must be teacher specific and focus principally on day-to-day activities at the classroom level. Taking a look at their suggested indicators of success in professional learning, the above research indicates clearly that disconnected and one-off professional development does little to improve or transform teachers’ knowledge, skills or attitudes. Thus, any program that requires teachers to pursue mandatory professional learning must recognise the fact that useful professional learning needs to address the daily life of teachers.

Others such as Tye and Tye (1984), Waugh and Punch (1987) and more recently Hirsh (2004), state that an emphasis on individuals was detrimental, implying that there was a need for professional learning to be embedded into the district or school plans stemming from a more system wide approach. Fullan (2004) suggests that professional learning needs to be based upon a clear vision. Fullan (2001) also suggests that effective teachers account for thirty percent of the variance of student progress. He goes on to state that for professional learning to be effective, the three areas of importance are: teaching skills, classroom climate and professional characteristics.

Keeping the above studies in mind, bringing about change in the area of literacy for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students is difficult for a variety of reasons. From the preceding research, researchers have suggested that change was difficult when:

- alienation of teachers occurs, due to the fact that change was imposed;
- a shared vision was not created;
- professional learning was not co-ordinated (having one-off professional learning sessions);
- an acceptance of the capacity of Indigenous students to achieve as well as Non-Indigenous students was not present.

I believe that the mismatch between professional learning, knowledge of policy, strategies and programs in their current form also contributes to the lack of change occurring in the area of literacy for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students. Chapter Three shows the range of materials available while Chapter Two overviews the extensive focus on policy to assist in improving literacy outcomes and yet there
does not appear to be either a shared vision or a co-ordinated approach to professional learning which is inclusive of the classroom teacher’s requirements. This being the case, change in this area may well have reason to be somewhat *hit and miss*.

Ingvarson (2003) and Noonan and Doherty (2003) go even further, stating that teacher training and professional learning were fundamental to the development of good teachers. According to Ingvarson (2003), student achievement could climb significantly in schools that supported effective professional learning among teachers. This belief was shared by Crevola and Hill (1998) who argued that ongoing teacher professional learning could (and did) deliver dramatic improvements in student learning. If we refer to *Table 2b Policy Roles and Responsibilities* (p. 34), we can see that a lot of responsibility for changing *teacher beliefs* and *practice* in this area was indeed left up to schools. This being the case, what happens if the professional learning was not co-ordinated (having one-off professional learning sessions) or was not developed with an acceptance that the capacity of Indigenous students to achieve was the same as non-Indigenous students? Who audits the professional learning and the inclusivity of all students in literacy workshops?

Even with the Department of Education and Training, WA (2004 –2007) *Plan for Government Schools* stating that all schools must have an Aboriginal Education Policy in place by the end of 2007, how did this encompass professional learning at a school level? Did a school-based policy encourage links to be made for inclusive classroom practices? The Case Study School was used to gain an insight into these concerns as the school had an Aboriginal Education Policy that covered the time span of this study. The staff had also participated in professional learning linked to their policy. Teachers’ opinions were used to shed light on professional learning, its impact, and their knowledge of the school policy through a questionnaire, interviews and discussions. These opinions are incorporated in the final chapters.

Continuing with the feelings of teachers, Horsell (2000) puts forward the notion that:

> For most teachers professional learning has traditionally been haphazard, off-site, barely relevant, and poorly provided and a chore at best. This may be an exaggeration but not much (p. 1).
He goes on to suggest that:

If we are to create an education service capable of both achieving world-class standards and changing rapidly, we have to do better. There should be a significant increase in investment in professional development year-on-year but the issue is at least as much one of the nature and quality of provision. Expenditure on professional development should exceed five per cent of the total teachers’ salary (p. 4).

Even with funding to this degree, could the professional learning packages in their current form impact on literacy outcomes for urban Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students? There was a need to further investigate just how current packages were having an impact before we looked at more funding, otherwise we could be throwing good money after bad.

Champion (2003) leads us to believe that educationalists were slowly changing their concepts of what constitutes effective professional learning. She suggests that:

…many professional development programs now take responsibility for real participant learning. In these programs, assessing learning goes beyond simply documenting it. It also helps accelerate participants' learning and deepens their knowledge of themselves as learners and professional educators. Professional development leaders help ensure their participants learn and can use the program content by assuming multiple helping roles, teacher, facilitator, coach, classroom observer, friendly critic, or mentor (p. 75).

So, was this happening with regard to professional learning packages that engage teachers in improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander descent in metropolitan classrooms or were professional learning packages still disjointed and being delivered in isolation? This was investigated further from the Case Study teachers’ points of view in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine as they discussed their access to and value of professional learning packages aligned to this study (Chapter Three).
4.1 Implications for Indigenous education

Partington and members of his Research Project Team (2003) suggested that in the case of professional learning packages for Indigenous students, a change in pedagogic practice needed to occur and that consideration of ongoing professional learning along the direction of Champion’s ideas needed to be taken into account. Partington goes on to suggest that many teachers are inadequately prepared to teach Indigenous students. He believes many teachers who work with Indigenous students bring to the situation models they have employed previously, or experienced in other educational contexts. Unfortunately, these models are often inappropriate and ineffective.

Simpson and Clancy (2001) state that:

Before Aboriginal and Torres Strait learners can become adept with school literacy they require an understanding of how classroom discourse works. Educators are the key in assisting the Aboriginal students to make meanings and to achieve smooth and adequate understandings in this unfamiliar environment (p. 1).

As educators, we have a responsibility for the development of the cultural and citizenship knowledge and values on which our society was founded. Australian schools (teachers and administrators) could assist in addressing this by including Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives, teaching and learning practices and the needs of Indigenous students (including languages and ESL practices) into their practice.

However, if teachers themselves do not have a knowledge base to develop these skills we must again return to professional learning as a key component of good practice. A survey of teachers on the National Priority Areas delivered by MCEETYA’s The Adelaide declaration; National Goals of Schooling (1999) found that less than fourteen percent (13.7%) of their respondents had undertaken training in areas of Indigenous education. The low percentage of teachers indicating that they had undertaken training in areas of Indigenous education becomes an issue when Commonwealth Government Reports, including the flagship report on Indigenous Strategic Results Projects (ISRP) What Works (2000), have concluded
that effective teaching practice was essential to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

This was further highlighted by the Australian Education Union’s (AEU) submissions to Teacher Education Reviews (2002, 2005). The AEU stated that the university Deans of Education had reported that the contest within university faculties for funding has meant that Indigenous studies has been even further marginalised than they were five years ago:

The failure to provide Indigenous Studies as part of teacher education courses is a particular indictment on the Federal Department of Education and the respective Ministers who have publicly championed their support for improved outcomes for Indigenous students when the link between training and outcomes has been established by Departmental research (p. 1, point 12).

Although the focus for this study was not on teacher training, this aspect has been touched upon in the questionnaire under the guise of prior learning in the named strategies or programs. Prior knowledge of a program may be the catalyst to seek more knowledge in an area. Although the existence of research, reports and professional development/strategies was not disputed, the impact of these on Indigenous students is, as the Productivity Commission, (in Tillett, 2009) confirmed, that ‘literacy and numeracy skills had not improved in Aboriginal students since 1999’ (p. 16).

In summing up the cross-section of research, what were some of the essential criteria for professional learning for the realms of this project? The AEU (2002) suggests that professional learning packages should include:

- Teaching and learning practices inclusive of strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders;
- An understanding of the issues related to their students’ home language, be it (the language) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dialects/AE/ Kriol or ESL; followed by
• Teaching practices that meet the needs of ESL/ESD students, which ensure students feel their language is valued and promotes code switching (p. 2).

It was envisaged that as a researcher one could extend this list, but for now the main focus is on whether professional learning packages had the purpose, structure and follow up to help initiate change in the area of Indigenous education.

Delanty (1999) suggested that although change in the education of Indigenous students in schools was possible, it was unlikely to ensue in a linear manner taking into account that change was an ongoing result of individuals who reflect, analyse and act upon the existing programs/strategies or policies. With this in mind, I felt I needed to take a thorough look at current professional learning strategies/packages and research their impact on current classroom practice. Perhaps it could be said that the real measure of professional learning was not the attending of said professional learning or the picking up of programs or packages that exist, but the impact of this learning and its influence on:

• classroom planning and teaching,
• classroom environments, and
• student engagement.

These issues will be revisited in the teacher interviews and classroom observations with relevant data informing Chapters Eight and Nine.

4.2 Research and Good practice
What then was deemed to be good practice for teachers working with Indigenous students in the research (knowing that this was indeed a complex issue)? Are there any recognised issues for teachers of students of Indigenous descent to adhere to? Do these impinge on what was deemed to be sound professional learning packages/strategies?

As noted by Hughes, More and Williams (2004), Aboriginal students have a distinctive cultural heritage whether they come from urban, rural or traditional -
oriented families. In their research they quoted The National Aboriginal Education Committee’s, (NAEC) emphasis for teachers and schools to:

... develop an education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this occurs will education for our people be a process that builds on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identity.... To be effective ... skills and learning must be acquired in harmony with our own cultural values, identity and choice of lifestyle, whether we reside in an urban, traditional community or homeland centre (p. 4).

Effective teaching and learning begins by building on the knowledge that students bring from their experiences outside the classroom. Hughes, More and Williams (2004) tend to agree with this, but moved away from referring to learning styles, focusing instead on students’ ways of learning, to help teachers in the area of Indigenous strategies. They looked at the different ways of learning for students and teachers, plus the physical and instructional settings, so that they could show ways that facilitated learning from a cultural, knowledge and skills perspective.

Partington (1998) takes the stance that ‘… teachers need to engage their students in a positive environment that supports personal and social growth, demonstrating a belief that all students can learn and have the ability to succeed’ (p. 24). He goes on to report that good teachers ‘modify the curriculum so that it more accurately reflects the reality of the lives of Indigenous students’ and they are also ‘alert to the skills Indigenous students possess rather than focussing on those they do not have’ (p. 24). Using the above view, do professional learning packages for metropolitan teachers of Indigenous students accurately reflect the reality of their students’ lives, and their group and individual ways of learning? Do they distinguish between metropolitan, rural and remote locations or do they carry a non-Indigenous perspective? Are they written and produced with input from local Indigenous communities? These questions can partially be answered by looking at the authors of the programs in Chapter Three and at the programs themselves. Many have formed their programs and strategies based on research in the area of literacy, and with people who have worked with students of Indigenous descent. The challenge, however, was not just in building the
strategies and programs, but in controlling the influence of the authors’ own cultural/educational or work background in the processes. Added to this issue was the influence of the cultural and educational background of the teachers implementing the strategies and programs.

4.3 Ways of Learning
I think there is a need to clarify the definition of ways of learning as used by Hughes, More and Williams (2004). They stated that:

Ways of learning are the mental processes and instructional settings, which an individual uses while learning. Mental processes include organising, perceiving, coding, remembering and reasoning. Instructional settings include formal or informal, warm or personal, cooperative or competitive (p. 266).

They used the dimensions below (Figure 4.1), for the ways of learning, as a useful tool in understanding culturally related differences to ways of learning.

Figure 4.1 Ways of Learning Dimensions

Their model perceived students as having various strengths along these continua and allowed for individual student differences without imposing a perceived learning style to match a culture, race or religion.

Learning styles, on the other hand, according to Hughes, More and Williams (2004), refer to the preferred way(s) in which individuals interact with, take in, and process new information across the three domains of learning identified in the taxonomy of education objectives: cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills) and affective (attitude). In other words, your preferred learning style was simply how you learnt best.
Hughes, More and Williams (2004) deliberately avoided the use of the term *learning styles*, preferring *ways of learning* and *learning strengths*. They believed that all learners developed and use individual combinations of *ways of learning* and that they were all capable of developing a full range of learning styles. While not identifying an *Aboriginal learning style*, they did identify recurrent Aboriginal learning strengths. This poses the question, was it a mistake to place Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders students into one *learning styles* basket? Did we need to utilise the *ways of learning dimensions* to create more inclusive environments for all students? If program developers were to take this into consideration, would it have an effect on how we incorporated professional learning for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent?


**4.4 Language**
Looking at the issue of language, literacy and ways of learning, Malcolm and Haig et al., (1999) in *Two Way English*, described the need to approach Aboriginal English (AE) understandings through a more holistic and integrated approach. This was the reverse of Standard Australian English (SAE) linguistic conventions, which began with the smallest unit. Why was this approach important for this study?

As with many current pieces of research, there was a view that Aboriginal society was based on a holistic and integrated approach, and this in turn supported Aboriginal strengths for learning as *big picture* instead of *fragmented or seriated*. This was taken further by Hughes, More and Williams (2004) who developed a *perspective of ways of learning* to show that students had a variety of strengths. They felt that for Aboriginal students, most learning was achieved through real-life performance rather than through practice in contrived settings (as was often the case in schools).
They used these dimensions as a basis to remind teachers to utilise a variety of ways of learning to encompass all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. To date, their published works have related to rural Indigenous students, however I feel that the Ways of Learning Project has implications for urban students.

From a different perspective Harris (1990) defines the issue of two-way Aboriginal schooling as:

…a strategy to help make the matter of choice real in both worlds; to provide opportunity for the primary Aboriginal identity to stay strong, though changing, and these continue to be the source of inner strength and security necessary for dealing with the Western world.... Aboriginal people today are increasingly interested both in being empowered in terms of the Western world and in retaining or rebuilding Aboriginal identity as a primary identity. An understanding and development of the ways of learning for individuals, groups and cultures may enable new models to emerge which better reflect the realities of today's complex societies (p. 48).

Utilising ideas from Harris (1994), Hughes and More (1997), Craven (1999), Cameron (2003) and other researchers, Yunkaporta’s (2007-2009) draft report on Aboriginal Pedagogies at the Cultural Interface further explores the previous suggestions, developing a project that not only engaged with Aboriginal languages and learning processes, but also engaged educators in a dialogue at the common ground between Indigenous and mainstream pedagogies. The project developed the Eight Ways Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework (p. 10) adding land and community links to ways of learning.

With the linking of ways of learning, language and culture being achieved by researchers developing professional learning packages/strategies in literacy needs to be an on going investment. The packages need to utilise information generated from the many cultural backgrounds and ways of learning. They need to encompass a common ground between Indigenous and mainstream pedagogies building on
knowledge to facilitate a shared understanding that strengthens the education process for teachers and students alike. In this way language and ways of learning could embedded in a more integrated approach.

![Diagram: 8ways Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework](image)

**Figure 4.2: 8ways Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework**

### 4.5 Language: Pragmatics and Use

Pragmatics is the term linguists use to refer to the way language is used rather than the way it is structured. The following is an example of pragmatic use of language: In a year two/three classroom, a student writing in his diary wrote:

… at dark time we had fun running around with all them lights going off in them sky… (Student A)

One of the other students commented when he read his diary to his peers, and a discussion was started over whether he should have put *night time* or *dark time*. It was agreed that both gave a picture of what was happening. The teacher considered that their diaries were the students’ own and as such the use of language was what they were comfortable with and valued – not necessarily School English.

Unfortunately, many students were not supported in their use of Aboriginal English. Researchers like Malcolm and Haig et al. (1999) suggest that some teachers lacked the skills and knowledge to recognise AE and as such did not understand the implications of devaluing AE for their students.
For many Indigenous people, important information was gained through techniques other than questioning. Indigenous people use more indirect ways of finding things out, using hinting or triggering statements. These, and other pragmatic features of Aboriginal English, are widespread. The recognition and understanding of Aboriginal English pragmatics should be highlighted in professional learning if effective cross-cultural communication is to be achieved. The role language played in valuing all students was well documented but Malcolm and Haig et al. (1999) who state in *Two Way English* that the ‘…evidence suggested the devaluing of Aboriginal students home talk by teachers’ was not an uncommon practice (p. 25). With Aboriginal English being part of the cultural capital of many Aboriginal students, the importance of valuing and merging these understandings needed to be incorporated into teacher knowledge and the formation of *user-friendly* curriculum materials and learning outcomes. The programs in Chapter Three suggest that the building blocks for this information were already available (An investigation into the effectiveness of these programs/strategies for the Case Study group is discussed in the chapters following the data collection processes of questionnaires and interviews).

With Aboriginal societies having an oral rather than written literacy tradition, literacy discourse structures weave to and fro. Ownership of an Aboriginal story can be collaborative as can be seen in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3 Aboriginal storytelling format**

(Model developed by Kevin May, Girrawheen Senior High School in *Two Way English* p. 42)

On the other hand, SAE format is generally governed by a written linear direction, which starts at the beginning and links through to the end. One speaker generally governs ownership.
Malcolm, (nd) states:

To most Indigenous Australians the experience of the loss of their traditional languages is a sad reality. The laudable attempts which have been made at language reconstruction and revival are, for many metropolitan and urban Indigenous people too little too late. However, urban Aboriginal people are often insistent that the absence of their language does not amount to the loss of their culture. One of the key instruments, which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have used, for cultural maintenance is Aboriginal English. It incorporates levels of meaning, which relate to traditional Aboriginal values, relationships and ways of life. It also maintains Indigenous cultural patterns in the genres and community based verbal art forms it incorporates, and in the ways in which it follows certain interactional conventions (p. 2).

The recognition and valuing of Aboriginal English needs more acknowledgement in professional learning packages in order to help overcome the division experienced by many urban Indigenous students. Much was written in the research, (Partington, Godfrey, Harslett and Richer, 2000; Groom and Hamilton, 1995), in regard to Indigenous students not wanting to fail. These authors hoped for a system of education that enables Indigenous students to be better equipped to participate within the system and the wider community.
The Deadly Ways to Learn set in, the *Deadly Ideas* series (Department of Education Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 2000) tackled teaching language and literacy extensively. *Deadly Ideas* suggested that one of the major issues pertaining to literacy in schools was that for many teachers, they saw the focus similar to the shape of an iceberg. They focused on the phonological, lexical and semantic issues rather than the all-inclusive factors of pragmatics and cultural capital, which could often be hidden especially in some metropolitan scenarios.

In a metropolitan setting, Indigenous students were generally a minority group and could feel socially and linguistically isolated (It should be noted that in an urban setting, these Indigenous students could come from varying backgrounds and locations). Strategies that promote parity and self-esteem of language skills and valued the worldview and skills of the students would be a stepping-stone in the right direction. The Commonwealth Governments IESIP (2000) *What has worked (and will again)* states that a ‘teaching methodology which includes sharing and negotiation, that makes literacies (Indigenous, SAE, classroom) explicit and that makes the links across the cultures’ would help in the urban context along with a curriculum that:

… deliberately scaffolds student literacy learning, monitors student progress, makes explicit the worlds of the dominant cultures, and
celebrates and affirms the individual cultures the students bring to the classroom (p. 6).

4.6 Teacher student relationships
In addition to language and literacy issues, references across the research have been consistently made with regard to Aboriginal students and their relationship with teachers. It was suggested that teachers were mainly negative and were a major reason for causing students to drop out of school. While this may be a little harsh, what did this suggest in regard to a focus on literacy?

Groom and Hamilton (1995) suggested that:

negative relationships are compounded by teachers’ lack of training and knowledge of ways Aboriginal students are different from other students, by low and negative teacher expectations, stereotyping of Aboriginal students, and teaching all students the same way without recognition of individual differences (para. 12).

It was interesting to see how the teachers in the Case Study related to these issues and what requirements they deemed important for professional learning packages in this area to be successful (See Chapters Eight and Nine).

4.7 Linking the issues together
Taking these issues into account, I have formulated the following questions:

- Did the metropolitan classroom teachers in this study feel they have enough access to the information and strategies to assist them to integrate their Indigenous students in the area of literacy?
  (For example - Could they identify students using AE?)
- What variety of professional learning was available to them? Did the professional learning, in their opinion, better equip them as teachers to involve their Indigenous students in the systems’ educational requirements?
- Was the professional learning of a sustainable/supported nature or was it infrequent?
• Did metropolitan teachers feel there was a need for professional learning to occur or did they feel that Indigenous students in the metropolitan area have language/literacy issues exactly the same as non-Aboriginal students?

In extending these questions, I was interested to find out the teachers’ opinions about the professional learning they had already received. Had said professional learning:
• increased their knowledge of literacy strategies/programs for Indigenous students so they were better able to achieve outcomes (stated in the Curriculum Framework for WA)?
• created a better balance between knowledge/culture/language?

In the words of Ladson Billings (1995a): ‘Educators traditionally have attempted to insert culture into the education, instead of inserting education into the culture’ (p. 151).

Was this what we were trying to do with our professional learning programs and packages, insert a dominant literacy practice into a culture, valuing and assessing from this and coming up with statements such as Kovacs (2009): ‘The Education Department has acknowledged a failure to improve Aboriginal education. To put it bluntly – which the department tends not to do – the results have been disastrously poor’ (p. 20). This statement and statements like it, signals that it is time to look at tagging the need for fixing to the system and not the student?

Continually developing or funding new programs and strategies, while it may be worthwhile, impedes the development of professional learning packages that enhance and utilise what research is already telling us.

The programs/strategies covered in Chapter Three provide a wide variety of options for teachers to use. It is the follow-through of these, with constructive professional learning packages that enable teachers to better equip Indigenous students to participate in the system, which particularly concerned me both as a researcher and a teacher.

Perhaps the way to go was along the lines of the Getting it Right Strategies, incorporating a multiprogramming approach to literacy issues. The professional
learning package certainly goes past a one-off scenario and meets a system directive. My concern was whether or not there was enough monitoring to show the effect for marginalised groups (like urban Indigenous students) in the areas of increasing teacher knowledge and student literacy outcomes. An initial look at this aspect is included in the Case Study data.

Another concern was how the initiatives for these programs/strategies (overviewed in Chapter Three) enabled teachers/schools to meet the requirements suggested in policy documents (over the duration of the Case Study) if they were sitting in the professional reading section of the school library collecting dust.

Finally, using what the research says about professional learning and issues that pertain to Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander students, how could we better utilise the avenue of constructive professional learning? An initial examination of this issue is developed through the interviews and questionnaires utilised in the Case Study, with teachers’ comments integrated into the data chapters (A teacher perspective from the classroom chalk face).

In the next chapter, I give an overview of the Case Study school. The programs and strategies mentioned in Chapter 3 (except the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy) can be found in the Case Study School. Comment on school policy, professional learning and teacher opportunities have been intertwined into the following chapters, with respect to the Case Study school.
Chapter Five

See Me, Hear Me: The chosen school

The intention of the following chapter is to give the reader some background knowledge of the school community in which this Case Study was developed. So the identity of the school can be protected the information will appear to be generalised at times.

According to Cresswell (1994):

A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (p. 1).

Extending this, the qualitative research process (in this instance a Critical Case Study) was used by the researcher to examine the patterns of meaning that emerged from the data. These patterns are often presented in a combination of the participants’ own words and those of the participant observer. As the participant observer, my role here was to find patterns within the words (and actions) and to present these patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the participants’ worldviews as they originally experienced them.

The purpose of this Case Study was to provide an insight into the proposed research questions from the perspective of a group of metropolitan schoolteachers in Western Australia with particular reference to the questions below:

1. Have teachers’ acquired enough information and professional learning in their eyes to adequately assist Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander students in literacy in their metropolitan classrooms?

and

2. How does this professional learning - or lack of it - in their eyes impact on their classroom structure and planning?
In revisiting the research questions, I hope to refocus the reader on what issues the Case Study was trying to highlight, so s/he could determine the relationship between argument and evidence and the selection of the school.

Having experienced the opportunity to be part of professional learning workshops covering the content of many of the programs discussed in Chapter Three and working with teachers in thirteen Kimberley schools and ten Pilbara schools while I was a literacy consultant, I wondered if the teachers in the metropolitan Case Study school had had the same opportunities. Having the opportunity to be part of the workshops certainly opened my eyes to many avenues of working with and assisting Indigenous students to achieve better outcomes in literacy.

All the Kimberley and Pilbara schools mentioned above are rural or remote schools and had an Indigenous cohort of varying degrees. These schools had access to constant professional learning in relation to programs and strategies to assist students of Indigenous descent. For me it was just as important that teachers in the metropolitan regions were exposed to the programs and strategies that were deemed best practice through the Creating a Vision 2001-2004 document. To find out if metropolitan schools had access to professional learning to the same degree, I chose a school where the local Aboriginal community had been part of the school population for a number of years. I wanted to establish the teachers’ prior learning and knowledge of the programs outlined in Chapter Three and place this alongside the teachers’ beliefs in their ability to improve literacy outcomes for Indigenous students.

5.1 The school community
In some ways the school for this Case Study chose itself: its metropolitan location, its population (more than ten percent of the students are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent) and the spiritual meaning of the area; for the local Aboriginal people, it means place of children.

The school is situated in an outer region of the Perth Metropolitan Area. It was a Level Five school with a Principal and two Deputy Principals. By the very nature of the school’s location, it has been associated with students of local Aboriginal descent since its opening. The school was established in the late 1980s, commencing operations with an enrolment of thirty-six part-time pre-primary students and one
hundred and forty-nine primary students, a total of one hundred and eighty nine students. By the late 1990s, the school had experienced remarkable growth and peaked at nine hundred and ninety-nine students. Since then, enrolments have slowly declined and at the end of 2005 (the time of the Case Study) the school roll had decreased to five hundred and seventy students of whom fifty-eight were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. There was an average of two to three students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in each class.

The teachers were from a range of backgrounds, strengths, interests and age groups. There were twenty six (fulltime or part time) classroom teachers (K – 7), five full or part-time specialists (Art, PE, Performing Arts, and LOTE) one fulltime Getting it Right Numeracy (GiRN) specialist, one 0.2 Learning Support Coordinator, One Aboriginal Islander Education Officer (AIEO), plus Administrators, Teaching Assistants, Office Staff and a Registrar.

The school’s facilities comprised three teaching blocks including special purpose withdrawal areas, three demountable classrooms (one was taken at the end of 2005), two separate, well equipped and specially designed specialist Visual Arts and Performing Arts rooms, a Library/Resource Centre, Administration Centre and two purpose built Kindergarten classrooms. Along with this, there were expansive ovals, playground, court and grassed areas, which contributed to a very functional learning environment.

The school utilised their facilities to cater for students in four cells: the Kindy cell, Pre Primary /Year One cell, and two community based cells which combined two or three Year Two/Three, Year Four/Five and Year Six/Seven classes. As part of the school strategy, there were regular meetings in Cell Groups to cater for the social needs of the students (both at student and teacher level). Older students were encouraged to look after, and in some cases mentor, younger students in their cell. Teachers were also encouraged to integrate students in activities across the year levels. Alongside Cell Group meetings, the school also ran Curriculum Area Committees, which had team representatives (where possible), from each cell or year level. This meant staff worked with fellow Cell Staff members and with teachers in their curriculum strength.
areas from across the school. The idea behind these groups was to create avenues for better working relationships among staff members.

The school offered specialist programmes, which complemented the students’ comprehensive classroom learning programmes. Every student engaged in specialist Physical Education, Indonesian, Music or Performing Arts and Visual Arts. Students’ performances in each of these areas gave them opportunities to succeed in interschool sporting competitions, state drama competitions, school choir festivals and art exhibitions alongside more academically aligned programs. This aided in building a confident and cohesive school community where students of all backgrounds had the opportunity to work with their strengths.

Complementing students’ classroom programs were support programs in Mathematics and Language. Federal government funding provided a Getting it Right Numeracy (GiRN) specialist teacher from 2004, and from 2006, a Getting it Right Literacy (GiRL) specialist teacher to collaborate with classroom teachers and to offer additional support to teachers and students deemed to be at educational risk. Federal funding for the initial GiRL specialist teacher ceased at the end of 2003 but the school budgeted to maintain this programme using its own funds from within its staffing allocation until 2006 when federal funding was reinstated.

As part of its pastoral care program and community building process the school had integrated the FISH Philosophy into its whole school philosophy for students and staff alike. The FISH philosophy, which was developed around improving working relationships in Pike's Fish Market in Seattle Washington, was a way of building stronger relationships to equip students and staff to face challenges more effectively. It was developed to help connect student and staff teams, develop better communication skills and produce higher retention skills.

Alongside the FISH program, the school introduced the TRIBES program, which was based on co-operative learning. TRIBES was a way of working with others to build a positive environment that promoted children’s learning, social and emotional well being. The TRIBES program was used to establish a caring environment for cooperative learning but also provided structures for children and teachers to interact
positively with each other. Throughout the process, children learnt to develop collaborative skills and to reflect both on the communication and the learning that was taking place. With these philosophies in place, the staff and students should have been well placed to accept and expand on the multicultural backgrounds and perspectives within the school demographics.

5.2 Building Aboriginal /Community participation

Indigenous students comprised approximately ten percent of the school population. At this school, the community was encouraged to celebrate Indigenous culture and the staff were committed to supporting all students to develop the knowledge, values and understandings necessary to live in a multicultural society. Each year, the school celebrated National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) and observed Reconciliation Day. With the support of the Aboriginal Islander Education Officer (AIEO), class and specialist teachers were encouraged to develop cross-cultural curricula and resources to enhance all the students’ education and develop whole school programmes. Although this was encouraged, I had a sense that it did not really take place across the whole school in the ways in which it was intended.

The school’s AIEO was employed as part of the full time staff. During the time of this Case Study, the AIEO was holding the position temporarily, while the permanent officer was on leave. It should be noted that there had been a lot of work done previously by these two AIEOs and some of the school’s teachers to build a supportive Aboriginal community link. Until it was disbanded (at National level), the school had a very strong Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee and homework class network. As new funding and policies were being revealed, meetings were taking place to build on the strong community focus already established. These meetings were to inform the local community about the policy changes and requirements, so they could form a new committee, as funding became available.

In addition to this committee, the school hosted informal meetings with morning tea (once or twice a month), with a focus on involving more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in school life. Parents were encouraged to participate in the morning teas, setting the agendas and suggesting guest speakers and/or topics for discussion.
Parents could just attend the morning teas or they could become more involved in school life, participating in classroom activities such as reading programs, cultural days or art sessions as their confidence grew.

Towards the end of my research, an Aboriginal playgroup was developed to encourage parents with children aged zero to four years old to come to the school. The playgroup was used to develop links between the ways of the local Aboriginal community and the expectations of Kindergarten and Pre Primary school life. Eventually it was hoped that guest speakers in areas such as health, speech and occupational therapy (OT) could be introduced to parents so that if their children had any issues, the parents knew where to go for support. Of course, the problem of where to get help if your child had issues was a concern for parents of young children in general for this region. They could self refer for speech and language or OT for children as young as two, but many were not aware of this fact. In this district, once children reached school age, they could wait for up to eighteen months to two years just to be seen.

5.3 The School Aboriginal Policy and its journey so far
The school’s Aboriginal Education policy, for the time period of data collection, was aligned with the Key Focus Areas of the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document. For the purposes of this Case Study, I drew on the school policy areas of, Key Focus Area Two – conductive hearing loss and Key Focus Area Four - Literacy. The original policy based on the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document was updated (towards the end of the Case Study) in line with the AETOP - Our Vision (2005-2008) document. At this time, the Aboriginal parent group was shown the school’s new policy. As a committee, they were asked to discuss the policy document and provide feedback to the school (This process had not been completed when the Case Study drew to a close so this feedback on the school’s progress has not been included).

While the school had endeavoured to put in place a variety of strategies, resources and evaluations to meet the outcomes set by its policy, it was the teachers’ belief that there was still a long way to go. The school staff had been taken through the Aboriginal Education policy based on the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document by the AIEO
at a school staff development meeting. Alongside the policy information, teachers had accessed professional learning workshops in conductive hearing loss (*Do You Hear What I Hear?*), *First Steps, Deadly Ways To Learn, Noongar Language Kit* and *Ways of Being, Ways of Talk* over the three years prior to this Case Study. The school had also been involved in either the *Getting It Right Literacy (GiRL)* or *Numeracy (GiRN)* strategies since 2001.

As the school had had a decreasing student population since 1999, staff stability had increased. Most of the teachers had taken part in the professional learning workshops (school based) for the majority of the programs mentioned in the school policy. Accordingly, the above-mentioned programs have been included in the Case Study questionnaire, along with the other programs/strategies mentioned in the *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) document and the *Getting it Right Literacy* documents (see the overviews of these in Chapter Three). It should be noted that the Department of Education’s *Creating a Vision* (2001-2004) programs/strategies and the *Getting it Right Literacy* program/strategies were available in the teacher resource section of the school library.

At the time of the Case Study, system directives only allowed schools to access funding/professional learning time, for either a *GiRN* or a *GiRL* specialist, even though in some instances schools had significant issues to warrant the need for both. Hence, with the school mathematics issues being of greater concern, the school applied for a *GiRN* specialist and generated a literacy specialist through their own funding processes. This decision meant that there was support across the school in the area of literacy. Alongside the literacy specialist, a staff member was appointed, again through school funding, as a 0.2 *BOIS* (Better Outcomes for Indigenous Students) coordinator. This was the beginning of the school’s journey into a more co-ordinated approach to looking at improving literacy outcomes for all of their students.

The literacy specialist, *BOIS* coordinator, *GiRN* specialist and the AEIO introduced workshops to help inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents about ways they could help their students to cope with the expectations of school based oral language, reading, writing and maths programs. These took into account cultural perspectives and school aspects, creating respect for both. This built a closer link with
the Indigenous community as they saw the school trying to take their students’ needs into consideration. This was backed up by the increase in numbers of parents participating as classroom helpers (especially in the junior school) and in school open days where they had the opportunity to discuss and learn more about their child’s work.

Feedback from the workshops conducted throughout the year resulted in questions being asked about whether all teachers (on this school’s staff) had the knowledge of the workshop presenters or, such a positive view about their students’ needs. This became an issue, which the school needed to investigate further. Using the feedback information, the school began taking another look at its strengths and areas of need, with regard to its program for students of Indigenous descent. They were using the checklists from the DEEWR Commonwealth funded program *Dare to Lead* (2000) 2006 web site to assess the knowledge and understandings of the staff and administration. This information would be used to help involve staff in setting the school’s future direction in the area of inclusive education practices, including literacy (It would have been interesting to see if there had been any movement or change in staff thinking or knowledge base since the Case Study questionnaire, completed twelve months previously, but this was outside the scope of this thesis).

While professional learning was encouraged in this school, particularly in the area of improving outcomes for Indigenous students, I believe that the statement from the DEEWR Executive Summary of the *National Inquiry into Teaching of Literacy* (2005) needed some consideration:

…many teaching approaches used in schools are not informed by findings from evidence based research, and that too many teachers do not have a clear understanding of how, why and where to use particular strategies. This has important implication for … on going teacher professional learning… (p. 4).

If there was indeed a ‘lack of a clear understanding of how, why and where to use [the] particular strategies’ outlined in the school policy, with regard to the professional learning workshops and teacher knowledge, it was hoped that these discrepancies would be displayed in the data generated from the Case Study
questionnaire (The data from the Case Study questionnaire is collated and discussed alongside the qualitative data in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine).

5.4 Knowledge of ‘Best Practice’ and WALNA data

In affirming the school’s efforts, the West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) data for Indigenous students showed that there was a positive growth in the area of literacy. However this improvement may have been a result of the focus on improving literacy outcomes for all students rather than an increased knowledge/understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ needs.

Due to this, I asked two questions to gain a better understanding of what was happening. The first was: What did teachers have in place to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve these better outcome standings? Using the information from the questionnaire, I endeavoured to put forward the teachers’ beliefs and consolidate these with information from the interviews and classroom observations. The second was: If teachers had a clear understanding of how, why and where to use strategies based on best practice for improving literacy for Indigenous students, would there be an even greater achievement level reached? This question needs to be answered through further research at a later date.

In looking at the first question, the school had taken on board the need for literacy improvements across the entire student cohort. The progress shown for the Indigenous students is consistent with progress made across the school, especially in the lower grades. The gap between students, as they got older, did not become obvious in this school. This may be due to the lower socio-economic background of the school and the issues associated with this. Of the 570 students, 278 students were on the Students at Educational Risk (SAER) register. Even with a major school focus in literacy and numeracy, this meant that there was a large tail, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous students that was just meeting or falling below the WALNA benchmarks.

Dwelling on the lower socio-economic nature of the school for a moment, and its results in the WALNA test, the school was given 0.6 GiRL time (2001-2003, just prior to the Case Study), by the Education Department. This was to help teachers to assist students to achieve better outcome standings in the area of literacy. This lapsed
when the system decided schools could only have a GiRL or a GiRN. Improved results in the WALNA data since 2001 may be an indication that the GiRL professional learning program has increased the variety of strategies being used in classrooms. It should also be noted that the school has had a long history of multi-age grouping, co-operative learning styles, professional learning workshops in literacy and literacy assessment practices. These may all contribute to a universal effect in the area of literacy, but does this indicate a better understanding by teachers of the needs of students of Indigenous descent?

In looking at the second issue, if teachers had a clearer understanding of how, why and where to use strategies based on best practice for improving literacy for Indigenous students, would there not be an even greater achievement level reached? Using the programs/strategies discussed in Chapter Three, one needed to develop an understanding of the programs in place through school policy during the Case Study to gain an insight into this issue. The school’s 2005 policy and direction in the area of Aboriginal Education complied with the WA Plan for Government Schools (2004-2007). Due to staffing stability at the time of this Case Study, the majority of the teachers should have been aware of the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document and its programs/strategies due to in school professional learning workshops and school policy.

However, from initial discussions with the school staff, and feedback from the questionnaire, with regard to the professional learning packages associated with the school’s Aboriginal policy, there appeared to be a discrepancy between what was documented in the school policy and what teachers had remembered. This discrepancy appeared to flow on to their knowledge of, and use of, programs/strategies in their classrooms as well as their planning. These discrepancies are revisited in the data section after the collation of the interviews and classroom observations.

Taking this further, this school was involved in the Making Consistent Judgements workshops, just like many Western Australian schools. These workshops were to generate a platform for teachers to validate their individual and group judgements in relation to the outcomes. It gave staff from several schools a platform to generate
common understandings of terminology and levels, creating a level of consistency across a *close schools network*.

Even with this process happening, one wondered how this helped Indigenous students’ literacy? The students, who had their work discussed by the group of teachers, were often non-Indigenous. This being the case, as a researcher I was concerned that the general practices already in place for *Making Consistent Judgements* (MCJ) meetings were continuing to take place, and that the discussions were too general to make an impact on Indigenous literacy issues. This MCJ exercise pertained to where a student was at, not necessarily focusing on strategies to improve a student’s access to obtaining the *said outcome level*. Although the MCJ workshops helped teachers to gain a better understanding of what an outcome looked like, and let them view a number of activities that helped show the outcomes, how was inclusivity supported for the metropolitan Indigenous student (or other students)? This was an ideal platform to encourage discussion and reflection on strategies/programs that helped to develop outcomes for students of Indigenous descent.

As a short aside, schools had been asked to look at attendance for the general school population and Indigenous student population by the Education Department. At this school, general attendance was at 94% and Indigenous students at 89%. Although attendance was an issue for a small number of students, overall, this was unlikely to contribute to a significant difference in student access to classroom literacy projects/teaching/outcomes. So, putting this to one side for this school, I focused more on the practices, knowledge and beliefs of the current staff.

### 5.5 Looking a little deeper

With an Aboriginal policy in place and a commitment to outcomes based education, one might assume that an inclusivity agenda was well entrenched into the classroom and school culture. However, taking a closer look based on classroom observations, this researcher was not so convinced.

In an upper school class, a discussion took place with regard to information based on a story about Aboriginal history. The teacher was heard to say:
Olden days Aboriginal people used to go into the desert and hunt kangaroo and eat them, they liked the tails the best. You don’t do that any more do you ……?

The student, suitably embarrassed, replied ‘I do, Miss’. The teacher quickly realising she had shamed the student, tried to cover up.

In another instance, a young child wrote in his diary ‘… Nan, Pop un me gunna get um fish dark time’ to which the teacher growled and made the child rewrite the diary piece as ‘I am going to go fishing with Nan and Pop tonight’. In one simple act, the teacher had, unknowingly in this case, devalued the child’s language and dampened his willingness to produce his own writing.

The above incidents aligned with Malcolm et al.’s (1999) comments in *Two Way English* that stated that ‘…evidence suggested the devaluing of Aboriginal students home talk by teachers’ was not an uncommon practice (p. 25). These were just two incidents of several, suggesting that maybe the school culture in regard to inclusivity was not as sound as it looked from the outside. Perhaps more knowledge/understanding was needed at a cultural and linguistic level. Teacher beliefs played an integral role in providing inclusivity and worldviews for their student population. Hence the teachers’ belief in their ability to provide this for their students of Aboriginal descent needed to be integrated into this Case Study. One needed to incorporate what the teachers were saying, what classroom environments were saying and their understanding of best practice at the time of the Case Study. One needed to also ponder on whether all the good intentions of having a school philosophy that used the TRIBES and FISH programs worked if the teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal and multicultural perspectives, cultures and ways of learning was limited.

In a document published by the Board Of Teacher Registration Queensland (2005), Stewart (2002) stated that: ‘Rather than simply relating learning styles to cultural traits in ways that marginalise and alienate Indigenous students within mainstream education, there should be an emphasis on the communicative processes within the school community context and a focus on how these can either work positively or negatively towards desired outcomes’ (p. 14). I felt that this school needed to look at
its philosophies and ‘focus on how these worked positively or negatively towards [the] desired outcomes’ they were seeking in improving literacy for their students of Indigenous descent.

Located in the school library was a staff resources section in which programs and information had been collected to highlight the needs and issues pertaining to Indigenous students. All the resources sent from the Education Department and additional programs were contained here including: First Steps, Two Way Literacy and Learning, Deadly Ways to Learn and Ways of Being, Ways of Talk, 100 Children go to School Project, Making the Jump, Solid English, and Do you Hear What I Hear? With these books available, and a documented notation in the school policy that stated professional learning had taken place in First Steps, Deadly Ways to Learn, Do you Hear What I Hear?, one wondered why incidences like the ones observed above and others were still occurring if professional learning had indeed influenced current classroom practice?

Taking this a step further, the AIEO had coordinated hearing tests (additional to general health tests done by the School Nurse) to check Indigenous students for Otis Media (conductive hearing loss) for the three years before this study’s data collection. This was to insure that all new Indigenous students to the school and Kindy/Pre-Primary students had any additional needs catered for. With this information, and the delivery of the Do you Hear What I Hear? package, teaching practice and classroom environments should have shown some changes. At a minimum, the positioning of students in the classroom should have been taken into account, as should the ways in which dictation, spelling tests and discussions took place. These issues have an enormous effect on a student’s ability to meet literacy outcomes. The degree to which these factors were taken into account is discussed in the data chapters.

In outlining these issues, I am not implying that the teachers were not doing their best or to devalue the school’s effort. In justification, the level to which current First Step practices and GiRL strategies were being conducted may have been a contributing factor to the positive movement of the Indigenous students at this school. However, this may have been just luck and not governed by actual knowledge of best practice in the area of improving literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander descent. The question could be asked, if teacher knowledge and practice at the classroom level were developed, would further growth for these students occur? This thesis cannot answer this question but it can highlight the teachers’ current beliefs and practices with regard to professional learning and its influences in their daily classroom role.

5.6 Conclusion

In part, because of this project, plus a keen BOIS co-ordinator, AEIO and motivated Administration Team, this school was endeavouring to put in place the most effective strategies it could (with its current knowledge base) for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. With time, and the positive attitude shown by staff in the questionnaire, it may be a school well worth revisiting in the future.

In building a complex and holistic picture of the school, I gained a glimpse into the metropolitan setting from which the staff continued to develop their perspectives/understandings of the issues surrounding literacy for students of Indigenous descent. These understandings/beliefs are intertwined throughout the Case Study data collection and discussion chapters that follow.
Chapter Six

See Me, Hear Me: from Critical Theory a Case Study is born

As a researcher I have located myself within Critical Theory, as it has a broad tradition based upon the use of critique as a method of investigation (McCarthy, 1991). Critical theory interrogates the nature and structure of the social world through the lens of power. It does not simply try to understand the nature of the community/issues involved, but also to change it: to make it more humane, equitable and just. Critical theory researchers seek to promote change by ‘becoming part of the self-consciousness of oppressed social groups (Hoy and McCarthy, 1994)’. In this instance the focus was on seeking information to build an understanding of the Case Study teachers’ knowledge of strategies and beliefs in their ability to improve literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal descent and suggest recommendations for change utilising their input and current research.

Hence Critical Theory can be utilized in educational research, art, philosophy, literature, or business with its processes attempting to play a significant role in changing the world, not just recording information. This lens allowed me to approach the beliefs that the teachers held with regard to improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent from several perspectives. These perspectives encompassed both qualitative and quantitative methods including a questionnaire, interviews and participant observation. Intertwined into these were the backgrounds in policy, professional learning and the programmes overviewed in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Due to the nature of my position in the school community, a Critical Case Study approach provided me with rich data with which to expand the information teachers generated through the questionnaire and interviews. As a specialist literacy teacher in the school, I had become part of the classroom environment and both students and teachers expected me to be there during certain periods of the week. I participated in whole class, small group and individual student sessions. By using questionnaires and interviews as a starting point and then expanding out to classroom environments, discussions and observations, I had the opportunity to explore the teachers’ worldviews. This also allowed me to cross reference the data collected from the
different perspectives to support, question and validate the information, giving depth to these teachers’ beliefs and suggestions.

According to Sanders (1974) ‘winning the trust and confidence of the subjects is a matter of rapport, and, in participant observation more than any other method, rapport is essential’ (p. 159). I felt I had gained the trust of this community through working with and alongside them over the past few years. Sanders (1974) also stated that ‘ethnographies are basically analytic descriptions of cultures, organisations or settings’ (p. 12) and, as such, this method allowed me to critique teacher views versus deeds and align their knowledge with the policy and programmes governed by the case study’s timeframe.

The term Critical Theory is used to refer to the work of a group of sociopolitical analysts commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School, whose prominent members included Adorno, Marcuse and more recently, Habermas (see Best & Kellner, 1991; Bronner, 2002; Rush, 2004). They were all interested in the idea of a more just society in terms, not just of all people having equal access to the good things of life, but also and perhaps more importantly, of people being in cultural, economic and political control of their lives. They argued that these goals could only be achieved through emancipation, a process by which oppressed and exploited people became sufficiently empowered to transform their circumstances for themselves by themselves.

It was called Critical Theory because they saw the route to emancipation as being a kind of self-conscious critique which challenges social relations, in particular those of and within a wide range of practices of power. Kellner (1993) stated that ‘Critical theory nurtured a critical approach to social analysis that would detect existing social problems and promote social transformation’ (p. 1). Hoy and McCarthy (1994) go on to suggest that Critical Theory researchers sought to promote change by becoming part of the self-consciousness of the oppressed social community and worked towards empowering them to promote change. Thus, in my research, I carried out a critique of the teachers’ beliefs within the school community, investigating the positives and negatives developed from their opinions with the intention that my research would seek to empower teachers to explore ways to better address the literacy learning needs
of Aboriginal students and their teachers’ professional learning needs in this area. There is value in acknowledging the diversity in literacy needs and being respectful of that diversity as well as the differing knowledge and perspectives that accompany them.

While Critical Theory is often thought to narrowly refer to the Frankfurt School that begins with Horkheimer and Adorno and stretches to Marcuse and Habermas, any philosophical approach with similar practical aims including feminism, critical race theory, critical education theory, critical ethnography and some forms of post-colonial criticism fit under this umbrella (see Rush 2004; Ward, 2007), others identify it as the mode of inquiry that participants may adopt in their social relations to others. Critical Theory has been used to link detailed analysis to social structures and systems of power relationships in order to examine their origins. This has raised extensive questions about structural and power relationships. For some, its intention was to go beyond grasping the subject’s meanings in order to relate those meanings to wider cultural and ideological forms (see Kellner, 1993).

In using Critical Theory as the underlying theory for this project, I hoped to signify the critical dimension, the theoretical aspirations, and political issues that would help link theory and practice. Using the Greek sense of the verb critical (krinein), which signifies to discern, reflect, and judge and the Greek noun for theory (theoria) which refers to a way of seeing and contemplation, I examined the school community, beliefs, knowledge, values, and dominant ideas, to construct everyday life through the teachers’ own thoughts and actions. To attempt this, I investigated and highlighted the issues relevant to this project using writings from scholars such as Kellner (1990, 1993, and 2003), Rush (2004), Honneth (1991), Bronner (2002) and Ward (2007).

An important tool for a Critical Theory of education in the present age according to Kellner (2003), is the consideration of:

…poststructuralist theories which emphasize the importance of difference, marginality, heterogeneity, and multiculturalism, calling attention to dimensions of experiences, groups and voices that have been suppressed in the modern tradition. They develop new critical theories of multicultural otherness and difference, which includes engagement
with class, gender, race, sexuality, and other important components of identity and life that much modern pedagogy neglect or ignore. Poststructuralists also call for situated reason and knowledges, stressing the importance of context and the social construction of reality that allows constant reconstruction. (paragraph 21)

This quote discusses the issues of multiculturalism and the dimensions of experiences being suppressed in modern traditions. Hence to develop a more equitable education experience for students of Indigenous descent the issues of teacher knowledge and understanding in regard to language, cultural and or learning differences needs to be investigated. These appear to have been neglected in the sense that whilst programs and strategies exist, the information from them may not be reaching urban teachers. Without this information both the voices of the teachers and students are being marginalized; if this is the case, regardless of the continued updating of policy in the area of Indigenous education, the experience of education of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students will continue to be very different (Mellor and Corrigan, 2004).

By looking at teacher beliefs and knowledge in the area of improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent I hoped that with their help I could develop a way forward to help teachers provide more inclusive programs that might help close the experience gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students, one that called attention to the experiences, groups and voices that were currently being suppressed in many educational classroom environments.

I also felt that there was a need to get both myself as researcher and the Case Study teachers to reflect on our positions, biases and limitations (knowledge of programs/strategies) so we could look to validate, improve on or change current practices (practices based on policy documentation from 2003 – 2006) and put forward some workable solutions or at least starting points for further research.

With the Department of Education’s Our Vision Policy (2005-2008) focusing on:

The current lack of achievement by Aboriginal students [that could] no longer be tolerated and the [W.A Education] Department developing
additional initiatives that would be key drivers in bridging the gap between the outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (p. 2),

there was a need to investigate and reflect on whether these concerns were being reiterated by teachers and if in these teachers’ opinions the above mentioned initiatives (see Chapter Three) by the W.A Education Department were indeed being incorporated into their professional learning packages. Were these initiatives impacting at a school level to provide an equal playing field for all students? Also were they promoting the concept of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, in accordance with the requirement of the MEECTYA Adelaide Declaration (1999)? To gain an insight into these issues, teachers’ beliefs and reflections were sought and developed through questionnaires, discussions, observations and interviews within the context of this metropolitan community. These were collated and put forward as a constructive means to promote solutions from a teacher’s perspective.

As I compiled the teachers’ ideas and beliefs, I needed to bear in mind my background as a Literacy Consultant for Catholic Education. While only holding this position for two years, it took me to the rural and remote schools in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions in Western Australia. This gave me an insight into the availability of professional learning opportunities for teachers in the area of literacy for students of Indigenous descent in these schools. In turn, this gave me the privileged position of seeing many of the programs and strategies listed in Chapter Three being used in schools, something I had not been part of in the Case Study school, because it was an urban school. With this experience, I needed to continually reflect on my prior knowledge and the assumptions developed from it, plus the prior knowledge of teachers who had taught in a variety of schools including rural and remote schools. I needed to be mindful of my own assumptions, positions, and practices, and to constantly reflect on what the teachers’ were actually saying in relation to professional learning, policy and practice with regard to improving literacy opportunities for students of Indigenous descent.
Some writers, such as Mooney and Craven (nd) and Harris (1990) argued that domination was reinforced by the political and cultural interpretations of the world and that children and teachers accepted the schools’ definition of truth (subject matter) in the hidden curriculum. To me, critical research helps the researcher to better interrogate their study, aiding in the understanding of contradictions, experiences and observations. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) go on to state that: ‘critical research can be best understood in the context of the empowerment of the individual’ (p. 264). By giving the teachers the opportunity to put forward suggestions that they felt would help them to improve literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent, I hoped that this would give them a voice alongside policy makers. As noted in Chapter Two, policy and practice do not necessarily align and maybe it was time to develop a better way to link policy and practice to gain better results at the classroom chalkface.

6.1 Aspects of Critical Theory
According to Ward (2007), Critical Theory is grounded upon the realisation that education and knowledge are political - that is that what is seen to be legitimate knowledge and education is a contested domain where competing social and cultural groups struggle to have their own beliefs and ideologies become part of the common sense of everyday life and meaning (p. 1).

It aims at understanding people’s values and uses of their meanings rather than finding the truth. Developing this further, Critical Theory involves the interpretation and interplay between social and cultural relations. Kincheloe and McLaren (1998) maintain that: ‘…It attempts to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society’ (p. 264). In this study, it might also serve to respect the complexity of the school community and its teachers, while at the same time, allow my voice to be heard. By using classroom observations in the Case Study I gained an alternative perspective of the social and cultural aspects of the community allowing me to support, query or expand on the teachers’ comments and beliefs. In doing this, it allows the reader to develop an understanding of my methodological ideas or socio-political stance as well as some of the socio-cultural aspects of the community that have influenced this study.
Given that ‘knowledge is the product of an interaction between our ideas about the world and our experience of the world’ and that ‘…all experience is influenced by our concepts: we see things — even physical things — through cultural lenses…’ (Beck 1993, Paragraph 18) there seemed to me to be an inherent link between knowledge and culture. Taking a critical look at this, I think we need to be careful of the attachments often made to the terms knowledge, culture and power and the contexts in which they are used. Generalisations can exclude the influences of innovations, diversity and mechanisms for continual change that may fall outside of these boundaries. In this study, knowledge has been implied in policy, but does it exist in the reality of the school community? An example of this is the requirement for teachers to have a minimum of two units in Indigenous education to meet the 2010 requirements of the MCEETYA document, Australian Directions in Indigenous Education (2005-2008) which stated that in order to gain a teaching position professional learning/knowledge will be:

9.2 … a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a principal and incorporated into performance agreements of existing principals;
9.1(a) … a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher; and that professional learning at 9.1(a), (b) and (c) is incorporated into performance agreements and/or duty statements of existing teachers (p. 10).

This implies not only the opportunity for teachers to do this but also a knowledge base from which to enhance the use of this information in the classroom. This concept of access to professional learning and the follow-through or application of professional learning was investigated through the school’s policy and teachers feedback plus classroom observations.

Beck (1993) voices the concept that:

Individuals are just as unified and definable as communities, and they have considerable (though not unlimited) capacity for self-knowledge, self-expression, and self-regulation. There is no basis for emphasizing culture or community to the neglect of individuals (paragraph 20).
By investigating the school community as a whole, this study hoped to put forward a unified inventory of concerns and suggestions developed from both community and individual perspectives to give the metropolitan teachers a voice in the promotion of change in the area of improving literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal descent.

Even though the political climate at the time of the Case Study highlighted the issues surrounding the literacy needs of Indigenous students through funding, media releases and supporting best practice via policies such as the Department of Education WA’s Creating a Vision document (2001 – 2004), were teachers in their classrooms mirroring these concerns? Did teachers have the opportunities or knowledge to implement the political intentions/policies of this time period? Was the push by the Department of Education W.A. to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in education reflected in avenues for the metropolitan teachers to understand and create equally inclusive classrooms for all students? As a researcher, I chose not to ask these questions of the policy makers or central/regional office consultants, but to elicit comments for discussion from the classroom teachers themselves and these are included in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine.

### 6.2 The Critical Frame for this Case Study

The essence of this part of the chapter is to elaborate my reasons for the use of Critical Theory in a predominately qualitative research study. Refocusing on the concept that Critical Theory is based on a long-term investigation of a group (often a culture) that is based on immersion and, optimally, participation in that group, critical theory provides a detailed exploration of group activity and may include literature (in this case identifying policy, programs and strategies) that affects the group’s beliefs. The issue for the observer was how the particulars in a given situation are interrelated. In other words, Critical Theory attempts to explain the web of interdependence of group behaviours and interactions.

Taking this a step further and looking at the aspect of qualitative research within Critical Theory, qualitative research could be seen as positivist, interpretive, or critical. It follows from this that the choice of a specific approach (such as the Case Study method) is independent of the underlying philosophical position adopted. For example, Case Study research can be positivist (Yin, 2003); interpretive (Walsham,
1993), or critical (Stake 1995), just as Action Research can be positivist (Clark, 1972), interpretive (Elden and Chisholm, 1993) or critical (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

Following the suggestion that qualitative research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical, I moved forward with confidence in my choice. As a researcher using a qualitative approach, one needs to allow the reader insight into one’s theoretical positioning, which I have attempted to do. This includes references to my motives, presuppositions, and personal history as they all helped shape my particular inquiry. I have always had an interest in literacy and its importance in opening pathways for students of all cultures and backgrounds. I have worked in the field of education for over thirty years: twelve years as an Education Support Teacher, seven years as a Literacy Specialist in primary school, two years as a curriculum writer for WestOne (who develop programs for the School of Isolated and Distance Education, SIDE) and two years as a Literacy Consultant for Catholic Education.

With the concept of literacy opening pathways for students of all cultures and backgrounds in mind, I became involved in the Literacy Net roll out for Catholic Education, which enabled me to visit many schools across Western Australia and to work with teachers, educational assistants and fellow consultants. This broadened my understandings of the issues involved in improving literacy outcomes for students across many backgrounds. It also highlighted the differences between professional learning opportunities in urban and rural/remote areas. I discovered that professional learning strategies and programs that were automatically available to rural and remote schools because of their Indigenous student cohort were not automatically available to metropolitan schools even though they might have a significant percentage of Indigenous students. Due to this inconsistency in professional learning opportunities, and the depth of programs and strategies available (as discussed in Chapter Three), I decided to take a more in-depth look at these issues through the eyes of a group of metropolitan teachers. Using a Critical Case Study approach, I looked specifically at the teachers’ beliefs with respect to improving outcomes for their Indigenous students to see if their knowledge base and practice included professional learning in the strategies and programs outlined in the Department of Education WA’s Creating a Vision Policy (2001-2004).
The above interests and concerns underline the position from which I speak about the research and the approach I have taken. They give an indication of why I chose Critical Theory to explore this topic. The Case Study developed from a community that provided an opportunity to take a critical look at the issues of this topic, namely policy, professional learning and the teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about providing opportunities for students of Aboriginal descent to achieve literacy outcomes according to the WALNA (West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment) data (now the NAPLAN, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy). Thus, I argue that, as a researcher employing a generic approach, I need to explicitly identify what brought me to the research question, as well as the assumptions I make about the topic. A continual refocussing of the research questions has been intertwined into the data chapters to help me navigate the literature and data collection process and to assist the reader in their journey.

My work as an educator and researcher is intertwined with my interest in literacy and inclusive education for all. I believe that structures exist in society that not only allow, but also exacerbate underlying inequities in society. These inequities are maintained by the assumptions that policy is translated into action. They also exist in the belief that education for all students is inclusive. How can this be the case when the blame on Western Australia’s poor result in the literacy and numeracy in the 2009 NAPLAN was attributed to the fact that: ‘We have more remote students than Victoria [and] we have a lot more Aboriginal students’ (Dr Constable, the Minister for Education and Tourism in WA, cited in Hiatt, 2009, p. 7). With all the funding into education strategies and policy, especially in rural and remote areas, why are we still attributing blame for poor results to students in these areas? Are we placing blame on students where the gap between their language and Standard Australian English (SAE) is the greatest? Is it perhaps time to focus on improving the knowledge of teachers in urban and inner rural schools where the code switching between home language and SAE is closer? This surely would provide a wider educational base for future Aboriginal teachers, educators and mentors to help close the gap as there are now fifty three percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in inner rural or urban situations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census).
Hence, one could suggest that policy makers impose their ideas and theories without checking their impact at school level and subject change that is not necessarily tied to demographic, ethnic, or gender considerations. Schools are left with choosing a focus that best fits their cohort and level of funding, not necessarily covering all policies. Indeed, it seems that the classroom has become a place where teachers follow school priorities and consider policy beyond that to further their own knowledge. There are so many policies, many of which can be disconnected from professional learning and, as such, collect educational dust.

At the beginning of the Case Study (as indicated by the initial questionnaire) the school’s administration team, the BOIS (Better Outcomes for Indigenous Students) co-ordinator and the Literacy Specialist each had an understanding of the Creating a Vision Document (2001-2004), but many of the classroom teachers did not, as it had not become the basis of a school priority at this stage, nor had it been included in professional learning (only aspects of it had been covered). For me, the choice of Critical Theory was based on an opportunity to understand and explore current policy, related professional learning and their impact on teachers (within a school community), with a cohort of students of Indigenous descent. The focus was on the teachers’ beliefs in their ability to improve literacy outcomes for this cohort of students. Chapters Two and Three indicate that a great deal of work has been done in the areas of policy and programs/strategies. Continuing in Chapter Four, I suggested that the research showed that funding had been allocated along with policy showing the need for teachers’ professional learning to be targeted so as to optimise student learning. This being the case, one could put forward the idea that at a System/National level there was a belief that there was a need for change, but one could also question whether these policies and aspects of change reached the school communities.

The challenge taken up by this Critical Case Study was to share/understand/portray the teachers’ beliefs and practices with regard to their knowledge of policies, programs/strategies and professional learning opportunities, and to make suggestions based on what the teachers thought, and if they thought there were ways they could improve the opportunities for students of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander descent to achieve outcomes in literacy. I collated ideas that supported the positives
that already existed and highlighted the negatives or concerns, thus promoting the teachers’ ideas for change in improving literacy outcomes and accessing/using professional learning opportunities. Through the Case Study, I investigated the interplay between policy, funding and communication at school community, state and national levels.

6.3 Methodology
Due to the nature of qualitative observational research and its development around observations and interaction with groups, certain ethical issues can arise. Miles and Huberman (1994) list several issues that researchers should consider when analysing data. They caution researchers to be aware of these and other issues before, during, and after the research has been conducted. Some of the issues involved the following:

- Informed consent (Did participants have full knowledge of what was involved?);
- Harm and risk (Could the study hurt participants?);
- Honesty and trust (Was the researcher being truthful in presenting data?); and
- Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Would the study intrude too much into group behaviours?).

Before starting the Case Study, permission was gained by the school administration and a submission was put forward to the ethics committee at university. Once these were cleared, the participants signed consent forms agreeing to be part of this study. Further consent was gained from those participants taking part in the interviews, as their ideas would contribute *direct text* comments in the discussion parts of the concluding chapters.

During the collection of data, it was necessary to inform teachers if I, as a researcher, was *observing* aspects of classroom practice, interactions and/or environment for this project. As I was *a part* of these classrooms, the ethical issue of what *hat* I was wearing at any particular stage of the investigation needed clarification to maintain the trust of the participants.
The ethical issue of maintaining the integrity of the participants’ voices and their anonymity was a conscious part of this project, as the participants often gave information or presented ideas that they would discuss openly with me as the researcher, but were not ready to voice these understandings or concepts at a staff meeting or administrative level. In relaying the voices of the participants, the level of anonymity has been maintained.

Thomas (1993) states that while ‘conventional ethnography describes what is, critical ethnography asks what could be…Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purposes of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it’ (p. 4). With the idea of critically investigating the issues surrounding teacher beliefs about improving literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent in metropolitan schools to elicit change I explored Carspecken’s work as a framework to develop this Case Study.

Carspecken (1996) argues that: ‘we (critical researchers) must share a concern with social theory and some of the basic issues with which it has struggled since the beginning of the 19th century. These include the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency’ (p. x). Carspecken’s work illustrated the foundations of critical research and provided a basis for this research. He stated that critical qualitative writers:

...position themselves as political and interrogative beings, fully explicit about their original positions, and about where their research actually took them as investigators and as political actors (p. xi).

According to Carspecken (1996) qualitative research usually consists of three components:

1) Data, which can come from various sources;
2) Analytic or interpretive procedures that are used to arrive at findings or theories; and
3) Written and verbal reports.

with Critical Case Studies ‘being concerned about social inequalities’ and directed towards ‘positive social change’ (p. 3).
Data can be gathered by means of interviews, observations, documents, books, and videotapes. The data produced by qualitative research is considered to be rich in detail and closer to the participants’ perceived world, while the data produced by quantitative approaches may lead to data that is restricted in depth by its nature. To combine aspects of both data collection approaches (triangulation) allowed me to widen the scope of the data collected and help support validations made through observations and interviews.

According to Endres (1996), Habermas distinguishes two dimensions of the lifeworld that can be employed simultaneously within a critical research project:

- the objective world, which represents facts independent of human thought and serves as a common reference point for determining truth;
- the social world, comprised of intersubjective relationships; and the subjective world of private experiences.

(Paragraph 9)

With further research (Anderson 1991, Emden, and Sandelowski 1998a) I expanded on these terms to give me further insight into their meaning:

1) Objectivising studies, basing them on observable phenomena of the social community however prioritising an outside’s view. Here one sought social structures that helped shape and define the community’s culture:

2) Hermeneutic, which was based on the Greek word hermēneutika, meaning things for interpreting. Here one took the insider’s view of a cultural group and reconstructed it to interpret and judge their world and construct a picture of their world.

This led me to Carspecken’s (1996) work as he followed the concepts of Habermas, offering a five-stage scheme or framework in order to conduct critical qualitative research. These five stages included:

1) compiling the primary record through qualitative data;
2) preliminary reconstructive analysis;
3) discovering dialogical data generation;
4) describing system relations; and
5) using system relationships to explain the findings.

Stage One (compiling the primary record through qualitative data) includes providing a description of the subjects, their beliefs and knowledge, their school and the related professional learning opportunities. A starting point for this was Chapter Five which provided an overview of the community in which the project was based. The interviews and classroom observations were used to build on this platform and provided thick and not so thick descriptions to develop a more in depth picture (see Carspecken, 1996, Chapter Three). This was the preliminary phase and interpreted through the researcher’s perspectives.

Stage Two (preliminary reconstructive analysis) was developed through reflection on accounts and information developed through observation and interviews, so as to clarify first impressions and formulate articulations underlying the tacit realm of the community. Carspecken (1996) stated that by: ‘Articulating such tacit realms [it] helps you to become more aware of what you might be missing, what biases might be in play, what cultural forms are necessary to understand through further analysis’ (p. 102).

He goes on to discuss the importance of creating validity claims, both horizontally (through three ontological categories, objective, subjective and normative-evaluative claims) and vertically (through the foregrounding and backgrounding of claims). For me, the policy and programs/strategies discussed in Chapters Two and Three provide a background into what the Department of Education (WA) highlighted as good practice, and the foreground was gauging the teachers’ understanding of these; their beliefs and practices at the time of the Case Study. To validate how these understandings and practices intertwined, I utilised a questionnaire to obtain a baseline of what the teachers knew about the program/strategies discussed in Chapter Three, their beliefs about how they could help improve literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal descent and then used interviews, observations and discussions to support, dispute or extend their ideas.

It should be noted that I am aware that two of the disadvantages of Case Studies are that the group being studied may be unique, and the observer (me in this case) may be biased in her perceptions. I concede that this group may indeed be unique and, as
such, generalisations will be kept to the confines of the school. Nonetheless, there will be other metropolitan schools with similar percentage of students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent where a comparative study might be conducted. As to my own biases, I have tried to inform the reader about the position I am debating from so that s/he can formulate their own opinion. For much of the study, I have tended to play devil’s advocate by questioning issues and policies, in order to try and see beyond the assumptions being made, and to focus on the teachers’ realities.

Intertwined into the validity process was the process of accounting for the pragmatic horizons through pragmatic units, semantic units and interpretive schemes which enabled the researcher to fully explore the realms of the community. These help to develop the characteristics of the culture of the community plus the roles, types of talk and sequences within it. By utilising a cross section of teachers through the interview and observation process, the levels of understandings and issues across the community could be developed. The understandings of a new graduate and a new teacher to this country differed considerably from the others interviewed, and yet their roles and places in the community were on equal footing with the other teachers.

Stage Three (discovering dialogical data generation) gave the participants a voice in the process and gave them a chance to challenge material outlined by the researcher. It explored their world using their own vocabulary, metaphors and ideas.

I envisaged that the passages of conversation in written form would assist me to piece together the participants’ viewpoints and experiences on whether they felt they had had enough information/professional learning to adequately assist students of Aboriginal descent to improve their literacy outcomes in their metropolitan schools. Underpinning these viewpoints, I tried to elicit the perceptions of the teachers about how professional learning had impacted on their classroom practice and planning. This was accessed through the use of questionnaires, interviews, discussions and classroom observations.

The five teachers that were approached for interviews also provided me with access to their classrooms for more focused observations. These observations were utilised to gain a more in-depth look into teacher practice and to expand on their questionnaire comments. The teachers had differing insights into the issues facing
Indigenous students and how they were approaching them. Their viewpoints also differed in the construct and value of professional learning in this area. Discussions were formulated as the data was unravelled and the suggestions and observations that followed are intertwined into the concluding chapters.

Stage Four (describing system relations) was narrowly explored in the context of school policy, the school administration team, and their interpretation/response to the study’s aims. The school administration team’s responses are described through the use of questionnaire records, taped interviews and policy documentation. They offered another vantage point to comment on the community culture and extend the reader’s overview of where they (the school administration team) felt they were placed with in the system.

As noted in Chapter Five, there appeared to be a positive feel about the school on the part of the local Indigenous community, with high attendance rates from their students and high participation from the parents themselves in committees and meetings. However, the teacher knowledge of the Aboriginal Education school policy and its integrated literacy programs (developed from the Department of Education WA’s Creating a Vision 2001 – 2004 document) seemed limited (based on an initial look at the questionnaire). The teachers’ knowledge of the variety of programs in the school and/or the availability of professional learning seemed limited to First Steps. Therefore, one needs to gain an understanding of the following questions:

- What was happening to make the school a positive place for these students?
- What teachers were basing their everyday classrooms experiences on to enhance this positive climate, especially in the area of literacy?
- What was the role of the school policy and/or the school administration team in influencing the above issues?

Stage Five (using system relationships to explain the findings) reconstructs the socio-political climate, policies and educational background of the time when this project took place. It provided one aspect of many for building the participants’ perceived worlds. In becoming familiar with the group, I felt it was important to highlight the current political, policy and educational background under which their teaching programmes were being compiled and delivered.
At the time of this study, the State of Western Australia was operating under outcomes based education. Integrated into this drive were policies and programs that had strong implications for the teachers in this study group. The teachers’ knowledge of the most pertinent of these programs/strategies was ascertained through a questionnaire, as were their comments about how they were utilising these in their classroom practice. The policies influencing this study have been placed historically; their influences from national and local levels are outlined in Chapter Two. The programs discussed within State policy have been overviewed in Chapter Three to give the reader an insight into what was available and accessible for teacher professional learning. These chapters developed a view of outside influences at a System level.

In Carspecken’s work, Stages Four and Five were based on objectivising studies of the social system to prioritise the outsider’s view. I have loosely used them as a guide to developing a macro analysis of the teachers’ perceived world with the awareness that the assumption that teachers had acquired enough information/professional learning to adequately assist Indigenous students was already being made via current educational policy (Refer to Chapter Two).

6.3.1 Setting, Questionnaire, Observations, and Participants
As I outlined earlier, the setting for the research community was a metropolitan school in the Southwest region of Perth. The staffing at the school had become stable in the three years prior to the Case Study. The school had had a cohort of above ten percent of students of Indigenous descent since its opening, thus making it an ideal Case Study community. The school and the teachers were chosen as a means of showing the impact of the Department of Education WA’s Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document and its strategies/programs during the 2003–2006 time period. By using the Department of Education WA’s Creating a Vision (2001- 2004) as a link to policy and professional learning requirements, I gained an insight into the teachers’ beliefs about their professional learning opportunities to meet the needs of this cohort in literacy. A more in-depth look at the community was provided in Chapter Five.

After choosing the Case Study school, gaining consent from the ethics committee, the administration of the school, and the teachers, I distributed the questionnaires were to
be completed on a voluntary basis. Nineteen out of the twenty-six teachers and administrators completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire compiled information on:

- Professional learning based on the programs/strategies in Chapter Three;
- *Getting it Right Literacy Strategy* and its role in the school;
- The programs/strategies (including the *GiRL* program) that had the most influence on teachers’ classroom planning/practice in supporting Indigenous students;
- Teachers’ views on professional learning, including:
  - Do you feel that you have had sufficient Professional Learning (Development) to help you cater for the Indigenous students in your class?
  - Are there any areas of Professional Learning (Development) that you feel need to be covered in more depth with regard to supporting Indigenous students?
  - What areas (if any) do you feel need to have more focus in regard to supporting Indigenous students in education?
  - What suggestions/comments do you have about current teacher knowledge concerning their ability to include students of Indigenous backgrounds in metropolitan classrooms?

Once the questionnaire had been completed, I began compiling the information and used it as a guide to classroom observations and interviews. Participant observations were carried out in a cross section of twenty classrooms from Pre-Primary to Year Seven. Five teachers with varying roles, age groups and backgrounds were interviewed. These teachers also completed the questionnaire. I conducted a series of observations that were developed over the course of a year to provide a rich, thick description of what was happening in the classrooms. The observations were to:

- Find support or discrepancies for the information given by the teachers in the questionnaires;
• Find out if there was any participation by the Indigenous community in the classrooms. This was to see if there was an overlap between teacher beliefs/attitudes/knowledge with regard to improving literacy skills for students of Indigenous descent and Indigenous parent participation;
• Find out if classroom environments displayed/supported teacher beliefs (physical as in wall displays, seating of students, etc and emotional, i.e. acceptance of language and worldviews, etc.).

In general, the observational research went smoothly. The teachers were helpful and cooperative in accommodating the observational research process.

In designing the research, I envisioned particular issues that would guide the interview process and the cross section of teachers interviewed. The cross section had to be diverse enough to take in years of teaching (graduate to experienced teachers), country of origin (to see how teachers entering the system from other countries are provided for in this area) and expertise (specialist teachers with a background in this area to gain a more informed view of the issues). The interview schedule was structured in such a manner that the participants could easily understand the questions being posed. Once overall focus questions were answered, the participants were asked to provide further clarification of the issues they thought impacted most on a teacher’s ability to improve outcomes for students of Indigenous descent and make suggestions about how they thought teachers could move forward from here. Once the interviews were finished, they were transcribed, coded, and analysed in order to develop thematic categories. These categories were then compared with observational categories and general themes were teased from the comparison.

The hope inherent in this study was to be able to empower teachers and provide an insight into what they have to confront as the end users of policy documents. Without some form of alignment between policy, funding and professional learning, despite all of their good intentions teachers are left out in the cold. Upon completion of the observations and interviews, I followed Carspecken’s stages portraying the teachers’ and researcher’s views and linking these back to policy, programs/strategies and professional learning to put forward suggestions for change.


6.4 Conclusion

As Critical Theory makes no apology for being openly ideological, my concern was to unveil the social climate and the underlying but often hidden interests represented with in the school community to gain a better understanding of the teachers’ beliefs in their ability to improve literacy outcomes for students of Indigenous descent. In doing this, I had to consider aspects of validity with in the realms of a qualitative approach. Lather (1986b) best answers the validity question when she reconceptualizes validity in a critical mode. To Lather, validity is achieved when the research process ‘re- orients, focuses, and energizes in what Freire (1973) terms consscientization’ (p. 67). Lather (in Ulichny, 1997) further commented:

Validity is achieved if respondents further self-understanding and, ideally, self determination through their participation in the research. Praxis, inversely, may be met by reflecting on the roles and positionalities co-constructed between researcher and participant as well as presenting opportunities to participants to raise consciousness concerning systemic inequities of class, race and gender (p. 139).

In this study, Lather’s terms for validity through self determination and reflection are inclusive in the Case Study approach, whereby both the teacher and researcher have the opportunity to raise their consciousness regarding issues/beliefs/practices about literacy for Indigenous students within their classroom context. Underlying issues regarding professional learning, accessibility, usability and practicality also surfaced. As a participant observer in this project, the concept of reflecting upon my own position and biases, privileges, and limitations have been made explicit to the reader to aid in the validity of the process. Included in the validity process was the opportunity for teachers, who were interviewed or were part of the classroom observations, to clarify, expand on or restate their opinions to help me to better understand/portray their beliefs as individuals and as a community.

Within the guidelines of a Critical Case Study, one needed to remember that qualitative researchers have a special responsibility to their subjects and their readers. Since there are no statistical tests for significance in qualitative studies, the researcher bears the burden of discovering and interpreting the importance of what was observed, and of establishing a plausible connection between what was observed and the conclusions.
drawn in the research report. With this in mind, I will move into Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine to put forward the data, analysis and ensuing discussion.
Chapter Seven

See Me, Hear Me: Looking at the initial data

During the following chapter, the process of collecting and analysing the data will be unpacked. The process is centred on Carspecken’s (1996) five-stage framework to conduct critical qualitative research outlined in Chapter Six.

In developing this chapter, I have tied together aspects of Stages One and Two of Carspecken’s (1996) five-stage framework. Stage One (compiling the primary record through qualitative data) included providing a description of the subjects, their beliefs and knowledge, their school and the related professional learning opportunities available to them. Chapter Five was the starting point for this as it provided an overview of the community in which the project was based. The interviews, questionnaire comments and classroom observations were used to build on the platform constructed in Chapter Five (about the school community) to provide thick and not so thick descriptions to develop a more in depth picture of the teachers’ beliefs. (see Carspecken 1996 Chapter Three). This was the preliminary phase and interpreted from the researcher’s perspectives, with some participant comments to support and develop observations.

Stage Two (preliminary reconstructive analysis) was developed through reflection on accounts and information developed through observation, questionnaire comments and interviews, so as to clarify/support first impressions and formulate articulations underlying the tacit realms of the community. Carspecken (1996) states that by ‘articulating such tacit realms [it] helps you to become more aware of what you might be missing, what biases might be in play, what cultural forms are necessary to understand through further analysis’ (p. 102).

7.1 Initial Observations

On viewing the school community through the eyes of this Case Study, I began to explore the Case Study teachers’ concept of teacher knowledge and beliefs in their ability to assist their students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in the area of literacy. The position I held in the school community meant that I had been in the majority of the classrooms from Kindergarten to Year Seven for at least a year.
prior to the Case Study. This meant that both students and teachers were used to my being in their classrooms. As a participant observer, this meant that I was able to observe without influencing their behaviours to the extent an outsider might have done.

According to local research (DEEWR *Dare to Lead Project 2006*) and international research by the Alberta Education Department (2005), *Our Words, Our Ways* (p. 79), the teacher’s relationship with the student is at the heart of Aboriginal approaches to education. Traditionally, teachers knew each student as an individual, with unique gifts and needs. In this environment, they tailored the learning process to the student’s needs as a matter of course.

Tailoring the learning process for Aboriginal students helps to engage their interest and allows them to succeed. To do this, teachers need to:

- build relationships with individual students;
- gather information through conversations with students, parents and other teachers (links to Chapter 4.6 Teacher student relationships);
- respect and acknowledge their languages (links to Chapter 4.4 Language);
- acknowledge individual cultures, world views and perspectives;
- provide a welcoming classroom environment (Links to Chapter Two, Policy);
- utilise programs/strategies that are deemed to enhance opportunities for their success (in this instance, the programs/strategies referred to in Chapter Three).

These suggestions have been gathered from the research to use as a guideline to see how this school community has developed within the realms of the research presented in this chapter and Chapters Two to Four. In the next five sections, I will investigate teacher student relationships, Aboriginal English (AE) and Standard Australian English (SAE), classroom environments (inclusive of grouping, conductive hearing loss), worldviews, programs and strategies before taking a preliminary look at teacher knowledge and their requests for professional learning.

### 7.2 Teacher student relationships

Initially, I looked at teacher-student relationships. Harrison (2004) found that:
success for both the student and teacher is not just a consequence of a good theory or methodology but the product of an unconscious influence of the teacher’s speaking style upon the student. While the student is expected to learn from the teacher, the crucial factor that brings the two together in the classroom is how the teacher talks (p. 8).

This view was also held by one of the staff members in the school community who commented that:

*You have to let Aboriginal kids know that you genuinely want to know about them not just chit chat like you do as kids walk in the door but let them know that you know who their siblings are. Make an effort to meet their parents. Also get to know what their interests are, like with A….. if you ask about how his football went on Saturday you’ve won him over for the week. It’s the little things that make things a bit more personal – the teacher relationship on a daily basis is the most important and then comes the literacy. The relationship isn’t that of an equal but it looks more like that with boundaries, different from the more traditional teacher because it is a jokey-more-having-fun relationship that still has boundaries. This relationship can be used with all students but it is really important for Aboriginal students. It has to be genuine. From my personal and family views the students know when you’re faking it and are one of those teachers that says jolly things and doesn’t really mean it. (Teacher T)*

In this community, this type of teacher-student relationship was developing but it was not part of the overall school philosophy at the time of the Case Study. Progress had been made with the focus in staff meetings beginning to encompass discussions around *what an inclusive classroom looks, feels and sounds like?* There were also workshops and parent meetings to engage the parents of the students, so the process of building a better home-school link could be forged. This was starting to show results with more parents participating voluntarily in school activities.
Cahill suggests on the DEEWR *Dare to Lead* website (2007) that success in the classroom has:

less to do with what the teachers do, and more to do with what they believe. Teachers’ beliefs about Aboriginal English, worldview, and Aboriginal ways permeate their incidental reactions to things students do and say in the classroom (paragraph 16).

This being the case, it seemed paramount that teachers had an understanding of these issues to help bridge the gap and initiate the learning process.

7.3 Aboriginal histories, Aboriginal worldviews and Aboriginal perspectives

Aboriginal students, regardless of whether they are gifted, bright, average or struggling, come to the classroom with histories and worldviews that are unique. Because these are such an integral part of who they are, it may be difficult for parents and students to articulate exactly what their histories and worldviews are, and exactly how these factors affect what they think and do. Some students in urban centres may have limited contact and understanding of their Aboriginal culture (Alberta Education Department, 2005, *Our Words, Our Ways*. p. 1).

While Aboriginal students benefit from best teaching practices, teachers support their students’ learning needs most effectively when they incorporate into their teaching practice an understanding of three key areas: Aboriginal histories, Aboriginal worldviews and Aboriginal perspectives.

According to the research, understanding the history and cultures of the Aboriginal peoples in the local community creates a better understanding of Aboriginal students. Becoming more familiar with Aboriginal worldviews helps teachers build cultural continuity into both the content and instructional approaches of all subject areas. Becoming more aware of how cultural beliefs and practices affected teaching practices would help individual teachers make better and more culturally responsive choices throughout the teaching day (Alberta Education Department, *Our Words, Our Ways*. p. 2).
Reviewing this in the context of the Case Study school community, there seemed to be a dilemma in regard to what was meant by an Aboriginal perspective and how one went about incorporating an Aboriginal perspective in classroom practice. There was also an assumption by the Case Study school that teachers had a solid grounding in Aboriginal history, both local and national. On the whole, the teachers researched material for topics that were encompassed by special events, for example National Aboriginal and Islander Observation Committee (NAIDOC) week or Reconciliation events but were happy to let their knowledge end there. I developed a sense that many of the teachers felt that, their own cultural heritage was the norm and that this was reflected in the classroom environment. From observations within the classroom settings, only about twenty percent of the teachers regularly tried to include multicultural perspectives.

This, in itself, relates to Mathiesons’ research (cited in Lea and Helfand 2004) which states that as whites we need to step back from our own culture to see, hear and learn more about the different voices and perspective in our classrooms. Based on staff meetings and discussions with the teachers, it seemed that for many of this Case Study group, the journey towards stepping back was only just beginning.

7.4 Knowledge and Understanding of Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English

Looking further into the issue of teacher knowledge, I investigated whether teachers acknowledged students who used Aboriginal English (AE) in their oral language and written work. Looking firstly at the use of AE, the AE patterns of students in the school tended more towards soft AE where the language patterns and vocabulary were not distinctly different but nonetheless were apparent especially in junior classes. I noted that three teachers in the junior block corrected the news telling and written news from their students, even to the extent to where, over a period of time, students became reluctant to join in. In these classrooms, there seemed to be no acknowledgement of the difference in home and school English so the students began to join in only when prompted. It should be noted here that these same teachers did not acknowledge students using English as a Second Language (ESL) patterns from non-Indigenous backgrounds either. They adhered to the same structure for all, so those students who had a better grasp of SAE showed more progress in the Peel Oral
Language Programme (POLP) testing, which was conducted in February each year and re-tested in November.

In contrast, the other two junior class teachers appeared to value all the cultures in their classrooms and the students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent appeared to be joining class discussions and written work with some enthusiasm. They utilised stories and concepts across cultures (for example, traditional stories, different styles of story telling, and inclusion of different languages on the wall) to show that all language was valued. The students in these two classes showed more gains in the November POLP re-testing, with all students showing an improvement.

All the classrooms had a huge emphasis on literacy with lots of cooperative activities and EDWA First Step strategies. The observations in the junior classes correlated with upper school classes. From observation, approximately forty percent of the classroom teachers acknowledged students’ cultural backgrounds and this in turn influenced how they approached the teaching of their literacy strategies. Students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who moved through classes of teachers acknowledging these differences tended to achieve better results in SAE requirements (This observation was backed up by data from the school’s West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) results 2003 – 2006). These teachers also appeared to have a better relationship with the parents of students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. This was also evidenced by the number of Aboriginal parents who volunteered time in these rooms as opposed to the other classrooms. Ninety percent of the classrooms with teachers who acknowledged cultural backgrounds had Aboriginal parent volunteers on a consistent basis, whereas the other classrooms only had volunteers for events such as NAIDOC week or for special events.

Many of the teachers who did not acknowledge cultural differences based their teaching on the whole language component of EDWA First Steps and glossed over teaching of the concepts such as tenses, personal pronouns and story structures, leaving students with non SAE language backgrounds struggling to come to terms with these concepts. This issue was observed to impact on students of Vietnamese,
Thai or Polynesian background as well as students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. This may be an issue where teacher knowledge in general is the main culprit (just as First Steps has been misinterpreted in these areas) rather than a lack of understanding of culturally based language issues.

Regardless, in both EDWA First Steps and the EDWA Getting It Right Literacy Strategy, there could be a greater emphasis on the differences between AE and SAE and how teachers can cater for these differences in their general classroom practice. (It appears that others have had this concern, as, since the Case Study ended, the Getting It Right Literacy Strategy has incorporated professional learning on the DET ESL/ESD Progress Map (2007) in its overall strategy. This progress map is a tool for monitoring, assessing and evaluating ESL/ESD students’ acquisition of SAE. Teachers in primary and secondary schools were now able to report ESL/ESD student achievement using this format. This was a step in a more inclusive approach, however, it stopped short of structuring the links for teachers to classroom practice, instead relying on teachers to locate reference materials and make the links themselves.

In refocusing on the community, one of the teachers interviewed commented that:

> in literacy, there is a lot written about Aboriginal literacy, learning styles and those sorts of things. I think you have to be careful that you don’t generalise and go ‘Oh Aboriginal! So they’ll all use Aboriginal English’. Some teachers may not even acknowledge AE so you need to say, some Aboriginal kids speak AE, it’s a genuine language and you have to acknowledge it and accept it. A lot of teachers who have been here a long time see AE as wrong; they see it as a deficit, like poor kid can’t even speak English. They don’t see it as a language on its own. You need to teach SAE, as well as value what the students write in their own language. This means you can say, ‘In School English this is how we would write what you have said, can you see the differences?’ You need to acknowledge and accept AE (Teacher T).

On the basis of this statement as well as classroom observations, it is safe to say that there was work to be done in the area of teacher knowledge and understanding of AE.
at this school. Based on information gained through the questionnaire and discussions
the teachers felt they needed more professional learning on:

- what AE was;
- the major differences between AE and SAE; and
- how to respectfully incorporate students who speak AE into literacy programs.

This will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

7.5 Classroom environment

The classroom was important, especially when Aboriginal students formed a minority
in the classroom. The Alberta Education Department’s *Our Words, Our Ways* (2005)
resource material states that:

> The classroom is more than simply a place. It is an environment that
teachers and students create. When the atmosphere is warm, inclusive
and inviting, students are more likely to feel safe and comfortable.
When they enter the classroom and sense a foundation of recognition
and respect—cultural continuity—Aboriginal students feel better able
to participate in classroom learning activities, take more ownership for
their own learning, and face and overcome challenges that may lie
ahead (p. 41).

One of the teachers in the case study school shared the way she would set up a
classroom:

> To set up my room, I would use a group orientation although not all the
time, and not necessarily so the Aboriginal kids are altogether but so they
can see each other and have the freedom to go over and talk to each other
or ask each other advice.
I’d go away from the straight lines and the teacher knows it all
I’d use collaborative strategies to allow for the group or peer work.
*(Teacher I)*

The above comment took into account the physical nature of a classroom setting.
During the Case Study, I also observed changes in the classroom environment, taking
notice of what appeared on the walls, at workstations and in activities. This gave me a
feel for the school atmosphere/community and it gave me a visual reference of how or if teachers were acknowledging the cultures within their rooms. As previously noted, in two of the junior classes there were charts and wall stories showing the use of the Noongar language. Over the time period of the Case Study, the Aboriginal flag was shown in many rooms during special events weeks. Aboriginal artwork was hung in the school foyer, the school assembly hall and in some classrooms. Apart from focus weeks or focus topics, including an Aboriginal perspective seemed to only appear in literacy when Dreamtime stories were being discussed. However, in maths, a maths kit had been constructed from Aboriginal artefacts and cultural objects that assisted with measurement and counting activities thus acknowledging the Aboriginal culture in everyday activities. There seemed to be an awareness developing, but from observations it seemed to me that the school’s learning journey was only in its early stages.

Another issue that needed to be accounted for in terms of literacy in SAE was the health issue of Otis Media (conductive hearing loss). As a teacher, you could modify the physical environment within and outside the classroom to maximise listening and learning but before this could happen, teachers needed to understand the issues relating to conductive hearing loss. In this school community, although students were tested for Otis Media as they entered the school, the follow-up information did not appear to be used at the classroom level. This left some students experiencing major problems with spelling and during general writing activities. It also left parents of these students thinking teachers were poorly informed and that teachers were not catering for the needs of their children.

In this instance, the teachers had had professional learning workshops in this area and the program was in the school library. It appeared that teachers had not linked the materials in this package to their First Steps, Getting it Right spelling and writing strategies, let alone speaking and listening issues. Also teachers had not considered the physical aspects of placement of these students in the classroom. This was an area that needed revisiting in this school. Alongside this issue was the need to develop teacher knowledge in reading and interpreting the results of the School Nurse’s testing both in hearing and eyesight to reduce areas that could affect students’ learning.
7.6 Teacher Knowledge

O’Rourke, Craven, Seeshing Yeung, Munns (nd) stated that:

the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs has recognised the need for culturally inclusive pedagogy in their strategic plan for Aboriginal Education 2005-2008. However little is known about which inclusive practices are most effective in relation to Aboriginal students (p. 2).

This was an interesting notion considering the amount of funding and research that had been conducted over the previous decades. O’Rourke et al (nd) goes on to say: ‘Culturally inclusive pedagogy is widely assumed to improve Aboriginal students’ educational achievement and success but its actual impact remains untested’ (p. 2). Maybe it was not so much the assumption that these pedagogies were or were not achieving success but rather the assumption that teachers knew and used these pedagogies that was the issue.

With this in mind I want to refocus on the strategies and programs outlined in Chapter Three (the Department of Education Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document and the EDWA Getting it Right Literacy (GiRL) strategy) to see what the teachers’ knowledge base was for this school community. Nineteen out of twenty-five teachers filled in and returned the questionnaire. These results have been collated in Table 7a Program/Strategy Overview from the Questionnaire (p. 120). In the first section, the teachers were asked the question ‘Have you participated in professional learning (development) to inform you about the following strategies/programs?’ Table 7a Program/Strategy Overview from the Questionnaire (p. 120) showed that the teacher knowledge in this area was somewhat patchy. Even though the school stated in their Aboriginal Policy that teachers have had professional learning in Do You Hear What I Hear? (Conductive hearing loss), Deadly Ways and the Dare to Lead programs, the teachers had not acknowledged these as part of their current knowledge base.

It should also be noted that even though the GiRL strategies were highly acknowledged by the teachers (with sixteen out of nineteen teachers acknowledging professional learning) other than First Steps, only a limited number of teachers acknowledged Two Way English, Deadly Ways to Learn and Ways of Being, Time for
Talk and Making the Jump. Did this mean that the teachers thought First Steps and the GiRL strategies were one and the same?

I was interested in this observation and asked the previous GiRL specialist if she had any insights into this. To my concern, the response was ‘I did not go too deeply into these areas as the teachers were not interested’. In extending the discussion, I tried to find out whether the specialist had covered the strategies in her professional learning. She acknowledged that there was, in her opinion, a good coverage of programs/strategies in the GiRL professional learning package to assist students of Indigenous descent with their literacy skills. She went on to say that it was easier just to get teachers to implement First Step strategies because they knew them and at least (in her opinion) they were getting a positive result.

I am not saying that First Steps strategies are not useful in assisting Indigenous students, but feel that perhaps it was time for teachers to extend their strategies and pedagogies, especially as many resources already exist.

As the GiRL strategies incorporated many of the programs listed, it was a shame that this knowledge was not passed on initially, but this could be partially due to the fact that the school did not develop a school policy for Indigenous Education until 2003, and this policy was still in its infancy at the beginning of this Case Study. Added to this was the withdrawal of the GiRL specialist from 2002 to 2006 due to State funding issues. Schools were only allocated either a GiRL or GiRN specialist at this time. (It should be noted that since 2007, schools could have both a GiRL and GiRN specialist and if the school had a significant cohort of Indigenous students, they would be allocated more specialist time).

Taking into account the GiRL specialist’s comments and her decision to focus on the First Steps strategies solely in preference to the Indigenous based programs/strategies integrated in the overall GiRL project; one could shed light on the results (Table 7b) of Question One and Four of the questionnaire (restated in the text box following Table).
<table>
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<th>Program / Strategy</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Current school</th>
<th>Other Metro</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Last 0-2yrs</th>
<th>3-5yrs</th>
<th>5+ yrs</th>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>I Hear?</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 7b Tally for Questions 1-4 General Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As a <em>Getting it Right Literacy</em> participant school please comment on the following: -</th>
<th>Total number of teachers that Strongly Agreed</th>
<th>Strongly Disagreed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q1 The overall <em>GiRL</em> strategy is an effective tool to help students of Indigenous descent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 There were specific strategies to help me cater for the needs of my Indigenous students (if I needed them).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 The program catered for all students, as Indigenous students need the same strategies as everyone else.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 The program failed to give me any new strategies to help me cater for students of Indigenous descent with learning issues</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In *Table 7b* sixteen teachers agreed/strongly agreed that the *GiRL* strategy was an effective tool to help students of Indigenous descent. However, fourteen agreed/strongly agreed that *GiRL* failed to give any new strategies in the area of Indigenous literacy learning issues. If, inadvertently, the teachers had not been given the opportunity to learn about the strategies included in programs such as the Department of Education Western Australia, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia *Deadly Ideas/Ways* program, one could not assess the overall value of the *GiRL* program.

Questions that could be asked here included what quality control was in place for the *GiRL* specialist teachers? And/or was there back up for *GiRL* specialist teachers who had difficulties initiating change? Surely, in a school with a population of more than ten percent of students of Indigenous descent, supervisors should be accountable for at least reviewing what professional learning *looks like* at the school level? After all, this was a prime opportunity for a positive professional learning experience (which
was well funded) to have a greater impact at the classroom level. The other avenue of reviewing this was when the teachers had performance management. During my interview with an administrator, he stated that as administrator:

*I could refer to it in performance management meetings and ask the questions:

- Are you aware there is an Aboriginal Plan for our state?
- Are you aware of what this school has in place?
- Are you aware of the programs in this school? (GiRL, First Steps etc.)

*If they are,

- How have you implemented them in the classroom?
- Are there any areas you need help with or would like professional learning in?

*(Teacher H)*

The results obtained from question one and four back up the information on *Table 7a Program/Strategy Overview from the Questionnaire* (p. 117), which showed First Steps/GiRL as the most acknowledged professional learning packages but with little or no knowledge shown of the programs/strategies included in the broader sense of the GiRL strategy.

This was also supported by the classroom observations where I noted that teachers predominantly used a co-operative learning approach with First Steps and TRIBES strategies intertwined. This meant teachers were implementing co-operative learning situations in order to cater for the students’ differing levels. This was a positive for the school, as the research suggested (e.g. *Our Words, Our Ways* and *GiRL strategies*) that co-operative learning, where students worked in small groups to complete tasks or projects, was an effective strategy to use with Aboriginal students because it reflects the sense of co-operation and community that is a vital aspect of Aboriginal cultures.

Teachers structured co-operative learning tasks so that each group member contributed to the completion of the task. Students’ success was based on the
performance of the group rather than on the performance of each student. The research suggests that co-operative learning can build on its strong reflection of Aboriginal cultural values. However, in the case of this school community, co-operative learning and its links to a reflection of Aboriginal cultural values were observed only on minimal occasions. The co-operative learning strategy had become embedded through First Steps, the TRIBES program and the Getting it Right Literacy Strategy as a technique and its links with Aboriginal culture had yet to be forged.

According to MCEETYA’s (2005-2008) Australian Directions in Indigenous Education:

8 Ministers agree that quality teaching in primary and secondary schools is essential to improving outcomes for Indigenous students while fostering in them a strong sense of identity as successful learners and as Indigenous Australians.

9 To give effect to recommendation 8, ministers commit to:
9.1 provide by 2010 pre-service and in-service professional learning accredited by teaching accreditation authorities to:
   b enable teachers to explicitly teach literacy to Indigenous students, including those for whom standard Australian English is a second language or dialect; and
   c enable teachers to adopt pedagogical approaches that result in high levels of academic expectation and achievement by Indigenous students across all learning areas (p. 8)

Keeping these recommendations in mind, did the teachers in this Case Study believe that they had sufficient Professional Learning (Development) to help them cater for the Indigenous students in their classes at the time of the study? Twelve teachers said they had not; one was not sure, and five thought they had had sufficient professional learning. This was backed up by the observations developed with in the community. Even though teachers believed they had a depth of knowledge in the area of literacy practice, they were unsure if their knowledge base was inclusive of the strategies research deemed as best practice to improve outcomes for Indigenous students. The teachers were confident to talk about what they felt was working in their classrooms,
but until recently, they had not consciously linked their strategies to supporting a more culturally inclusive environment.

Among the teachers who responded to the questionnaire, five teachers felt they did not need further professional learning (development). Their reasons included:

- Our Indigenous students achieve as well as the rest of the children (I have spent two years teaching in an Aboriginal school in Menzies);
- The professional development that we have had over the years at …… has been very valuable (*Deadly Ways, Conductive Hearing Loss*);
- We have lots of resources; and
- We have staff members who are able to help.

These comments could be backed up by the fact that over the course of the Case Study there were more resources being used in the classrooms. The school librarian had indicated more teachers were using or asking about the resources. The AIEO and BOIS co-ordinator also commented that there had been a positive shift, as more teachers were asking about ways to make their classrooms more inclusive. However they (AIEO and BOIS co-ordinator) also commented that: ‘teachers were still confusing the difference between Aboriginal topics/units and an Aboriginal perspective’.

Even with the five teachers who considered they had had enough professional learning, the aspect of using an *Aboriginal perspective* in classroom based activities or discussions was less evident. As previously stated, from my observations, it appeared that teachers were integrating more *Aboriginal topics*, especially around events like NAIDOC week or Reconciliation, but everyday teaching showed mainly a white middle class perspective. As one of the teachers interviewed commented:

> You can put an Aboriginal perspective on anything you read. It is an important aspect. At first that sounds really hard but it is not, once you understand a little bit of the world view, their Dreaming stories, culture and histories you can add this perspective even to say an Enid Blyton story. You can add or discuss an Aboriginal perspective – you don’t have to say the words ‘this is an Aboriginal perspective’ but you need to introduce different world views, which goes if you’ve got Indonesian children or whatever but you haven’t just got middle white
Australia views – you’ve got to include classroom world views.

(Teacher T)

(Interestingly this teacher was not one of the five who stated they did not need further professional learning.)

The understanding of what constitutes an Aboriginal perspective needed further discussion in this school community. Developing this understanding could help further improve classroom environments, parent/home links and student-to-student cultural perspectives.

Returning to the questionnaire, the other fourteen teachers in the Case Study group thought they needed further professional learning because:

- They were always happy to learn more;
- Indigenous students have distinctly different ways of learning – we are never given enough help, to help them learn the same way;
- We know some strategies but we could always use more;
- There was a need for more resources in the library;
- Teachers require a deeper understanding of Aboriginal literacy and numeracy learning styles;
- We need to know how Indigenous students learn best;
- We need to know how to use the ESL Bandscaler to identify needs; and
- We need to gain familiarity with current resources, and we need support in their application.

One teacher (Teacher H) stated that although he felt that he had more knowledge than most because of his personal interest in this area of teaching he would greatly benefit from further professional development on Aboriginal learning, culture and current issues. He believed that this would help build a better classroom culture plus help improve student outcomes.

7.7 Teachers’ requests for professional learning

From the preceding comments, it was possible to infer that although the depth of teachers’ knowledge may not include all the strategies/programs in current policies, there seemed to be a willingness from the majority of the staff to embrace professional learning in the area of literacy for students of Indigenous descent.
The teachers themselves suggested that they needed more professional learning in:

- *Two Way English;*
- *Deadly Ways;*
- *Do You Hear What I Hear?;*
- Speech pathology strategies to assist because parents often do not take children to see specialists;
- Oral language;
- Aboriginal English (AE);
- Useful strategies for visual learners and tactile learners;
- Motivation/interesting materials/content;
- Specific PD in specialist resources (eg, *Two Way English/Deadly Ways*) that can be applied once specific learning needs of Indigenous students are identified using existing tools (i.e. Outcomes and Standards Framework (OSF), ESL Bandscapes, Lit Net, First Steps continua);
- Aboriginal Learning Styles – exploring more inclusive learning styles, developing a more effective curricula for students to explore their culture; and
- Providing an Aboriginal Perspective across all learning areas.

Expanding these, the teachers’ made further suggestions as to what they felt would help them include students of Indigenous backgrounds at the classroom level. These suggestions varied among:

- A need for more PD on *how Indigenous students learn* so Aboriginal learning styles could be included more easily into teaching strategies for all students, as each student has his/her own learning style;
- A need for background/cultural knowledge – we need to show we value it (in order to do this we need to understand it);
- A need for more understanding of families and their issues so communication with parents could be more positive;
- A need to have more knowledge of infantile language development from 0 – 5 (plus positive community education programmes for 0 – 4 to encourage Pre-school skills, health, etc);
- That most teachers were aware of *Reconciliation, Stolen Generation* traditional Aboriginal culture as teaching units but are less aware of
Aboriginal learning styles or the needs/benefits for structuring their teaching to include opportunities for learning in this manner (for the benefits of all students);

- A need for new resources to be accompanied by adequate professional learning, so teachers have sufficient support in the programs’ use or application;
- Strategies to help students value school and understand the importance of coming to school;
- A need for Oral Language strategies; although these kids do not speak Noongar or Kriol at home, they were not speaking SAE;
- A need for developing better links between curriculum/programs/strategies and an Aboriginal perspective; and
- That professional learning in this area was made more accessible (lots for AIEO’s which is great but not for classroom teachers).

All interviewees felt that the school needed to focus on developing teacher knowledge and understanding, so as a community they could discuss, issues such as:

- Attendance;
- Linking Aboriginal culture to curriculum requirements;
- Student learning strategies including homework classes/reading at home;
- Respecting the Aboriginal culture through programs such as NAIDOC week;
- Health (conductive hearing loss, breakfast club);
- Improving parental support/home liaison; and
- Understanding family and home issues.

It was interesting to note that the teachers did not highlight a school focus on incorporating an Aboriginal perspective even though this was highlighted by one staff member and was part of the school policy. As noted earlier in this chapter, about forty percent of the classrooms showed they acknowledged the multicultural nature of their students. There was an awareness that was beginning to develop in this community with regard to the need for an Aboriginal perspective to be included within classroom topics/programs/discussions. The system could also have helped here by providing
better links/examples between curriculum/programs/strategies and how Aboriginal perspectives could be incorporated into everyday learning situations.

It should be noted that the WA Department of Education and Training (DET) also saw this as an issue, as since 2007, they have tried to address this through developing a website to address Aboriginal Perspectives. The Aboriginal Perspective Across the Curriculum (APAC) initiative is a project that aims to broaden and deepen students’ and teachers’ understandings of Aboriginal cultures and ways of being. Teaching APAC would assist all students to be able to look at the world from an Aboriginal viewpoint and understand the different Aboriginal points of view on a range of issues such as reconciliation, social justice and equality (APAC site http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/apac/index.html paragraph 1). It would be interesting to know how many schools use this site. I only found it because I was researching this area. It did not come to my attention through working in a classroom.

7.8 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter, one gets a sense that while the teachers had a positive attitude towards improving literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent they felt they needed far more cohesive professional learning packages that were linked to their everyday teaching practices. The teachers had voiced a need for:

- a better understanding of the Aboriginal culture itself, especially the aspects that influence school situations;
- more professional learning in regard to the programs that are already in the school; and
- time, as for some they have just started this learning journey.

In the next chapter, I have used the teacher questionnaires and interviews to highlight more teacher insights to expand on this chapter. I have also delved into the influences of the administration in the community. Throughout Chapter Eight the focus is more on community insights that align with Stage Three (discovering dialogical data generation) and Four (describing system relations) of Carspecken’s (1996) five steps to Critical Research.
Chapter Eight
See Me, Hear Me: School and Classroom Impact

Whilst the school environment is an important overarching context in which learning takes place, it is the classroom that impacts most on student learning:

The teacher’s relationship with the student is at the heart of Aboriginal approaches to education. Traditionally, teachers knew each student as an individual, with unique gifts and needs. In this environment, they tailored the learning process to the student’s needs as a matter of course. Tailoring the learning process for Aboriginal students helps to engage their interest and allows them to succeed (Alberta Education Department, 2005, Chapter 5, p. 1).

As previously discussed, the day-to-day classroom experiences and student-teacher relationships had a critical influence not only on skill development but on children’s developing attitudes about themselves as learners, which then stays with them throughout their lives (Cahill 1999, Mellor and Corrigan 2004, The Alberta Education Department 2005). Therefore, I was keen to gain a sense of what teachers believed about current professional learning programs and how these translated into helping them to integrate students of Indigenous descent into their general classroom practice.

In this chapter, I have put forward passages of conversation that help piece together the participants’ viewpoints and experiences, on whether they (the teachers) felt they had had enough information/professional learning to adequately assist Indigenous students to improve their literacy outcomes in their metropolitan classrooms. I have elicited how the teachers’ perceived professional learning had impacted on their classroom practice and planning. By utilising questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation, I developed Stage Three (discovering dialogical data generation) of Carspecken’s (1996) concepts, which gave the participants a voice in the process and gave them a chance to challenge material outlined by me (the researcher). This process was used to explore their world using their own vocabulary, metaphors and ideas.

Taking strands from the questionnaire. I developed a more focused look at specific teachers’ beliefs: namely, the five teachers who agreed to be interviewed. Noting in
the research, that ‘some Aboriginal students have had limited exposure [different expectations] to the ways of operating in school contexts’ (Board of Studies NSW, 2000, p. 6), I wanted to gain an insight into how these teachers, who represented a cross section of the teachers who filled out the original questionnaire, suggested dealing with this, with regard to improving literacy outcomes. The five teachers were asked to imagine that they were a mentor for a teacher newly arrived in Western Australia, with three to four Indigenous students of varying abilities in their metropolitan class of thirty-two students.

8.1 Classroom Inclusivity

The teachers were asked what their advice would be:

1. To assist the new teacher in making their classroom inclusive for his/her students (Were there any key issues/ideas that may help him/her achieve this?):

   You need to look at where your students are at, so you can relate strategies to the outcomes your programs are based on, to improve individual student achievement.

   I am assuming the class is older as there are 32 students so I suggest she looks at where the top and bottom of the class’s abilities are. I’d use the English outcomes- probably level 2 or 3 and First Steps. If she/he gets stuck with information on individual students ask the AEIO, he should be able to help. (Teacher T)

Teacher T seems to focus on the importance of individual student achievement, using the Curriculum Frameworks English Outcomes and First Steps. While Teacher I’s focus (below) seems to be on the classroom environment:

First I’d talk to her about the set up of his/her room. I would use a group orientation although not all the time, and not necessarily so the Aboriginal kids are all together but so they can see each other and have the freedom to go over and talk to each other or ask each other advice.
Teacher I went on to say:

*If he/she had any students with health issues such as conductive hearing loss I suggest that they, as a teacher, became conscious of where they stood in the classroom and the volume of their voice so their students had the best opportunity to participate in class activities.*

(Teacher I)

Teacher H put ideas forward from a system and school perspective offering information on several key issues:

*You need to talk to him/her one-to-one, explaining how the system works and if they had taught in other states you would assume that they would have come across Indigenous students. The key issues would be:*

*They’d have to be aware of their backgrounds;*
*They have different learning styles- they don’t learn in perhaps the same way as we do;*
*The language they use at home might be a slightly different version to school;*
*To expect them to be behaviourally different;*
*To have structured activities, more hands on, with a variety of mediums (Teacher H).*

Taking into account the previous teachers’ (Teachers T, I, and H) responses, I interviewed another teacher (Teacher W), who was new to the Australian schooling system (let alone West Australian system), to see if she had experienced the advice mentioned above. Even though the teachers T, H and I had made some valid suggestions as to how to initiate help for a new teacher, the new teacher stated that she had had:

*No help from the school, but I had three days overall PD [at system level] when I started teaching in Australia and that was general and touched on racism and culture. (Teacher W)*

The fifth teacher (Teacher D) interviewed was one of the school’s new graduates and she stated:
I had very little to nil advice from university regarding literacy, nothing. University was mainly about racism and feelings of ‘othering’ from white people to Indigenous people. I’ve had little to none.

This graduate’s comment was in line with the comments discussed in the Australian Education (2005) report. The report reflected on:

the failure to provide Indigenous Studies as part of teacher education courses is a particular indictment on the Federal Department of Education and the respective Ministers who have publicly championed their support for improved outcomes for Indigenous students when the link between training and outcomes has been established by Departmental research (p. 1).

These new graduates are one avenue in which a school can improve their knowledge base, however a lot of these new graduates are still finding their feet in their new profession. So, other than using this information to inform programming, assist in classroom set-ups, help build student relationships and trigger avenues to seek more learning opportunities, many would be reticent in outwardly showing this knowledge. It seemed that yet another possible avenue of professional learning that could be included in a standard teaching degree in some cases was being squandered.

Supporting this concept was the investigation by McLaughlin and Whatman (2007) from the Oodgeroo Unit, Queensland University of Technology, which investigated the concept of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into a University’s curriculum for teaching degrees. They found the process to be at best ad hoc and in their view Indigenous perspectives were largely absent from the faculties’ core business of teaching. They conceded that change would take time and that there was a need for professional learning/development in this area among University Staff.

Following this line of thought, one could consider the concept of having university/training units that have multiple perspectives (an English unit that gives strategies for teaching English but highlights ESD and ESL issues as a core part of the unit) instead of separate units. This would allow new graduates to have a more inclusive approach to general classroom practice. Another consideration here is the
provision of multiliteracies courses that show teaching graduates a variety of ways to incorporate multiple perspectives to enhance the depth of their everyday literacy programs, making them more inclusive of the students in their classrooms.

In suggesting the above, one still has to bear in mind that a superficial kind of multiculturalism which deliver only a surface level variety of life worlds with a predominance of life worlds in accordance with mainstream power according to Cope and Kalantzis (2005). They suggest that the starting point is situated in the learners themselves and as such the role of teachers and schools is to build on their: ‘multiple languages and dialects, multiple community histories and life experiences, multiple intelligences, in sum multiple ways of being human’ (p. 148). For teachers and teacher graduates to do this, they need to be taken outside their own worldview comfort zones and begin to acknowledge that others construct their knowledge and learning from differing worldviews.

8.2 School Resources
As stated in the previous chapter, the school community had started to make more use of its resources, both physical and human. So let us look at what the teachers felt with regard to the availability and usefulness of the resources.

Teacher T acknowledged that the school was well resourced with current programs and materials:

*We have heaps and heaps, you only have to go up to the resource room. There are programs like Deadly Ways. Even the Otitis Media resources have heaps of strategies that you can use in the classroom but I suppose you would have to show the new teacher how to use them as well.*

*We have got normal school type resources (such as the Noongar kit and maths kit) and some of the Dreamtime videos. These would be a learning experience for a new teacher anyway. (Teacher T)*
Teacher H focused on the aspect of people as resources. He stated:

*The best resource the school might have is an AIEO, if they have access to one. The new teacher could spend time with them and their mentor and the mentor could be the third link in the chain to help implement the programs/strategies in the classroom. The other person is the school librarian; he/she will have an extensive knowledge of the resources in the school. There are quite a few in this school. The setting up of community parent programs, where by parents are invited into the school and become comfortable visiting. This builds bridges as in their pasts they might not have had positive links with schools. Community elders are another useful resource, not that we have many in this region, or District office personnel.*

Even with these avenues of support highlighted by Teachers T and H, there were still issues for the new teacher (Teacher W), as, when asked if she had been approached by any of her peers to help her out with resourcing ideas, she replied that she had had:

*None. I had to find my own way around the school, and find my own resources.* (Teacher W)

In their defence, if one reflects on the questionnaire feedback, the teachers themselves felt they needed:

*Specific PD in specialist resources (Two Way English/Deadly Ways) that can be applied once specific learning needs of Indigenous students are identified using existing tools (i.e. Outcome and Standards Framework (OSF), ESL Bandscales, Lit Net, First Steps continua) (questionnaire feedback).*

And that

*Adequate Professional Learning does not accompany new resources; meaning teachers are either unaware of the resources and/or lack sufficient support in its use or application.* (Teacher T)

Many useful resources have been identified in the DET ESL/ESD Framework (2007) (published since this Case Study finished) but sadly, at this stage, these have not been
accompanied by professional learning into their actual use. Most of the resources were listed in the Resources Section and once again, teachers have had to make the connections themselves. However, one thing the DET ESL/ESD Framework (2007) did do, was give teachers a better understanding of issues pertaining to culture and ESL/ESD.

At the school level, there could have been more done to embrace new staff and help them to understand issues relating to the students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent; however, this could only be done in accordance with current teacher knowledge. The school began refocussing its policy and professional learning opportunities for teachers as a result of some of the findings gained through the questionnaire. This was when the school began to develop the Aboriginal Education team as part of the school leadership structure (see Table 9a School leadership Structure p. 158)

As noted in the last chapter professional learning providers system or otherwise need to have some accountability for ensuring strategies are put forward in a manner that can be utilised in classroom planning or programs. In the case of the EDWA Getting it Right Literacy (GiRL) strategy, this researcher strongly suggests that specialist supervisors have system information on metropolitan schools with more than ten percent of their cohort made up of students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Armed with this information, they (the specialist supervisors) need to be accountable for asking the in-school GIRL specialist to provide documentation about how they are up-skilling their teacher colleagues. If issues became apparent, then the supervisor needs to assist the specialist. At the time of this study there seemed to be significant funding in some areas, but the funding appeared to be poorly utilised showing a broad spectrum of results at the classroom interface, at least in the Case Study school.

As previously noted in Chapter Seven, the Department of Education, through the GiRL strategy (since 2007), had begun to take into account the number of students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent when it provided funding (for specialists) for schools. I saw this as an opportunity to increase accountability for what is happening in schools. If this funding was attached to school audits, whereby
schools had to show how they were improving literacy outcomes for students of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and incorporating Aboriginal
perspectives into their school environment, then a learning journey could be embarked
upon.

Even though I have made comment on areas I think could be improved on, I am not
questioning the effects of First Steps or the concept of the GiRL strategy. They are
sound resources for the teaching of Standard Australian English and a step forward
for providing opportunities for the classroom teacher. The issue of concern was the
lack of teacher understanding of how Aboriginal stories develop, the different ways
Aboriginal students link to texts and ‘the hidden curriculum that reflect[ed] the many
un-Aboriginal processes and procedures used in school which present[ed] a threat to
growing up Aboriginal’ (Harris, 1990, p. 5) in a predominantly SAE environment.
The GiRL project has the ability to address some of these issues, for example, by
putting an auditing process in place to check the follow through of information and
strategies from the workshops to the classroom (Including the ESL/ESD Framework,
2007 in the GiRL strategy from 2007 has, in this researcher’s opinion, begun the
process of a more inclusive approach to literacy for students of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander descent and incorporating Aboriginal perspectives, but it needs to
continue to grow, not just stop here).

As with many initiatives from the Education Department, there seems to be a time lag
before links are made to the units being studied by Teacher graduates in university. If
the current resources, deemed to be important by research and government funding in
the area of Indigenous education and literacy strategies (GiRL for example), were
integrated into current university units along-side the theoretical base, at least a
platform could be built to enhance future knowledge in the system. Craven, Halse,
Marsh, Mooney and Wilson-Miller (2005) found that:

   Ideally, teacher education courses would benefit from a multifaceted
   approach to Aboriginal Studies in the teacher education curriculum,
   whereby mandatory subjects, elective subjects and perspectives across
   the curriculum are integrated into teacher education curriculum (p. 9).
And that where there had been:

…the introduction of Indigenous Studies as a core unit in undergraduate teacher education programmes [this] has resulted in a qualitatively better preparation of our students for teaching, not just in teaching Indigenous students and about Indigenous issues although this is obviously the case but in considering aspects of culture and race and how these impinge on their curriculum development and pedagogical practices in schools (p. 7).

Considering the above findings surely there is a need to establish a more uniform approach where-by links can be made between what is deemed best practice by the Department of Education and current practice within the context of university teaching degrees so pre-service teachers can be better prepared?

8.3 Professional Learning

Let us reflect on the overall plan for government schools in relation to professional learning, impact of teacher knowledge and judgement, keeping in mind students of Indigenous descent.

The DET *Plan for Government Schools WA (2004 –2007)* states under point 4 that by employing the most powerful teaching strategies:

Students will participate in inclusive educational programs that maximise their engagement, recognise their differences and connect to the real world. Teachers will renew and build on their skills continually and be supported in developing their professional expertise. Targeted professional development will concentrate on the skills teachers need to respond in schools to emerging economic, social and technological conditions. High-quality professional development in pedagogies, curriculum and assessment will support teachers. Teachers will optimise students’ learning using information about their performance to drive curriculum planning and pedagogy and to make changes where they are shown to be necessary (p. 4).
In the Case Study teachers group, the teachers expressed concern that professional learning with regard to an inclusive approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially in the area of literacy, was sadly lacking.

Their comments were:

*I have a thing with this; I don’t think we do enough. I think in the six years I have been here I have done, My Story with consultant, the AIEO’s Otitis Media, these are whole school ones. I have done ones privately but not through school.*

Even with all curriculum information, when [the lady] came to explain, Aboriginal perspectives, Aboriginal culture, didn’t come into any of the PD, it annoyed me.

Even now, while I’m writing a scope and sequence for the school, when you go back to the curriculum, you have to look really hard to find the paragraph that refers to Aboriginal educational needs.

(Teacher T)

and:

*There isn’t enough. You showed us Deadly Ways but we need a workshop where we are sitting down and using it. We are opening it up and just looking at it. For any resource this is not enough for most teachers, as they have to interpret what the author is trying to tell them. We have had all our First Steps professional development but you will still find teachers who do not open the book; they just listen and use what has gone in and this happens even less with the Aboriginal information.*

*Teachers are coming around especially now we have (staff) in positions. Teachers are coming and asking for what they can use.*

(Teacher I)

or:

*I would say ‘no’, but again if you had a regular injection of enthusiasm in literacy, Indigenous culture and how Aboriginal history is based on ownership, by the Aboriginals of land it would help. If people get that understanding it goes a long way to getting people to understand Aboriginal children’s plight in school.* (Teacher T)
As a graduate, Teacher D commented:

No. I haven’t been approached, re literacy, but I recently received a letter form from the Better Outcomes for Indigenous Students (BOIS) co-ordinator and she said that she will be doing PD in week 5, so I am definitely going to put my name down for that

and:

I would like to see more Professional Learning. What I thought we’d have at uni, is a unit on how to teach literacy for Indigenous students, bearing in mind that they learn differently, bearing in mind this is mostly from hear say. If this is so I want to know so I am able to help them with their learning. (Teacher D)

The teachers seemed to voice a consistent message; they felt the professional learning they had received in the area of literacy had not contained sufficient information to enable them to create informed learning options to help them to improve literacy outcomes for students of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. With the DET Plan for Government Schools WA (2004 –2007) targeting: ‘…professional development [that] concentrates on the skills teachers need to respond in schools to emerging economic, social and technological conditions’ (p. 4), surely at a minimum, metropolitan schools with student populations of more than ten percent should be accessing professional learning to up-skill their teachers to assist students of Indigenous descent. This researcher realises that the school and districts need to take on some responsibility for accessing said professional learning and that this process should be notated in school plans. It should also be part of the school review process, when the District Superintendent visits, especially for metropolitan schools with student populations containing students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

As stated in the Plan for Government Schools WA (2004 –2007):

Some system-level targets have already been set. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has set literacy and numeracy benchmark targets. Targets for improved performance of Aboriginal students have been
negotiated with the Commonwealth as part of the *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program Agreement* (p. 11).

It was admirable to have targets but, without a concerted effort to investigate the prior knowledge of classroom teachers and constructive suggestions to building teachers’ knowledge in this area, how could one expect to realistically reach them?

The DET *Plan for Government Schools WA* (2004 –2007) goes on to state:

- teachers and other staff will be supported to create learning environments that stimulate and challenge students to achieve optimum learning,

and that

- learning programs need to acknowledge and build on where students are at with their learning. They need to be culturally and developmentally appropriate and have real-life application [with] learning occur[ing] where student, home and school have a common goal, interact positively and are mutually supportive (p. 8).

In the area of education for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, this may indeed be possible, but based on the teachers surveyed and interviewed in this metropolitan Case Study school, strategies need to be put in place to assist teachers to do this.

Professional learning projects exist, but currently their impact on the metropolitan school setting may need an injection of reality. By this I mean a look at what was actually happening. The above statement by the DET *Plan for Government Schools WA* (2004 –2007) looks good on paper, but if teachers do not have the prior knowledge, how do the policy writers expect them to impact on the above targets set as part of the *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program Agreements* at the Commonwealth level or any other levels? As a teacher myself, this is like expecting students to achieve outcomes just because I put them in a program, without accessing their prior knowledge or their strengths and weaknesses. Certainly, it is a hit-and-miss process.
Phase 2 of the Curriculum Improvement Program, included in the Plan for Government Schools WA (2004 –2007), concentrated on:

building the capacity of teachers to use flexible approaches to pedagogy that motivate, engage and respond to the needs of all students and includes: providing a suite of professional development programs for classroom practitioners, directed at enhancing and refining pedagogy and including modules on teacher judgements within and across schools; effective teaching strategies at different stages of schooling (Key Objective 1, Focusing on Pedagogy).

As a researcher, while I agree that making consistent judgements for teachers is essential, I question how this could have been achieved if they did not have the prior knowledge about how a cultural group within their student cohort approached their learning. If students were ESL and fell on the ESL Bandscales, they were given a visual chart that showed the literacy paths these students could take. As a guideline, it showed students took two years to be competent enough to hold an oral discussion, while it took up to seven years for this to transpose into written forms. Based on this, if an Indigenous student started school from a background of Aboriginal English/Aboriginal dialect and was given all the strategies and skills that teachers tend to give ESL students, then it would be year six or seven before that student could be expected to have a good grasp of SAE.

The system takes it for granted that teachers have this prior knowledge, but like the new teacher interviewed – as well as myself – when we arrived we did not have a background in even the Australian culture. There are many multicultural groups represented within the teaching force. The following was a comment by Teacher W:

'It would have been great to have had a mentor to help me out, as the system was new to me. I have only been here a year. Apart from some cultural differences, I wasn’t told anything about the issues for Aboriginal students in literacy, numeracy or general schooling. I have worked with many different cultures and religions in my thirteen years, but as I said even the Australian culture is different, let alone the Aboriginal culture.'
As stated in Chapter Four, Ingvarson (2003) believed student achievement would climb significantly in schools that support effective professional learning among teachers. This belief was shared by Crevola and Hill (1998) who argued that ongoing teacher professional learning could and did deliver dramatic improvements in student learning.

8.4 Policy
As a researcher, I realise that some of the responsibility goes to schools as a flow-on from the system directives, so let’s look at what the Case Study school had in place with respect to procedures and policy:

As far as policy goes, they (the teachers) would need to know that this school is one of the largest schools in this area with a significant Indigenous population and that we have target policies to help these students. We have an Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) teacher who targets year four and six students below the West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA) benchmark, some of whom may be in their classes. The ITAS teacher has had some PD and has a more intimate knowledge in this area. They would need to look at the department’s policy for Indigenous students (although it is not something that most people would read but you need to be aware of it). The current policy poster is up in the staffroom, (but how many people have read it, or are aware of its (the policy’s) requirements for us, I am not sure). As part of the admin team, I guess I could refer to the Creating a Vision 2001 – 2004 policy in performance management meetings and ask the (following) questions:
Are you aware there is an Aboriginal Plan for our state?
Are you aware of what this school has in place?
If they are, then I could ask about the processes they have in place to cater for these needs. (Teacher H)

Another teacher stated that:

We have an Indigenous Plan at school so I would direct them (new teachers) to the blue file (school policy file). There is also a lot available through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Education website (NATSIEW) and the Parent School Partnership Initiatives (PSPI). I am investigating Programs like What Works, Dare to Lead, the update for Creating A Vision, Our Vision (2005-2008) with the eight priorities; it’s really concise and it tells teachers what they have to do with literacy and numeracy priorities. (Teacher T)

However, this had not taken place for our new teacher, who stated:

_I have read the blue file (school policy file) but I do not remember a policy for Indigenous education. I checked and it was missing from the file._ (Teacher W)

Or the graduate teacher, who stated:

_I know more about the policy regarding attendance because we have really tried to encourage him (student of Indigenous descent) to come to school._

_I have only one Indigenous student in my class and he doesn’t come very often. He is an attendance issue but the AIEO has talked to his Mum. She is adamant that pre primary is not compulsory and she will not send him if she does not want to._ (Teacher D)

Due to the policy issues highlighted by this research, the school formulated a team to investigate how they as a school could improve in this area. With the receptive climate in the school at the time of the Case Study, initiating change seemed timely.

**8.5 Relationship Building**

So far I have looked at professional learning and policy and now it is time to see how our handful of teachers used their knowledge in everyday classroom practice. The following are teacher statements about daily classroom practices they used to assist students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent:

_You can put an Aboriginal perspective on anything you read. It is an important aspect. At first that sounds really hard but it is not, once you understand a little bit of the world view, their Dreaming stories,
culture and histories you can add this perspective even to, say, an Enid Blyton story. You can add or discuss an Aboriginal perspective – you don’t have to say the words ‘this is an Aboriginal perspective’ but you need to introduce different world views, which goes if you have got Indonesian children or whatever but you have not just got middle white Australian views – you have got to include classroom world views. (Teacher T)

In literacy, there is a lot written about Aboriginal literacy, learning styles and those sorts of things. I think you have to be careful that you do not generalise.

There are a lot of good programs available to give you an insight into making literacy interesting in the classroom for not just Aboriginal students but students of all cultures. We need more PD to help us get better at using and recognising these. Multicultural students love it when they get to learn about their cultures, they are proud and feel they belong. Classrooms need to show this to help all students feel a part of their learning environment. They need to respect the different language bases students bring with them. (Teacher T).

Initially, you would have to get to know your students and have a really good handle on where they are at, from a literacy and numeracy point, the two key foci, and to see if there were any behavioural issues, language issues or health issues so that they can be kept in mind. This would allow you to develop individual education programs if you need them and follow them for daily classroom practice. (Teacher I)

Treat all the students the same; be seen to be fair and work on the children working collaboratively. Make sure all the students understand the instructions. Seat children, so they can help each other with their work. Adapt the work for students who need it. (Teacher I)
In revisiting the above comments, I realised that the teachers had covered relationship building, respect for languages, Aboriginal and perspectives within the classroom cohort as well as individual student needs. All the comments were very general, but they showed a broad understanding of issues relating to students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Even though the interview questions referred to programming for their daily work pad and literacy needs for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, it appeared it was easier for teachers to generalise in this area than deal in specifics. As a researcher, I decided the comments from the new teacher and graduate would be excluded, as they felt they needed time to develop their knowledge. The teachers whose comments have been utilised for the last section showed an extensive knowledge background of the programs/strategies noted in the questionnaire. Two of the teachers interviewed were in positions which could influence the school agenda and create opportunities to further the knowledge of the school in this area.

8.6 An Aboriginal Perspective

In following up on the emphasis of the teachers interviewed, Lawrence (1994) stated:

When Aboriginal children arrive at school they bring with them a wealth of knowledge of their culture. For five years they have been totally immersed in the Aboriginal ways of their parents and their parents before them. It has been said, and with a degree of truth, that good teachers learn from their students. Eagleson et al. (1982, p.169) state that the difference between an Aboriginal child succeeding or failing in school is an understanding teacher. The school places too much emphasis on what the child doesn’t know, rather than on what the child does know (p. 2).

Lawrence, (1994) goes on to mirror concerns expressed by the teachers;:

the non-Aboriginal teacher usually arrives at the school with the same cultural background as most of the non-Aboriginal children. This makes the task of teaching the non-Aboriginal children so much easier because the school is seen as an extension of their home experiences and values, and the transition from home to school is undertaken with a minimum of
trauma. However, the child from a different culture is expected to go through a deculturation process (p. 4).

Research shows that there is a need to include all the classroom worldviews, but there is also a need to give examples of how this can be done, for example, what does an Aboriginal perspective in reading look like? How does this impact on daily classroom planning? What prior knowledge do teachers need to have, to be able to put forward an Aboriginal perspective in an appropriate way?

These questions relate to professional learning. Given the self confessed nature of the prior knowledge of some of the Case Study teachers, their learning journey suggests the need for this to be extended to enable them to generate specifics for their peer cohort. As commented on in Chapter Seven, the issue of defining the difference between a unit on Aboriginal culture and including an Aboriginal perspective had been identified as a concern in this school. Because of this, the school embarked on a series of workshops and discussions to explore these differences between a unit on Aboriginal culture and including an Aboriginal perspective. Perhaps these subsequent workshops would also provide opportunities for expanding the inclusion of Aboriginal worldviews in the everyday curriculum.

The complexities involved in professional learning in this region go beyond willingness for change, but one must feel encouraged if this willingness is shown to exist. This Case Study school certainly demonstrated a willingness to explore the issues related to improving outcomes for students of Indigenous descent and had started on a learning journey for all their staff, but what suggestions did they highlight that could be put forward for others?

Chapter Nine incorporates information gained in the previous two chapters and the final stage (using system relationships to explain the findings) of Carspecken’s Critical Theory approach to develop some suggestions based on the Case Study. These will provide a platform for further research to be developed from or linked to,
and not an end point in themselves as the Case Study gives only a keyhole view of these issues.
Chapter Nine
See Me, Hear Me: Where to from here?

In the previous two chapters, I have progressed through Stages One to Three of Carspecken’s (1996) framework, compiling, portraying and analysing the data collected from the questionnaires, interviews, teacher discussions and classroom observations. In this chapter, by way of my conclusions, I will frame selected Case Study data in terms of Carspecken’s (1996) Stages Four and Five: describing system relations (school, district and state level), and using system relationships (socio-political climate, policies and educational) of the time period, to make recommendations. Thus suggestions from the teachers’ and researcher’s perspectives are made, to initiate a change process.

Based on the feedback from the teachers and school administration, a starting point for this school was to join the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Dare to Lead (2006) project, which was a program being used nationally (at the time of the Case Study) to coordinate the efforts being made in Indigenous education. Joining this project helped the Principal and school team to work systematically, using their data to check the efficacy of programs, and to encourage the sharing of ideas that worked. By using a school checklist, such as the ones in the Dare to Lead (2006) project (Assessing the strengths and areas of need in your school’s Aboriginal Education program) or the Australian Government Department of Education Science and Training’s What Works (2005) project to ascertain where the school was at, the school could begin to build a stronger learning community. The school looked at:

- Teachers’ prior knowledge/current knowledge;
- Receptiveness of staff;
- Directions they [the school] might like to try.

Wenger (1998) describes three modes of belonging to a learning community as: ‘engagement - negotiated meaning, relevant, real life; imagination - shared worldview; and alignment - shared vision, agreed enterprises’ (p. 173-174). By engaging in the issues of improving outcomes for students of Indigenous descent as a whole school project, there was the opportunity to facilitate change in teaching
practices and ultimately improve student outcomes. As suggested in the Independent Education Union Association’s (IEUA) *Indigenous Education Policy Statement* (2009) the following help build relationships that value reciprocity:

- Recognizing relevant issues for Indigenous students and school communities:
- Developing effective teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of Indigenous students: and
- Developing strategies for the full inclusion of Indigenous students in the educational life of schools (p. 5).

This process includes establishing mutual respect, a demonstrated willingness to build shared understandings, and a desire to challenge existing assumptions and knowledge about students, teaching, schools, systems, and self.

With regard to the research questions, the Case Study teachers have articulated clearly that there was room for improvement in the way they previously gained professional learning/information, if they were to more adequately assist Indigenous students in their metropolitan classrooms to achieve targeted outcomes. The teachers said that they needed more professional learning in the areas of:

- Aboriginal English;
- Oral language/speech pathology strategies;
- Providing an Aboriginal perspective across all learning areas;
- Specialist resources (*Two Way English/ Deadly Ways/Do you Hear What I Hear?*); specific PD to assist in applying different strategies/programs once the individual learning needs of Indigenous students are identified using existing tools (i.e. *Outcomes standards Framework (OSF), ESL Bandscales, Lit Net, First Steps continua*); and
- Aboriginal Learning Styles – exploring more inclusive learning styles, developing more effective curricula for students to explore their culture.

None of the above-identified suggestions were new or separate from those identified in different research topics. These were issues that have been debated in an on-going way in research and have done so for many years. What this suggested was that with all the research, and to some extent, all the professional learning packages in the system, teachers were not receiving the information at the school/classroom level. If they had received some professional learning, they appeared to be questioning those
programs’ applications, as often these programs had been introduced briefly without aligning them to the curriculum framework or outcomes.

Using the teachers’ suggestions as guidelines, I want to look at each issue which they perceived that they needed more knowledge/information/assistance with, in order to achieve better outcomes for their students.

9.1 Aboriginal English
As commented on by one of the teachers interviewed:

*In literacy, there is a lot written about Aboriginal literacy, learning styles and those sorts of things. I think you have to be careful that you don’t generalise and go ‘Oh Aboriginal! So they’ll all use Aboriginal English’. Some teachers may not even acknowledge AE so you need to say, some Aboriginal kids speak AE, it’s a genuine language and you have to acknowledge it and accept it. A lot of teachers who have been here a long time see AE as wrong; they see it as a deficit, like poor kid can’t even speak English. They don’t see it as a language on its own. You need to teach SAE, as well as value what the students write in their own language. This means you can say, ‘In School English this is how we would write what you have said, can you see the difference?’ You need to acknowledge and accept AE (Teacher T).*

In the Malcolm et al. project *Two-Way English: Towards More User-Friendly Education for Speakers of Aboriginal English* (1999), the following key points jumped out with regard to the teachers’ comments:

- …despite the fact that English is a *many-ways* phenomenon, it tends to be treated educationally as if it had only *one-way*, with the implication that the other ways, which people might communicate, are less powerful or even wrong;
- it is known that language, which portrays ways in which speakers have different expectations or associate different meanings, can cause a breakdown in communication in the classroom and students’ loss of self worth is still common place and over-looked in many [urban] schools.
At a policy level, the state sees AE as a language which Aboriginal people use to identify with each other and to express distinctively Aboriginal worldviews. It is to be regarded as a language in its own right, one which has a different set of sounds, many different words, its own rules for making sentences and different ways of being used by its speakers. This being the case, the following suggestions may help the teacher at the classroom level grasp and incorporate some of the differences. These suggestions have resulted from discussions with individuals or groups of staff members plus feedback from the questionnaires;

- Align areas in the *Curriculum Framework/English Outcome* statements, such as conventions with specific examples of areas that need to be taught for ESL/ESD/AE speakers (These might be the use of pronouns, tense, prepositions, singular/plural nouns and verbs);
- Make specific the programs targeted in the *GiRL* package that assist with building an inclusive program for students of Indigenous descent or other cultural backgrounds and worldviews;
- In documents such as the *Literacy Net*, which is already aligned to *First Steps*, add references to texts such as *Deadly Ways/Ideas, Making the Jump* (which are in most school libraries) to show a systems-led initiate to actively improve outcomes for students of Indigenous descent;
- Provide simple charts to show the code-switching stairway (as generated for a *Kimberley Literacy Project*), and the Areas of Difficulty for students’ code switching from AE to SAE (also ESL, ESD to AE);
- Highlight on a website the current professional learning programs that are available, their objectives and their perceived impact at the classroom level, so that schools can choose the pertinent ones for their own audit needs. An example is the program called the *ABC Project of Two-Way Literacy and Learning*, presented by Patsy Konigsberg and Glenys Collard on integrating AE into the classroom environment;
- Teach/explore the basic understanding of how to incorporate AE/ESL/ESD into core teaching/literacy units at university; and
- Co-ordinate *experts* in the fields of SAE and AE/ESL to present collaborative workshops, including the *GiRL* strategy, in order to model the joint effort between Aboriginal Literacy Education and the Department of Education.
Literacy Specialists, and thus portraying Aboriginal Education as being core business.

9.2 Oral language/ Speech pathology strategies
In their ethnographic study, Lowell and Devlin (1998) found that the cultural differences in communication were not easily differentiated from hearing-related communication problems by non-Aboriginal educators. These difficulties were exacerbated by the lack of specialist support and appropriate training for teachers in cross-cultural communication and ESL teaching (p. 1).

Research by the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia (2006) suggests that Conductive Hearing Loss has the potential to adversely affect:

- aspects of cognitive development;
- communicative development;
- academic success;
- as well as social development.

In this Case Study school, the classroom environments did not always account for the needs of students with conductive hearing loss, as teachers were not sufficiently aware of the issues facing their diagnosed students.

The school has taken its first steps in dealing with this issue by:

- Instigating early identification of students with Conductive Hearing Loss (a screen for all Kindy, Pre Primary and newly arrived Indigenous students);
- Running a workshop on the Do You Hear What I Hear? program (which, as teachers in the questionnaire indicated has not carried through to the classroom); and
- Running a follow up workshop, this time using earplugs to give the teachers a simulated experience similar to their students and asking them to identify their students who have or have had a history of Conductive Hearing Loss.
Once this knowledge has been developed (and perhaps through the use of second edition of the Do You Hear What I Hear? Program, with the teachers’ strategies text attached), the next step would be to develop teacher-generated solutions to:

- classroom environmental issues;
- literacy/oral language and speech issues;
- common spelling errors and suggested ways to help correct them; and
- social issues, which in some cases, may be a reason for students not wanting to attend school.

However, addressing Conductive Hearing Loss only deals with one aspect of oral language. There are other aspects of concern such as:

- ways of constructing a narrative,
- the code switching between AE and SAE,
- language structures, and
- when to use AE or SAE just add to the complexities.

Although there are programs already written to address these aspects of oral language (see Chapter Three for further details) the Case Study teachers felt that they had not been addressed in the professional learning opportunities to which they have had access.

Toward the end of this Case Study, the film Ten Canoes, featuring David Gulpilil, was released. This was an ideal medium for sharing the power and constructs of an Aboriginal story. Resources like this provide a visual way to enable staff to see the differences between Aboriginal story telling and non-Aboriginal story telling. Ten Canoes deals with the non-linear structure of a story, describing the order of a story as being like the limbs of a tree, influenced more by events than time. On my discussing this with the BOIS co-ordinator from the school, she suggested that: ‘many stories have a reason for being told and the reason may not be highlighted till the end. The story itself may not be fixed in time but can be transported to a situation or learning experience’. Non-Aboriginal stories, on the other hand are generally linear and the relevance of time and sequence is of utmost importance.

Taking on board the difference in the narrative/conventions structure of SAE and AE was one thing but teachers needed to be given references (even if it was to ESL.
documentation) in the Speaking and Listening section of the English Student Outcome Statements, so they were reminded of the different story telling structures and conventions of other cultures and modelled the transitions where needed. At the time of the Case Study, there were ESL Bandscules that generated outcomes for identified ESL students, but in this school, they were not utilised to assist in pin-pointing progress for students speaking AE or with students from cultures significantly different from the Australian mainstream. Perhaps if teachers viewed these in the school context, they would begin to generate strategies that may assist across their classes and thus increasing the participation of both ESL/ESD and AE students. Since the end of this Case Study the Department of Education and Training has released the ESL/ESD Framework (2007) to assist schools to improve literacy outcomes for students of ESL/ESD background. The professional learning has been predominantly integrated into the GiRL strategy but schools can request the professional learning package. This meant schools that were proactive in this area due to the nature of their student populations now had access to the DET ESL/ESD Framework (2007) information in the same way, as would those schools that had a proactive GiRL specialist (remembering that all schools are not eligible for a GiRL specialist).

9.3 Providing an Aboriginal Perspective across all learning areas
The following comment cited in Herbert (2000) signals one reason why the understanding of an Aboriginal perspective, as opposed to an Aboriginal curriculum/Aboriginal unit of work, is needed: ‘...when the kids [ Aboriginal] cross from outside to inside the gate, they’re expected to forget their culture and to be somebody else’ (p. 11). Without such understandings (including an acceptance of Aboriginal perspectives) by their teachers, these students can feel isolated in their own school environment.

For many students in the Case Study school, the only potential exposure to Aboriginal worldviews was through Aboriginal units of work or NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks. In discussions with the teachers, it was noted that for some, this was all that was needed for them to feel they had done the right thing by their Aboriginal students. According to Herbert (2000):
We hear a lot about how schools are trying to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students through the development of inclusive schools, yet many Aboriginal groups perceive this as simply another fad - the latest priority in a long line of priorities. … For Aboriginal students the experience of school may only be valuable in terms of the extent to which the school is willing to build upon and respect the cultural integrity which students bring (p. 11).

When looking at an Aboriginal perspective, this needs to take into account Aboriginal parents’ perceptions of their children’s schooling. This can be problematic, as teachers and Aboriginal parents often come from different worldviews about such issues. Ngarritjan-Kessaris (1994) suggests that often people look at the externals to judge a person’s culture, but culture is more: ‘about how people view their world and how they structure their lives according to that world view’ (p. 117). One purpose of gaining an Aboriginal perspective would be to better understand Aboriginal forms of knowledge; and to be able to integrate these into everyday practice as an educator, assisting all students to value differing world views and the contributions they make.

As a school, how do you start to resolve this? I believe that bringing the issue to the attention of the learning community, as the Case Study school was in the process of doing, would allow teachers to voice their understandings and develop some collective strategies to approach these issues.

One of the participants in the initial workshop on what it means to include an Aboriginal perspective was a visitor of Indigenous descent, who was happy to share her experience of what it felt like to be of Indigenous descent in an urban education setting. This challenged some of the teachers’ understandings and began the process of defining an Aboriginal perspective.

Once the learning journey to understanding an Aboriginal perspective had begun, then the Case Study teachers were in a position to start to incorporate aspects of Aboriginal perspectives by:

- challenging rather than reinforcing traditional stereotypes;
• linking up with the Aboriginal people living contemporary lifestyles in the local area and seeking to involve them in their education programme;
• being aware of the responsibilities that are associated with owning cultural information (In Indigenous societies, information and knowledge are not property that is freely accessible to everyone. And so Non-Indigenous teachers may only ever hear very general information which appears to be of no special significance);
• showing mutual respect and a shared interest in promoting the value of Indigenous knowledge and views to their students and from their students; and
• facilitating the process in a culturally-appropriate way that achieves the best outcomes for promoting and valuing the Aboriginality of their students;
• increasing their own knowledge in programs and strategies that can be incorporated into everyday curriculum promoting Indigenous culture and knowledge in a positive light.

In this way, students could learn firstly that Aboriginal people exist (in a range of guises) and come to appreciate the diverse cultures that exist within Aboriginal society as part of a living, contemporary culture. (Swartz, Craig, and Walker, 1997).

9.4 Specific professional learning packages for specialist resources such as Two Way English/ Deadly Ways/Do you Hear What I Hear?

Most of the teachers seemed hard working and caring, but the questionnaires, interviews and conversations which they had shared, revealed that they felt their knowledge of professional learning packages lacked school and system support. The teachers showed concern and a willingness to learn more about Aboriginal perspectives, curricula, language and culture.

The situation suggests that education systems in their management practices have helped to produce unreliable structures and inequalities by:
• introducing programs and strategies without sufficient checks in place to oversee implementation (as happened with the GiRL strategy in the Case Study school);
• providing fewer opportunities for metropolitan schools/teachers to access specialised professional learning packages aimed at assisting their students of Indigenous descent to achieve literacy outcomes (compared to rural and remote); and
• not ensuring that the preparation of pre-service teachers to assist them in implementing programs that support students from a variety of cultures to achieve outcomes, regardless of their placements in rural, remote or urban schools, was consistent and meaningful.

Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2004) suggested that:

the preparation of all teachers with a pedagogy of cultural and global diversity, and ongoing specialist professional development for those who are teaching in Indigenous and multicultural settings, demands major structural changes that go beyond the addition of a multicultural course or two for student teachers (p. 12).

Since the teachers in the Case Study school and the researcher both agree that there was a need to improve access to specialised professional learning, how do we go about this in the current climate given that quality professional learning helps teachers develop and maintain strong and flexible teaching skills? This in turn facilitates successful learning for groups of students with diverse cultures, needs, talents and abilities, all of whom need guidance, support and encouragement.

As a starting point, the Case Study school was developing:

• school learning communities, where there was constructive input into developing a needs priority in the area of professional learning (regarding literacy for students of Indigenous descent);
• initial time outlays by setting aside early closes to introduce the above professional learning packages (preferably by a specialist/consultant who has hands on experience with said package or program);
• ongoing time outlays by setting aside follow up early closes, to allow teachers a chance to develop a culture of reflection and discussion of new
strategies/programs, which had been integrated into classroom practice (where applicable) to support the learning needs of students; and

- the skill levels of the newly introduced Aboriginal Education Team to facilitate ongoing, reflective professional learning in the school community.

I believe that in the educational and political climate of the time, schools were expected to become more self-sufficient in response to their individual needs. This should not let the system off the hook but as displayed in Chapter Two (Table 2b Policy Roles and Responsibilities), there was a lot of responsibility put on the schools to develop their individual communities. Responsibility for making better connections among policy documentation, in school documents (Curriculum Framework and Outcomes documentation), pedagogy, programs and their links to supporting students of Indigenous descent and other cultures needs to be facilitated at a system level. Their leadership in this area would encourage schools to provide the links and create a safer, more empowered learning environment for students of all cultures. Herbert (2000) suggested that:

> the answer lies at the heart of the system - in the schools or in other educational institutions. If schools do not give equity of access to an educational experience that is relevant to the learning needs of Indigenous students, then our education systems will continue having to throw precious resources at trying to fix the problem (paragraph 8).

I believe that if the system showed the issues surrounding Indigenous education are part of core business and not a totally separate issue, then schools and educational institutions will follow. They [the System] needed to make obvious the links between policies/strategies to the current Educational Plans and outcomes, not leave them [the links] for schools or teachers to find.

In the Case Study school, a leadership structure was developed to utilise the expertise of the current staff and provide staff members/teams to whom others could go for support (See diagram 9a School Leadership Structure).
Table 9 a School Leadership Structure

**Admin Team**
(Principal, Deputies, Registrar)

**School Advisory Team**
Principal, Deputies, GiRL Specialist, Language Support Teacher/Learning Support Coordinator, PSPI Coordinator, Ed Support, Support Staff Member, one Teacher from each Learning Community, one Specialist Teacher. (Total of 12)

**Curriculum Team**
Deputy
GiRN Specialist Teacher
K-1 Rep
2-3 Rep
4-5 Rep
6-7 Rep

**Role:**
- Implement school’s CIP2 Plan in line with CAR policy
- Lead ongoing review of our pedagogy to ensure that the way we teach matches our Agreed Beliefs and the Principles of Learning and Teaching
- Develop School Assessment Policy
- Lead in-school and between-school

**Aboriginal Ed Team**
Principal
AIEO
PSPI Coordinator
ITAS Coordinator
School Support Staff Member
LSC/LST
A Teacher

**Role:**
- Review and write school
  Aboriginal Ed Operational Plan (AEOP)
- Support teachers to implement Aboriginal perspectives to their curriculum
- Plan and support NAIDOC
- Review and submit PSPI Plan
- Monitor PSPI and ITAS

**Student Services Team**
Deputy
School Psychologist (LSC and LST)
Ed Support Rep
School Support Staff Member (Special Needs)

**Role:**
- Negotiate Service Agreement with School Psych
- Develop and maintain register of SAER
- Sub-committee submits Schools Plus applications for Sp Needs Ass time
- Review and write BMaD Plan (ie sub-committee plus 3 seconded teachers and 1 EA)
- Review and write Code of Conduct Policy (ie sub-

**Learning Area Committees**
- The Arts
- English
- Health & Phys Ed
- LOTE
- Maths
- Science
- S & E
- T & E

- Develops the Learning Area’s activities for the year and a proposed budget for presentation to the Finance Committee;
- Meet once per term, (or as required) to review progress of planned activities;
- Conduct annual review and prepare a summary for the school’s Annual Report if required.

The Aboriginal Education Team was set up to investigate where the school was at and to investigate programs/personnel that supported the school’s future direction. The
staff/learning community was encouraged to have input into what the future direction might look like. It was envisaged that this team approach would enable the school community as a whole to assist, encourage and support students of Indigenous descent to achieve satisfactory social/cultural/academic outcomes.

9.5 Aboriginal Learning Styles: exploring more inclusive learning styles, developing more effective curricula for students to explore their culture

In investigating the research into education for students of Indigenous descent one would almost certainly expect the issue of learning styles to arise from teachers so I will recapitulate what some researchers had been saying. Those like Cushner and Trifonovitch (1989), and Ladson-Billings (1995b) suggested teacher preparation should facilitate teachers’ understanding of their beliefs about race, class, culture, and other human diversities as many students enter teacher preparation programs with a thin knowledge base relative to their own and other cultural histories and values systems. This should be accompanied by knowledge of how students learn.

As discussed in Chapter Four, learning styles according to Hughes, More and Williams (2004), refer to the preferred way(s) in which individuals interact with, take in, and process new stimuli or information across the three domains of learning identified in the taxonomy of education objectives: cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills) and affective (attitude). In other words, your preferred learning style is simply how you learn best.

From a teacher perspective, how could one go about resolving the issue of learning styles? Maybe getting teachers to actually ask their students to discuss, record in groups - or as a class - their preferred ways of learning would be a start. Of course they may have more than one. The teachers could join in the process, establishing their own preferred ways of learning as well. In doing this it would make the teachers aware of some areas of conflict and raise the awareness both of teachers and students to each other’s strengths.

Part of a teacher’s responsibility is pointing out similarities between different groups of people when teaching about cultural and ethnic differences. Educational programs about different learning styles should address diversity but not crush students with the
issue or make differences more prominent than commonalities. In saying this, emphasis on sound pedagogy and recognising that all students may have varying learning styles seems to be more responsible than focusing on a specific learning style for a specific culture.

In talking about their concern with regard to *Aboriginal Learning Styles* and developing more effective curricula for students to explore their culture, one also wonders to what extent this is an excuse to abdicate any responsibility, as saying ‘*Aboriginal students learn differently and I don’t understand could be a justification if programs are not producing results*’ (Teacher T). According to Osborne (1995), becoming aware of one’s [the teacher’s] own subjectivities enables one to start where the child is, or otherwise one will find it easy to run with student subjectivities which match their own, and to silence or ignore those which do not.

Pedagogically relevant teachers are aware of variations in learning styles amongst their pupils and how they are created. The research shares a large body of conflicting reports and opinion on whether different cultures have different learning styles. Many researchers, including Woolfolk (2001), Eckerman (1988) and Stewart (2002), warn against making generalisations and categorisations about common learning styles for ethnic groups, including Aborigines. Variations in learning styles and their connection to cognitive development may be so complex that few people learn in the same way.

So where does this leave the Case Study school? On reflection, the idea of establishing the student cohort-learning styles was sound, but added to this, was the need to understand how students actively deal with their learning, as this appears to engage their cultural background/prior experiences and ways of assimilating knowledge.

Without the confidence or understanding by the non-Indigenous teachers in the Case Study school, the usefulness of the professional learning programs introduced appears to have been disjointed. The teachers have genuinely tried to be inclusive of all their students. As previously mentioned, towards the end of the Case Study, the school librarian stated that: ‘in recent times teachers have started to ask for and use a wider
range of resources (student and teacher) from the library to assist in their teaching practice and personnel understandings’.

One of the suggestions that came out of interview with Teacher H, a member of the Administration Team, was that he could:

…refer to it (education of students of Indigenous descent) in performance management meetings and ask the questions

- Are you aware there is an Aboriginal Plan for our State?;
- Are you aware of what this school has in place?;
- Are you aware of the programs in this school (eg GiRL, First Steps etc.)?

And:

- How have you implemented them in the classroom?;
- Are there any areas you need help with or would like professional learning in? (Teacher H)

The following questions could be added as the school reintroduces or initiates new professional learning:

- What did you find interesting in…professional learning?;
- How has this impacted on your classroom praxis?;
- Are you willing to share some of your ideas at the next early close session?; and
- How does the strategy initiate inclusive practices to simulate different worldviews or perspectives?

These questions would encourage a more effective whole school approach to inclusivity and help determine the usefulness of teachers’ professional learning as they proceed. Taking this a step further if time was allocated in staff or cell meetings then teachers could assist and support each other as new professional learning packages were introduced showing their own examples of inclusive practices that simulate different worldviews or perspectives.
By creating a Learning Journey as a school community, the teachers may start to or continue to acquire enough professional learning to the extent that they believe they are adequately equipped to assist Indigenous students in their metropolitan classrooms. With this focus, the teachers could reflect on their professional learning, its usefulness for their classroom praxis and share their ideas. This journey seems to be gaining more momentum in the Case Study school, but the process has only just begun.

Complicating the matter of utilising different programs was the matching of programs and strategies for impact after teacher assessment. In other words, which programs helped the teachers in assisting their students to achieve the relevant outcomes? One way to tackle the utilisation of different programs would be to incorporate looking at and discussing literacy samples of Indigenous students at an in-school *Making Consistent Judgement* (MCJ) session. This would allow teachers to discuss and suggest ways they could meet the needs of their students, reflecting on their own practices and those of others. Of course, professional learning exploring learning styles, Aboriginal perspectives and developing more effective ways to enhance curriculum opportunities for Indigenous students would need to be developed by the school before or alongside such a process.

**9.6 District and State Levels**

Alongside Carspecken’s (1996) Stage Four, Stage Five is utilised to develop system relationships to reconstruct the socio-political climate, policies and educational background of the time when this project took place. It provides one aspect of many for building the participants’ perceived worlds and as such the next set of suggestions come out of discussions and comments developed from the questionnaire, interviews and informal teacher discussions with regard to investigating ways in which the education system at District and State level could assist the Case study teachers in improving literacy outcomes for Indigenous students.

a) District Level

When there is a school audit or review, schools should be asked to show and explain how they are including an Aboriginal perspective within their community. The schools need to acknowledge the professional learning they are accessing and how
this is being supported at a school level. This way the Districts could assess if the way they are implementing professional learning in the area of Indigenous education is effective or not. The schools also need to acknowledge any funding provided for Indigenous education projects and provide data or work samples to show how the funding has made an impact. This should be a requirement regardless of the number of students of Indigenous descent in student cohorts.

Districts need to identify schools with at least ten percent of students of Indigenous descent to (funded) professional learning providers. The latter would then have the responsibility of showing the effectiveness of these programs in their audits before further funding was provided. (There has been a shift since the conclusion of the Case Study with the system allocating more funds (via time allocations) to schools with a higher ESL student cohort).

b) System Level
At a system level there needs to be more interagency/department cooperation in this area. Professional learning packages such as the Getting It Right Literacy Strategy need to thread an Aboriginal perspective into more avenues of the professional learning package to model for specialist teachers. This could be done by literacy specialists from the Aboriginal Section of the Education department or the Getting It Right Literacy Team.

When departmental policy writers are initiating new documents they need to be conscious of making the connections between their policies and Indigenous education policy to facilitate the concept that Indigenous education is a part of core business. For example the DET Government Schools Plan WA (2004-2007) could have had more links with Indigenous Policies rather than merely saying that schools should have the Department of Education Creating A Vision (2001-2004) strategies in place by 2007.

The Department of Education needs to provide avenues for non-Indigenous teachers and staff working with students of Indigenous descent, with the opportunity to access professional learning along the same lines as for Indigenous teachers and staff provided by the Creating a Vision (2001-2004) document.
When the System is developing System-directed initiatives, like the *Literacy Net*, there need to be connections to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous materials as there is a wealth of programs and strategies already developed to which teachers can gain access in their school libraries.

The System needs to promote more programs that are working, like the examples in the July issue of the School Matters (2006) and the *Dare to Lead/What Works* programs (2000+). (A website for *Dare to Lead* has been developed to help schools access more information in this area. I hope it is widely promoted in urban, rural and remote settings).

The Department of Education could provide access to a wider variety of programs/strategies for teachers in metropolitan areas, such as the *Aboriginal Literacy Strategy*, which Albert (2005), states is:

- to develop and train personnel to deliver a consistent and sustained literacy program [for Aboriginal students] in target schools, regardless of constantly changing personnel (No. 286);

Having access to a wider variety of programs/strategies would then provide avenues for teachers/schools to be part of professional learning initiatives that meet current research suggestions (see Chapter Four). The Department needs to limit the number of one-off professional learning sessions that do not have links or connections to current classroom practice or professional learning packages that can provide teacher backup.

Some of the above System and District level suggestions for improvement may already be happening but the reader needs to remember that this was from the teachers’ perspectives at the time, and one of the major issues raised was that the current programs and strategies and their links to current practice, were not visible enough to the everyday teacher in the classroom unless they or their school did the leg work to uncover them. If the System was more serious about this, then:

- programs/strategies/understandings would have visible links to teachers’ everyday documentation (outcomes, frameworks, programs);
instead of placing words in policy to direct schools to make sure their teachers have sufficient knowledge through professional learning, they should show leadership and incorporate the links teachers need to assist students of Indigenous descent into current pushes such as the *GiRL strategy* (which has the links there but in the Case Study school these were not made clear), *Literacy Net, Making Consistent Judgements (MCJ’s)*, *BM&IS* (Behaviour Management and Instructional Strategies) to name a few. At the time of this study, teachers were really feeling the load which professional learning placed on them where it involved being taken out of their classrooms and consequently disrupting student learning and classroom environments.

Results from the Case Study show that there was a need for directed professional learning, but that eventually the following should be encompassed in all System generated professional learning if the focus on inclusivity is ever to become a reality, giving equal opportunity and access for all students without just providing *words on paper*:

- Multicultural perspectives/worldviews;
- ESL/ESD/AE to SAE;
- Learning styles;
- Oral language; and
- Integrating new research/programs/strategies.

If teachers are to make a positive difference in Indigenous education, then surely creating a bigger emphasis in the metropolitan schools should impact on the *West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment* (WALNA) data (now replaced by the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy, NAPLAN) and overall student outcomes. This was only one metropolitan school, and its teachers were demonstrating that for all the policy and departmental directives, they needed more help in order to make an impact at the classroom level. The reflections of the Case Study teachers showed that they are keen to try and as a school they were creating a learning journey to provide the best possible opportunities for both students and teachers. If this was to be sustainable outside help would be needed.
Interestingly, Yunupingu (1995 as cited in Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2004) stated: ‘Together in the twenty-first century, we can construct a unique way of life here, inspired by the traditions of Aboriginal Australia and of Europe and Asia’ (p. 120). Granted, this will not be easy but with the positive attitudes developing amongst some teachers (as in the Case Study school) perhaps it is time for the System, Universities, Schools and Teachers to create a more visible learning journey; one in which the worldviews of our current multicultural population can be respected, celebrated and nurtured instead of overlooked or lost.

In answer to the focus questions there was a lot of work to be done before the Case Study teachers felt they would be willing to state that they had acquired enough professional learning to adequately assist Indigenous students in their metropolitan classrooms. As their learning journey occurs and the links are made to the Curriculum Framework, outcomes, differing programs and strategies, the teachers should be able to reflect and discuss the professional learning that is most useful for their classroom praxis.

Over the past three years it has been interesting to see the development of interest and openness of the Case Study teachers towards the education of Indigenous students in their school community. Even though for some, the journey had only just begun, this was a positive step for the future. The diagram below shows an overview of what the teachers themselves felt was required.

Diagram 9b was generated by the Case Study teachers to outline areas they felt needed to be covered more extensively, through policy, professional learning and best practice strategies before they would be able to say Yes to the Research question: ‘Have teachers acquired enough information/professional learning in their eyes to adequately assist Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students in literacy in their metropolitan classrooms?’ They felt that in order to achieve this, there needed to be support both at a school level and System level.
As they journeyed along this path and began to make the connections between professional learning programs and every day core business in their literacy programs, they felt that they could indeed make an impact in their classroom structures and planning for students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
Gillard, the federal education minister at the time (2009), has echoed the Case Study teachers’ voices in a speech by stating that:

A recent study undertaken by Monash University surveyed around 4,500 Australian teachers [where they were asked] about their professional learning. More than a quarter of those surveyed said that the area in which they wanted more professional development was in being able to better assist Indigenous students (p. 3).

Gillard (2009) went on to say:

It is vital that teachers, no matter where they teach, have the competence to appreciate and teach children from other cultures. I am listening to teachers and I will be seeking more commitment from universities and education systems to make sure teachers are better prepared to work successfully with Indigenous students (p. 3).

In light of this observation, perhaps this thesis can act as a small voice for metropolitan teachers who have the willingness to support their cohort of Indigenous students to achieve better outcomes in literacy. It may also act as a catalyst for further in-depth research into why there seems to be a mismatch between what the minister is saying and how the systems are implementing her suggestions at school level, creating more depth to Carspecken’s (1996) Stages Four and Five. Hence utilising the data constructed within the confines of this thesis I have made the following recommendations.

9.7 Recommendations

In reviewing the preceding chapters I put forward the following recommendations:

1. When the Department of Education releases policies, such as the Plan for Government Schools (2004-2007), there needs to be direct and transparent links to the Indigenous Education policy of that era (Aboriginal Education and Training Operational Plan, 2005-2008) so the Department can be seen to be including Indigenous Education as core business, especially in the areas of professional learning for teachers. Currently statements like the one that appears in the Plan For Public Schools (2008–2011) instructs schools to:
Ensure effective whole-school approaches are targeted at closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, including implementing the Aboriginal Literacy Strategy in remote schools and reviewing current systemic approaches to Aboriginal education (p. 7)

Statements such as these not only build on the assumption that schools and teachers already have the knowledge to effectively close the achievement gap but also take the focus off metropolitan and inner rural schools where there are now fifty three percent of Indigenous people living (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census Data, 2006). As shown in diagram 9b Overview from a Teachers Perspective (p. 168) professional learning and best practice strategies along with their connection to current practice were key issues that needed to be addressed before the Case Study group would say Yes to the Research question: ‘Have teachers acquired enough information/professional learning in their eyes to adequately assist Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander students in literacy in their metropolitan classrooms?’ These issues need to be addressed more comprehensively at policy level and lead into the next recommendations.

2. Programs and projects that receive funding under Government Grants in Education need to incorporate an avenue for the said programs to reach teachers as part of their professional learning. With this funding process there needs to be an inbuilt audit to show if the professional learning component has actually been achieved. We currently have too many programs and strategies that stand-alone. This follows the Case Study teachers expressed need for the Department to investigate how they could integrate new programs in a way that made them easy to assimilate into everyday classroom practice.

Along with addressing the issue of how professional learning will be fostered in new projects is addressing the issue of making more direct links to Indigenous education materials within Department promoted or funded programs are relevant. An example of this is the Literacy Net. When it was rolled out to schools, as part of its layout there was a resources column to help teachers find strategies to assist in their teaching. This column was directly related to First Steps but it could have been used as a vehicle to promote strategies or programs highlighted in the Creating a Vision (2004–2007)
document and as such promoting an Aboriginal perspective as part of the literacy process.

3. Consultants delivering professional learning packages such as *The Getting It Right Strategy* could intertwine an Aboriginal perspective through their content to model how Specialists Teachers could incorporate different perspectives into everyday curriculum and they in turn could model this for teacher back in their schools.

4. If possible and where practical, literacy professional learning packages supported at Departmental level, should be presented by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous literacy specialists to model the importance of inclusivity in programs.

5. If the MCEETYA *Australian Directions In Indigenous Education* (2005–2008) is to be initiated by the end of 2010 then perhaps the Department of Education could employ appropriate personnel to develop, write and present two on-line units on Indigenous education to enable teachers to gain the professional learning/knowledge needed to meet the two unit ‘prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher’ (p. 10).

The first unit, based upon the suggestions from the Case Study teachers, would be *How to Incorporate an Aboriginal Perspective across the curriculum*. This unit needs to show links associated with materials and websites already available. The second unit, *Improving literacy teaching for Students of Indigenous descent* could be broken into three parts:

- What the research says;
- What is already available; and
- Suggestions for incorporating the above into everyday classroom practice.

These units could be placed on the Department of Educations website where all teachers need to complete them. Initially the information would only be general but it would give all teachers baseline knowledge to build on with future professional learning.
6. With fifty three percent of Indigenous people living in Inner Rural and Metropolitan areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census Data, 2006) the Department of Education needs to insure the availability of professional learning packages such as the *Aboriginal Literacy Strategy* are rolled out in all areas, not just focusing on rural and remote areas, if they want to assist teachers in *closing the educational gap* for students of Aboriginal descent.

9.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this researcher believes that with a creative approach to funding, the inclusion of Indigenous Education as *core business* and not as an *add on* based on a *deficit model* situation, plus the explicit links to policy/professional learning with direct feedback from classroom teachers, we can make steps towards complying with the MEECTYA document *Australian Directions In Indigenous Education* (2005–2008) when it states that by 2010 professional learning/knowledge will be:

9.2 … a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a principal and incorporated into performance agreements of existing principals;
9.1(a) a prerequisite for appointment or contract renewal as a teacher; and that professional learning at 9.1(a), (b) and (c) is incorporated into performance agreements and/or duty statements of existing teachers (p. 10).

Working towards this needs further investigation of current practice in the educational system at district, school and teacher levels, as the findings from the Case Study school indicate that current policy is based on assumption not reality (in the sense of constructiveness for teachers and students). Based on this Case Study school, the political and educational climates are ready for the change in direction being pushed by the MEECTYA *Australian Directions In Indigenous Education* (2005–2008) document, but a lack of a coordinated approach may yet halt significant progress. Nevertheless, we do not want to be in the situation where we continue to see public statements being made about the degree of change created by these new directions as having not significantly influenced the level of outcomes achieved by students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
And so, a final word on funding. I believe that with a more co-ordinated approach to running programs that incorporate Indigenous perspectives/worldviews and strategies instead of stand alone packages that we could enhance MCEETYA’s outcomes in the area of Indigenous education. At the time of this study the majority of funding (approximately eighty percent) was going to Rural and Remote schools. Although these schools do need continued and sustained funding, the System also needs to identify where the schools with significant cohorts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are in the metropolitan or inner regional areas (as according to the 2006 Census fifty three percent of the Aboriginal and Torres State Islander population are now living in urban or inner regional areas) and redirect funding to try and close the gap by providing students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent with more everyday success role models. These metropolitan students possibly have the smallest academic gap to bridge, but with the system still making the current policy assumptions with regard to professional learning and teacher knowledge, these students have become a classroom minority group with their academic needs/worldviews/ perspectives compromised.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Consultative Group</td>
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<td>ACEG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Consultative Education Group</td>
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<td>AE</td>
<td>Aboriginal English</td>
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<td>AEG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Group</td>
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<td>AEP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Policy</td>
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<td>AEOP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Operational Plan</td>
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<td>AESIP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (now IESIP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AETOP</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education and Training Operational Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIEO</td>
<td>Aboriginal Islander Education Officer</td>
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<td>AIEW</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander education Workers</td>
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<td>ASSPA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness</td>
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<td>ATA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Teachers Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMAD</td>
<td>Behaviour Management and Discipline Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>BM &amp;IS</td>
<td>Behavioural Management and Instructional Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOIS</td>
<td>Better Outcomes for Indigenous Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
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<td>DETYA</td>
<td>Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEEWR</td>
<td>Department of education, Employment and Workplace relations</td>
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<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
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<td>EA</td>
<td>Education Assistant</td>
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<td>ELAN</td>
<td>English Literacy and Numeracy Program</td>
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<td>ELAS</td>
<td>Early Literacy Assessment Strategy</td>
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<td>ESD</td>
<td>English as a Second Dialect</td>
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<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>FELIKS</td>
<td>Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools</td>
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<td>GiRL</td>
<td>Getting It Right Literacy Strategy</td>
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<td>GiRN</td>
<td>Getting It Right Numeracy Strategy</td>
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<td>IEDA</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Direct Assistance Program</td>
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<td>IESIP</td>
<td>Indigenous Education Strategies Initiatives Program</td>
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<td>ILSS</td>
<td>Indigenous Language Speaking Students</td>
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<td>ISRP</td>
<td>Indigenous Strategic Results Projects (What Works)</td>
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<td>ITAS</td>
<td>Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme</td>
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<td>Lit Net</td>
<td>Literacy Net</td>
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<td>MCEETYA</td>
<td>Ministerial Council of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>MCJ</td>
<td>Making Consistent Judgements</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Education Committee</td>
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<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<td>NATSU</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy</td>
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<td>NATSIEP</td>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIELANS</td>
<td>National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>NIEP</td>
<td>National Indigenous Education Policy</td>
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<td>OSF</td>
<td>Outcomes and Standards Framework</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
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<td>PSPI</td>
<td>Parent School Partnership Initiatives</td>
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<td>SAE</td>
<td>Standard Australian English</td>
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<td>SAER</td>
<td>Students at Educational Risk</td>
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<td>SAESD</td>
<td>Standard Australian English as a Second Dialect</td>
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<td>SIDE</td>
<td>School of Isolated and Distance education</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Specialist Teacher</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education Teachers</td>
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<td>WALNA</td>
<td>West Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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Appendix

Questionnaire Information

The following questionnaire is to be completed for the project titled: See Me, Hear Me: From professional learning (literacy) to classroom practice in Aboriginal Education.

In filling out this questionnaire your information will be collated to help construct a picture of how current professional learning programs help teachers (in metropolitan schools) integrate students of Indigenous descent into their general classroom practice. The cover sheet of this questionnaire will be used solely by the researcher and will not be included in feedback (except to the original participant). Information gained from the questions following the cover sheet will be treated as confidential. Neither of the preceding sets of information will be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

From the information gathered, two participants will be invited (they can decline) to help the investigator give relevant samples of how these professional learning packages are influencing classroom practice. Other participants may be invited if they indicate strong views in regard to current professional learning and its influence on Aboriginal Education. Participants may withdraw at anytime without prejudice.

I appreciate your help with this project.
Jacky Lovegrove

Questionnaire

Age
20-30  31-40  41-50  50+

Class Level
ECE    Middle Primary    Upper Primary

Class Size

Number of Indigenous students
Professional Learning:

Have you participated in professional learning (development) to inform you about the following strategies/programs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program / Strategy</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Current school</th>
<th>Other Metro</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Last 0-2yrs</th>
<th>3-5yrs</th>
<th>5+ yrs</th>
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<tr>
<td>First Steps</td>
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<td>Getting it Right</td>
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<td>Do You Hear What I Hear?</td>
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<td>Deadly Ways</td>
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<td>Walking Talking Texts</td>
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<td>Solid English</td>
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<td>Time For Talk</td>
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<td>Making the Jump</td>
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<td>FELIKS</td>
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<td>ESL Bandscales</td>
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<td>What works (and will again)</td>
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General:
As a Getting it Right Literacy participant school please comment on the following: -
1 The overall GiRL strategy is an effective tool to help students of Indigenous decent.
   1  2  3  4  5
2 There were specific strategies to help me cater for the needs of my Indigenous students (if I needed them).
   1  2  3  4  5
3 The program catered for all students, as Indigenous students need the same strategies as everyone else.
   1  2  3  4  5
4 The program failed to give me any new strategies to help me cater for students of Indigenous descent with learning issues.
   1  2  3  4  5

In your opinion:
Which programs/strategies (including the GiRL program) had the most influence on your classroom planning/practice in supporting Indigenous students?

Please give examples

Which were the least useful? Explain.

Have you heard about any programs in this area that you would like professional learning in? Please explain.
Do you feel that you have had sufficient Professional Learning (Development) to help you cater for the Indigenous students in your class?

Yes    No
Explain.

Are there any areas of Professional Learning (Development) that you feel need to be covered in more depth with regard to supporting Indigenous students?

What areas (if any) do you feel need to have more focus in regard to supporting Indigenous students in education?

What suggestions/comments do you have about current teacher knowledge concerning their ability to include students of Indigenous backgrounds in metropolitan classrooms?
Interview Questions

This interview is a follow up to the questionnaire, which you filled in to help construct a picture of how current professional learning programs help teachers (in metropolitan schools) integrate students of Indigenous descent into their general classroom practice.

If you were asked to be the mentor for a teacher newly arrived in Western Australia, with 3-4 Indigenous students, of varying abilities, in her metropolitan class of 32 students what would your advice be: -

1. About making her classroom inclusive for her students? (Are there any key issues/ ideas that may help her achieve this?)

2. About programs or resources in the school that might be useful?

3. About accessing professional learning in regard to an inclusive approach for Indigenous students especially in the area of literacy?

If this new teacher was part of your teaching cell, are there any suggestions you might have: -

4. For her classroom programming and daily work pad?

5. In regard to literacy needs for the Indigenous students?

6. In regard to school policy for Indigenous students and key issues/personnel?

Keeping in mind that school policy is based on an inclusive education for all, at your classroom level: -

7. What do you think have been the most effective professional learning programs/ workshops you have attended? Why?

8. Would these programs/workshops be the same with regard to literacy, for Indigenous students? Please explain?

9. In your opinion, what are the key issues/ areas to inclusive education in literacy for Indigenous students?

10. Are these issues adequately covered in professional learning workshops in metropolitan schools? Why/ why not?

Lastly in your opinion if a teacher uses so called ‘best practice’ in the area of (SAE – Standard Australian English) literacy in their metropolitan classroom: -

11. Do they need to make further considerations / adjustments for Indigenous students? Why/ why not?

12. Out of curiosity do any metropolitan Indigenous students speak AE or dialect?
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