Participation of Indigenous students in education: an exploration of the significance of place in an Indigenous community school

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This dissertation is the report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University.

2008
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 tertiary institution.

__________________________
This study explores the pedagogical significance of life experiences of Indigenous students from an Australian community school and its relation to school participation. In particular the study focuses on the implications of students’ associations with ‘place’ on school curriculum. With the rate of participation of Indigenous students in education currently lower compared with non-Indigenous students, this study further informs our understanding of this phenomenon.

The study is interpretive, based on the perspectives of students, staff and parents of an Indigenous community school successful in improving participation of Indigenous students to Year 10, and informed by the researcher’s own lived experiences teaching Indigenous students in three different countries. During this time, it was observed that Indigenous students’ association with place was a significant factor in their participation in education.

Gruenewald’s multidimensional framework for place-conscious education is employed to guide the analysis and interpretation of data as it provides a means of addressing two important issues revealed in the review of literature on participation. First, participation is examined and interpreted in different ways, and second, a common thread in the differing interpretations is the concept of place. Analyses of the data reveal two overarching dimensions: Place and Aboriginality. Further analysis, informed by notions of place-conscious education reveal five identifiable elements for
enhancing participation of Indigenous students in education: Curriculum Method, Curriculum Content, Careers, Partners and Identity. Educational programs that recognise how these elements are related to place and action them are likely to be more effective in enhancing participation of Indigenous students in education.
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PART I: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY
Any traveller destined for Country Town travelling by road east from the coastline in Western Australia starts to experience a feel of the town far before reaching it. Somewhere, after an hour of travel, the vegetation starts to subtly change into scrubland and gumtrees. The colour of the sand changes from the dark fertile soils of the wheat belt to the red sands of the interior. When the traveller reaches Country Town, the encounter is similar to reaching the other smaller towns along the way after a lengthy period of travel from the previous town – a welcome sight because the immediate feel is that Country Town has more to offer than just a place to rest.

The main street is about thirty five meters wide, said to have one day accommodated camel-drawn carts that had to be able to turn around. The main street is well-lit and the tourist orientation of the town becomes evident by the signboards advertising tourist attractions and accommodation. Towards the right hand side after entering the town, is an impressive oval that is kept green throughout the year by irrigation from a water recycling plant. Further on, it is evident that the town is a popular stop for truck drivers who use the route to deliver cargo to the neighbouring city. The Shire\textsuperscript{2} has catered for this by allocating wide open spaces for drivers to be able to park their vehicles whilst resting before their onward journeys. To accommodate the constant stream of traffic, the service station, which also retails groceries and fast food, is open.

\textsuperscript{1} Country Town is a name used to represent the actual town in this study for the purposes of confidentiality.

\textsuperscript{2} A Shire is a local governing body in Australia. The body is responsible for services such as collection of rates, refuse removal and maintenance of roads in the local municipality.
for business twenty four hours each day, every day of the week. The hours of
operation of such businesses are crucial to the local residents also, since the nearest
other service station and grocery store would be more than forty kilometres away.

Travelling further along the main street towards the eastern end of the town, the
traveller encounters another caravan park, a welding business and the office of the
local Shire. Adjacent to this office block is a park that could best be described as an
oasis. Shady trees, lush green lawns and well-maintained barbeques are some of the
facilities available to residents and visitors. It is then that the heritage buildings come
into sight. On the left, they are constructed of sandstone and on the right is a two-
storeyed hotel that has been restored to its former glory. Between them, on either side,
are smaller slightly neglected buildings that are sometimes unoccupied for lengthy
periods of time. These smaller buildings seem to have some history to them, with one
business claiming that a once famous miner slept there. Other facilities that exist in
the town include a police station, fire station, gymnasium, swimming pool, tennis
court, lawn bowls club and a golf course.

It is when the traveller diverts from the main street into the inner suburb that the
socio-economic variables of the town become evident. The quality and design of
houses are not sophisticated. They are small to average in size ranging from solidly-
constructed brick and tile buildings to timber-constructed transportable buildings. The
block sizes average around six to eight hundred square metres. Individual blocks are
usually fenced. The low rainfall of the area makes it almost impossible for a garden to
grow without reticulation. It is not uncommon, though, for some properties to display
well-established gardens.
The low income status of the majority of residents is evident by the general state of the buildings and the vehicles that are common in the suburb. Government-subsidised buildings are evident by their sandstone-coloured face brick exteriors. These houses are usually occupied by Indigenous people who are unable to afford to rent private houses. The higher income residents have houses built on the outskirts of the town towards the north and south. The houses occupied by these residents are quite impressive in terms of design, size and maintenance.

The town’s almost rustic feel gives the traveller the impression that it is the perfect location for an Indigenous school. The town is small and compact and is surrounded by native vegetation. There are many activities that the boarding students can engage in during school hours and after. Just ‘going out bush’, hunting, swimming in water holes and camping are some of the activities that students boarding at the school can engage in to make them feel ‘at home away from home’. The large proportion of Indigenous residents adds to the social circle of students who are boarding at the school hundreds of kilometres away from their own communities.

Turning north off the main street, the traveller passes a heritage-listed building that was originally home to the Catholic Mission built in 1902. The building now functions as a temporary boarding facility for the school. Continuing north past this building, the traveller reaches the school itself. The initial visual impact of the school on anyone is likely to be quite profound. The school takes on an appearance quite unlike any of the other institutions in the area. The buildings are modern, surrounded by well-maintained gardens with flowers and trees. Four flagpoles indicate the school’s recognition of the Federal, State, Indigenous and its own identity.
The school is an independent Kindergarten to Year 12 School. It is operated by a Governing Board of mainly Indigenous elders who established the school in 1980 as a result of their discontentment with the State Education System in the region. These elders felt that the State Education System was failing their children in terms of the content and methodologies that were being used. They wanted their children to attend a Christian school that had a strong Indigenous character. Founding members felt that the curriculum at the school should be delivered in a manner that is culturally appropriate for Indigenous students. The curriculum was to develop students especially in the areas of Mathematics and Science so that Indigenous students could attend universities and technical colleges. Indigenous parents felt that this model of education would contribute to breaking the vicious cycle keeping their children from excelling in school.

The entrance to the school leads to the administration block which accommodates two offices and a staff common room. The restricted available space for attending to students and visitors has prompted the Governing Board to construct a temporary wall at the opposite side of the building so that it could be extended at a later date. The office block is usually abuzz with activity throughout the day as it hosts visitors, support personnel and staff from the boarding facility who have regular meetings with teachers regarding the affairs of boarding students.

Outside the office block, during breaks, the sound of children playing fills the air. Students from a wide range of age groups mix without any complications. The school accommodates students from Years 1 to 10 and may soon progress to Year 12. Apart from odd cases, bullying is virtually non-existent and so are problems such as theft,
vandalism and graffiti. It is not uncommon for students to greet visitors cheerfully and
to even hug them if they are familiar. It is this loving, safe environment that clearly
distinguishes this school from many others.

The high school classrooms are closest to the office block. Each classroom is
approximately eighty square metres. Since class sizes in the high school have been
capped at twenty five students in each room by the Governing Board, these rooms are
spacious and are able to accommodate a variety of teaching strategies. In each of the
classrooms, the floors are carpeted and well-resourced with a variety of audio-visual
equipment. One of the special features of the classrooms is the large number of
windows in each room. An average of twelve windows are fitted to each room
because of the Indigenous character of the school. The Governing Board is of the
opinion that Indigenous students regard walls as barriers whilst windows give
students a sense of being connected with the outside.

Just behind the high school, towards the north, is the school oval. The condition of the
oval is of a high standard and is a credit to all staff and students who are involved in
its maintenance. The focus on a high quality environment rests on the belief by the
Governing Board that the school environment impacts on the way students conduct
themselves.

The facilities described so far are not adequate to accommodate the school’s needs. It
is for this reason that other facilities available in the older part of the school have to be
used. The Kindergarten, Pre-primary and Literacy Support classes have to use
facilities that are located across the road from the school. Some of the buildings in this
section are in a state of disrepair and are not ideal as learning environments. It is widely regarded by staff that the reason for the lower rate of growth of the Kindergarten and Pre-school compared to the rest of the school is due to these facilities being inappropriate. However, the old buildings provide shelter from the weather and the Governing Board sees this arrangement as a short-term one as it seeks to expand the construction of new buildings at an affordable rate.

The building once owned by the Catholic Mission has two floors, the upper floor accommodate sleeping quarters for boarding students and the lower floor, amenities for boarding students. The lower floor also accommodates the offices of the boarding facility Supervisor and the School Administrator. At the time of writing, construction of new boarding facilities had started. The new facilities will greatly increase the capacity of the school to accommodate more students.

Country Town is noted for its semi-arid climate. The maximum average temperature for winter is approximately 17 Degrees Celsius and in summer 32 Degrees Celsius. The average annual rainfall is 260mm and, while the average rainfall is fairly evenly distributed throughout the year, there is considerable variation from year to year. The high temperatures experienced do not seem to have any significant impact on students’ passion for the outdoors. Students remain enthusiastic to engage in outdoors programs such as horse riding, swimming and sport throughout the year.

The distinct seasonal variations add a unique dimension to life in the town. The winters are characterised not only by relatively low temperatures but also by the exhilarating experience of significant rainfall. In spring, the wildflowers form carpets
of coloured patches along the roadsides and in the fields. Summer brings the warm, still nights during which families sit on the porch for long hours ‘just having a yarn’ (conversation). The summer night sky, free of all the distracting city lights, puts on the greatest display of stars that the human mind could imagine. In autumn, the bright sunny skies and the slight chill in the air tempts many residents to drive out into the bush to have a camp-out.

The distinct call of the crows and the sight of emus sauntering up to the fences add to the daily experiences to anyone who takes the time to notice. Anyone driving from the town into the bush is bound to encounter kangaroos, goats, sheep, wild horses and camels. These animals are able to survive because of the numerous waterholes in the area. The largest waterhole, situated about an hours drive to the north, is deep enough to accommodate ski boats.

Towards the south end of the town, the wide open spaces have been taken up by numerous owners of horses. Driving past the various ranch-style properties, one could easily forget being almost in the Australian outback. The horses are quite content feeding off hay in the shade of tall gum trees. The school owns a fenced paddock in this vicinity with about 12 horses. Students have lessons during the day and the horses are accessible to them after school hours.

Leaving Country Town and continuing the journey east for twenty minutes, the traveller will reach a city of about thirty five thousand people. The presence of the city gives more clarity to why the Governing Board has established a school in Country Town and why people, mainly Indigenous have chosen to make Country
Town their place of residence. The city has all the modern facilities such as large retail outlets, cinemas, restaurants and sports stadiums. Indigenous students residing in Country Town are able to enjoy living in a rural place and still be within close proximity to a wide range of amenities in the adjoining city. Other residents of Country Town not associated with the school also have the benefit of living in a rural place but still be within easy travelling distance to shopping and social services. It is not uncommon for travellers to return to Country Town permanently themselves, as has happened with many of its current residents.
Despite some gains, Indigenous Australians are yet to achieve equitable outcomes. Many Indigenous students continue to ‘drop out’ at or before Year 10 and far too few remain at school to complete Year 11 and Year 12, or its vocational equivalent. Of those who do complete Year 12, few obtain the scores needed to gain entry into university. Most Indigenous students, regardless of their completion year, leave school poorly prepared relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts. These outcomes limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage. (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2006: 4)

The MCEETYA (2006) report by the Australian Government regards the high ‘drop out’ rate of Indigenous students from school and the low number of these students achieving adequate scores for university entrance as endemic problems in current Australian society. The authors of the report also attribute the wider social and economic disadvantage of Indigenous people in Australia to the nature of the participation of Indigenous students. The report calls for new perspectives on the issue of participation of Indigenous students in education.

This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of effective participation of Indigenous students by examining the pedagogical significance of place-related lived experiences of students, parents and staff on participation. The study is interpretive, focusing on an Indigenous community school which has been successful in enhancing the participation of Indigenous students in education up to Year 10. The school was recently ranked as one of the fastest growing independent schools in Western Australia (Gibson, 2004). A research site such as this, where Indigenous students are showing positive trends in education, is significant in light of the report by
MCEETYA (2006) and a study by Zubrick, Cox, Dalby, De Maio, Griffin, Hayward, Lawrence, Milroy, Milroy, Mitrou, Pearson, Shepherd & Silburn (2006) showing that Indigenous students in Australia are lagging behind other population groups in terms of participation. In this study, an understanding of the basis for success of the school in encouraging student participation until Year 10, and possible reasons for not being able to experience similar success in Years 11 and 12, is sought. To this end, perspectives of participants and stakeholders from the school community are analysed to inform the key research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education in Australia?

Researching Indigenous contexts is complex, especially for a non-Indigenous researcher. One of the complexities relates to the use of the terms “Aboriginal”, “Indigenous” and “Aboriginality”. After extensive consultation with Indigenous members of the case study school community and academics at Murdoch University it was decided that, in this study, the term Indigenous will be used to refer to Indigenous people of Australia. However, the term Aboriginal is retained whenever participants in the study used the term. Aboriginality is used to refer to Indigenous cultural identity.

SITUATING THE RESEARCH

The study has its roots in my lived experiences in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. In each of these countries I worked closely with Indigenous students, parents and staff as a teacher and school administrator. My observations indicate that Indigenous students are not participating in education at the level evident for non-Indigenous students. Higher rates of absenteeism and low achievement grades
accompany higher drop-out rates. Authorities in each country seem to be struggling to find effective solutions. In Australia, most recent studies indicate that the participation of Indigenous students is at an unacceptably lower level to the rest of the Australian population (MCEETYA, 2006).

The participation of Indigenous students, in this study, is sought to be understood in terms of how place-conscious or place-based education contributes to its enhancement. Place-conscious education refers to the integration of dimensions of place into the curriculum (Gruenewald, 2003a). Such integration broadens the definition of curriculum to include aspects of students’ learning experiences that are often related to factors beyond classrooms. By contributing to the multiplicity of curriculum, the findings in this study will enable educators to make more effective choices in terms of what they implement in classrooms to encourage Indigenous students to remain in school until they complete their education. Scott (2003) states that “curriculum is always a selection” and that selection usually “occurs on the basis of logical delineations between domains of knowledge; distinctive mental or cognitive operations; cross-cultural social distinctions; and deliberate activity about the ideal society” (p. 1).

The premise that place-conscious education is significant to the participation of Indigenous students emerged from my lived experiences as a teacher. During these experiences, I observed that when curriculum implemented included aspects of students’ lives with which they were familiar such as their beliefs, traditions, family history and place, they showed higher levels of interest in their learning and attended school more regularly.
In this chapter I provide a description of how my lived experiences in each of the three countries gradually contributed to the premise that principles of place-conscious education contribute towards effective strategies for enhanced participation of Indigenous students in education. The description begins with my experiences as a teacher in South Africa where the participation of Indigenous Black³ students in education remains well below that of the other population groups (Zulu, 2003). It is within this context that the significance of place in the lives of Indigenous students, and hence strategies for enhanced participation, first surfaced when I observed how Indigenous students, after years of being forced to live away from urbanised settlements, struggled to fit into urban schools when apartheid was abolished.

My initial observations were reinforced in New Zealand where I was a teacher in a predominantly Indigenous (Maori) community. I describe how trends of low levels of participation were again observed and how dimensions of place associated with students’ lives were significant to such trends. For example, I noted how Maori students were leaving school far sooner than other groups, had high levels of absenteeism, and were not achieving results at higher levels than other population groups. I describe how, as a class teacher, recognition of students’ association with place in their lives proved to be an effective strategy in enhancing the participation of Maori students.

The third and most recent episode of my lived experiences working with Indigenous students occurred in Australia. Discussion will reflect how I had come to a

³ The term ‘Black’ was preferred by the Indigenous population of South Africa because this group originally felt that it was on the basis of their skin colour that they were classified as a separate group (Ginwala, 1977). The Indigenous population have continued to use the term to refer to themselves as a cultural group under the current democratically elected government.
predominantly Indigenous school as principal where, in keeping with national and international trends, Indigenous students displayed poor participation trends compared to non-Indigenous students. The latitude I had as principal to address the problem enabled me to draw on my developing understandings of place-conscious education and implement a wider strategy to enhance the participation of Indigenous students. The strategy consisted primarily of a curriculum that gave wider recognition to students’ lived experiences and knowledge of local geographic locations. Over my three year employment period at this school, enrolment of Indigenous students increased by about seventy five percent. This growth occurred mainly in the second and third year of assuming my position as principal – about a year after the implementation of the new curriculum. The high student population growth rate was accompanied by low student absences and led to the school being ranked as the ninth fastest growing independent school in Western Australia at the end of 2003 (Gibson, 2004: 7).

The chapter concludes by providing a brief synopsis of each of the remaining chapters of the dissertation. This synopsis provides an overview of how the two themes of low levels of participation of Indigenous students and place are threads that hold the study together.
MY LIVED EXPERIENCES AND THE EMERGENCE OF PARTICIPATION AND PLACE AS SIGNIFICANT THEMES IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Most of all, perhaps, we need an intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has anything magical about it, but we cannot study the future. (C.S. Lewis)

South Africa – Experience One

I am a fifth generation South African of Indian descent. To describe myself as such, I stir the notorious circumstances of my life and that of my previous generations. I say this because it took 102 years for the minority ‘White’ South African government to acknowledge that Indians were a permanent part of the South African population. In so doing, they changed the status of Indians from being “South African Indians” when they arrived in the country as indentured labourers aboard two ships from India in 1860, to “Indian South Africans” in 1962 after the country became a republic. Even the new status of the Indian population reflected the decades of discrimination yet to come because the status of ‘Indian’ was to appear in our identity documents. We were to be one of three race groups, which combined made up about 75% of the total population, to be ruled by the minority ‘White’ government. The other two groups were the ‘Coloureds’ and ‘Blacks’.

Levels of discrimination

The Indigenous Black people were given far less recognition than we received as Indians, not only as Indigenous people of South Africa but as individuals. The apartheid government conveniently labelled them ‘non-white’ and ‘African’ but the people referred to themselves as ‘Black’ since discrimination was based on skin colour and the skin colour of the oppressor was white. The situation of the Indigenous
people was far worse than that of Indians. The apartheid government recognised them as a threat to their minority rule and sought to repress them severely to ensure that they did not improve themselves socio-economically to challenge for power. To demonstrate the extent of repression, the state did not recognise the Indigenous family, which is the basic unit of human settlement, for residence or taxation. Put simply, they were a non-entity. Ginwala (1977) had this to say about the status of Indigenous South Africans:

All Black South Africans [were] denied the right to share a common society, to be part of a South African nation. People from diverse nations of Europe [were] considered able to come together and make a homogenous nation under the South African sun, Indigenous inhabitants [were] made statutory foreigners. (p.15)

**Spatial separation**

Racial discrimination in South Africa then, existed at different levels. Although Indians were not treated as equal to the ruling White population, they were more privileged than the Blacks. The Blacks were almost thirty times greater in number than Indians and were considered to be far more of a threat to White minority rule than Indians were. Accordingly, different race groups were allocated locations for settlement based on race. Whilst the White population occupied prime real estate close to the large cities, Indians and Coloureds were further away but within easy commuting distances to and from Central Business Districts. Blacks were allocated settlement zones at greater distances from the cities. There was minimal contact between them and the large metropolitan areas. This was a deliberate attempt by the government to maintain its fragile political control of the country. The government believed that if they controlled urbanised locations, they could hold on to power. The
product of this strategy however was a Black population that was overwhelmingly of rural origin with many of them never having been to a city in their lives.

The remote and often unproductive hinterland occupied by Black people was to shape the nature of participation of Indigenous students. Spatial separation meant that they were not recognised as part of the country’s mainstream education system. The schools for Black students were grossly under-funded leading to buildings being in a constant state of disrepair. Students, already coming from homes in which there was abject poverty, were forced to purchase their own books. The remoteness of locations meant that students and staff were also not within easy travelling distances to resource-rich cities. Even if they were within reach, Black adults were prevented from travelling into the cities by a ‘pass system’⁴ – if they did not have a pass they could not be in the cities. The city was therefore a world that lay beyond that of a typical Black student. Yet it was in these cities that the curriculum was drawn up by White bureaucrats to be implemented in Black schools. The curriculum content and methodologies prescribed had minimum regard for the unique lived experiences of Indigenous students. To add insult to injury, Black students were forced to learn Afrikaans (the language of the White ruling elite) in addition to their own languages.

My contact with Black students during this time was minimal. I was of Indian descent teaching in a school for students of Indian descent. Students at my school had more freedom of movement around the country compared with Black students, not having to produce a pass for being in the city. Schools for Indian students also had greater

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⁴ The ‘pass’ system was introduced in South Africa by the Pass Laws Act of 1952. This law stipulated that every Black South African over the age of 16 had to carry a pass book when in a White metropolitan area. To qualify for a pass, the person had to meet a number of requirements which was quite difficult. This pass system was meant to restrict the movements of Blacks to the cities (Southern Nazarene University, 2007).
access to the lifestyle and resources of cities. Curriculum content at the school in which I taught was based largely on students’ urban lived experiences.

Political transition

I could not have anticipated the impact that the first South African democratic elections in 1994 would have on Indigenous students. Indigenous schooling was already crippled by decades of under-funding during the apartheid era. There were few incentives to keep Black students attending their own schools. These schools were characterised by regular disruptions, poor building facilities, poorly qualified teachers, few resources and overcrowded classrooms. Perhaps most significantly, there was no distinct strategy in place by the Black education authorities to enhance the participation of Black students in education. It was no surprise therefore, that when apartheid was abolished, Black students sought enrolment in more privileged former White, Coloured and Indian schools thinking that they would experience greater success in their education at these schools. In 1995, the first batch of students enrolled at the school in which I was teaching. The school was completely unprepared for the transition into a multi-racial school. Black students were extremely nervous and I could only assume at the time that many of them took the step of coming to an Indian school because they desperately wanted to acquire the best education they could. Although the school in which I was employed had just the basic facilities, these were substantially better than Black students had in their former schools.

Between 1995 and 1997, the trickle of students seeking enrolment turned into a flood to the extent that students had to be turned away for lack of accommodation. Our own class sizes had grown from around thirty in each class to over forty. Our new
Indigenous intakes could not believe that schools could offer them so many privileges. Simple privileges which Indian students had taken for granted such as receiving free writing books and loan text books, were greatly appreciated by Black students. Most of the Black students coming to us were travelling on average for over two hours each way to reach the school from their remote home locations and initially felt that the sacrifice was worth making.

Curriculum challenges – the emergence of place as a significant consideration

Outside the classroom, Black students adapted quite well to their new school environment. However, as much as they were keen to be integrated into the new non-racial learning environment, they were hampered from making rapid progress. A major factor preventing students from becoming engaged with the learning programs was the ‘foreign’ curriculum that Black students encountered at the Indian school. The curriculum implemented at the school did not accommodate Black students learning in their own language. Apart from a core group of high achievers, most Black students had low levels of English which made it practically impossible for them to gain from the school’s established system of education. To overcome the problem, Black students had to be classified as those having English as a Second Language (ESL). This was uncomfortable for staff members because Black students were being taught separately from the other Indian students and this gave Black students the impression that they were being segregated once more. There was minimum assistance from the Department of Education for these ESL students. Each school was left to find its own solutions. We had entered into an era of having to cope with the aftermath of Black students enduring decades-long separation from the rest of the country’s students.
Another complicating factor for Black students was the ‘foreign’ content and methods of teaching. The curriculum content was based on the lived experiences of Indian students in urbanised locations and not on rural, regional and remote locations from which Black students originated. Whilst Black students preferred to learn with their peers, Indian students were quite accustomed to the lecture-style method of teaching, preferring to work individually. Black student participation suffered almost immediately as was reflected by their increasingly poor attendance and low retention rate. The novelty of attending a much better resourced school soon ended as the struggles with language proficiency and foreign curriculum content and methods became too great. This trend was disappointing to staff because for decades Indigenous students could not progress into Years 11 and 12 and then into university because school disruptions, poorly qualified teachers and overcrowded classrooms denied them from meeting tertiary education standards. Cruelly, now when a better resourced education system was available to them, they did not have the necessary background to benefit from it.

It soon became apparent that any attempt at enhancing the participation of Indigenous students in South Africa involved major paradigm shifts in terms of how the curriculum was delivered at the school. The curriculum content and methods used at the school over the years did not suit our new arrivals. We could not, for example, study the layout of the school’s nearest city centre using text-rich resources. Black students would have been greatly disadvantaged since by law they were not allowed to visit the city and their lack of literacy skills made existing texts inappropriate. Furthermore, the lecture-style method that seemed to have suited Indian students so well left Indigenous students feeling isolated because they preferred learning in
groups. The group style of learning seemed to reflect their lives in the communities they belonged to in the way they drew from information, organised and reflected their learning. The different lived experiences and cultural backgrounds of Black students forced staff to re-examine the entire curriculum structure but were unable to develop a significant strategy to enhance the participation of students. As staff deliberated over this dilemma, contact with Indigenous students who had dropped out of school revealed that they felt alienated by the education process that did not adequately recognise their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. In other words, the failure of the school to engage them in learning contributed to these students’ decision to discontinue their schooling.

**New Zealand – Experience Two**

When I arrived in New Zealand, I was employed as a teacher in a location with a high population density of Maori people. Although there was no law such as the Group Areas Act in South Africa that forced people to live only in certain areas, I found that Maori people tended to live together in common locations. The school in which I was employed was located in such a place.

I soon realised that the nature of participation of Maori students was quite similar to that of Black students in South Africa. I noticed that Maori students’ schooling experiences were characterised by erratic attendance, superficial engagement in learning programs and low rates of retention. Many Maori students I spoke to did not wish to progress to Year 12 for reasons which I attributed to an overall lowering of expectations by themselves and people around them. Maori students at the school generally disliked school and, as a teacher, I was preoccupied with having to deal with
consistently disruptive behaviour. Teaching and learning in my classes were of secondary importance and only occurred during limited windows of opportunity in a typical day.

Curriculum issues related to Maori students’ discontent

I discovered that the reasons behind Maori students feeling dissatisfied with their schooling experiences were quite similar to that given by Black students in South Africa. Maori students said that, as a cultural group, there was very little that they could identify with in the curriculum to keep them engaged at school. The curriculum being implemented was clearly designed for Pakeha (people of European descent) students who had lived in urbanised environments for decades. Rural-urban migration of Maori people was a recent trend making urbanised environments less familiar to students. I too found the topics for discussion and the text-rich format of resources to be inappropriate for Maori students. The situation was not helped by the absence of any clear set of school-wide strategies to address Maori students’ waning enthusiasm to remain in school.

Standard western-based tests that I administered as part of the school-wide testing program showed Maori students as underachievers compared with Pakeha students. Highly complicated group tasks, on the other hand, which I administered as part of my own testing program where students learnt as a community, showed Maori students as bright, vibrant thinkers with a high level of intelligence and alertness. Maori students’ connections with tasks depended strongly on what these students could relate to. When curriculum included Maori folk tales, Maori history and technology related to Maori heritage, these students reflected deep levels of
engagement with learning tasks. When students were assessed on their understanding in the languages, mathematics and science, using culture-rich resources and methods such as action research and group work, they revealed a high level of creativity and problem-solving skills. This disparity in academic performance between standard testing and more culturally-appropriate assessments suggested that Maori students were misplaced in a very elaborate, but foreign, education system.

Conversations with Maori students confirmed that their families were recent migrants to the suburb having previously moved from rural locations or other smaller towns. This would have meant that students’ parents and guardians had spent all their lives living in locations quite unlike that of the school in terms of the level of urbanisation. Many students stated that their extended families, especially their elders, still lived in country and remote locations where there were not even services such as electricity or piped water. They still had strong connections with these families and often went back to renew and strengthen cultural ties. For many students, locations associated with origins of their elders represented strength and confidence. Whenever they were in trouble, they could go back to these locations and find solutions to troubles that plagued them.

Parents indicated to me that they had moved to the urban suburbs for the sake of their children’s education and future employment but were disappointed with the education system. According to them, their children’s generally disruptive conduct in school was related to the learning environment in the school being different from the way Maori people learnt. They were critical of the way students were forced to sit behind desks for long periods of time and questioned the assumption that such practice was
the best way to facilitate students’ learning. Parents’ emphasis on the importance of
Maori song and dance as being ideal ways to teach language and culture was evident
in their support of students participating in cultural festivals held at the school. During
these festivals, Maori students were completely transformed, often from being
disruptive students in class to passionate, highly disciplined and talented performers
of exquisite traditional Maori dancing and singing. This led me to believe that I could
harness students’ enthusiasm to develop deeper levels of engagement with learning
programs by acknowledging their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

The first steps towards developing a practical strategy to enhance the participation of
my Maori students began with consultation with Maori staff. They indicated that I
should allow students to learn in a ‘whanau’ or family. They claimed that this was
how students would have approached problem-solving had they still lived with their
extended families in the ‘marae’ or village. Maori staff felt that students had a
different way of looking at the world that was based on their intimate relationship
with the land. I took this advice on board and integrated place-related Maori history
and tradition into the curriculum. Maori staff suggested I try varied lessons, consisting
of outdoor lessons, inviting parents to talk, using short information sessions combined
with hands-on activities and group problem-solving activities. These learning sessions
were extremely successful. Maori staff attributed this success to programs
acknowledging the naturally social and outgoing nature of students who were
inherently connected to people and open spaces. The positive impact on the way
Maori students started to respond to the program was almost immediate. Soon
students in my class started to reflect positive trends in participation. They attended
school more regularly, were more often deeply engaged in learning tasks and retention rates were higher compared to Maori students in the rest of the school.

I discovered that the strategy suggested by Maori staff members was along the lines of a form of education known as ‘kaupapa Maori’. This theory “urges Maori to replace the Western culture of the Pakeha or European system with traditional Maori ways of thinking and being in the world” (Rata, 2004: 59). This unique way of looking at the world was mainly through activities that mirrored the way students would have acquired knowledge, organised and learnt from it in their traditional communities.

However, the problem arising in implementing what I now understand as ‘place-conscious’ kaupapa Maori education was that the school’s mainstream curriculum was based on the standard New Zealand curriculum. This curriculum, Maori staff and parents stated, was drawn up by Pakeha administrators living in cities. Although the standard curriculum was very accommodating to the implementation of kaupapa Maori, the status of the latter was clearly one of being ancillary to the mainstream westernised curriculum. It was left to individual teachers to decide which of the two systems they would implement and to what degree. Whilst my strategy yielded positive outcomes such as improved attendance, enthusiastic engagement and higher student retention, many teachers continued to implement the standard western curriculum because kaupapa Maori education involved too much consultation with Indigenous Maori stakeholders and extra lesson preparation. The lack of a school wide implementation of kaupapa Maori meant that I too was restricted by the degree to which I could implement the program because I still had to implement a considerable proportion of the school’s mainstream curriculum.
After successfully applying for the position of principal of an Indigenous school in Australia, I left New Zealand with my family for the opportunity to work in yet another context of Indigenous education.

**Australia – Experience Three**

On arrival in Australia I discovered that the school was established 20 years ago by a group of Indigenous parents dissatisfied with the State education system in terms of its content and methodology. They claimed that the learning content used in State schools disregarded the cultural background and lived experiences of Indigenous students. Parents were of the opinion that whilst the core of the school’s curriculum strategy should consist of the Curriculum Framework of Western Australia, the curriculum should also accommodate the unique ways that Indigenous students learnt and the unique knowledge content familiar to Indigenous students. This accommodation should occur within a Christian environment consisting of values and principles upheld by Indigenous members of the Governing Board.

**Participation of Indigenous students**

There were two major trends I observed about the participation of Indigenous students at the school. First, students attended school irregularly. Second, the school had a record of low retention of students. While there was a steady stream of Indigenous students seeking admission, they then dropped out after only a few months. Third, whilst at school, students showed low levels of engagement with learning activities.

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5 The Curriculum Framework of Western Australia is a framework that provides a structure around which government and non-government schools in Western Australia can build education programs that ensure students achieve agreed outcomes (Curriculum Council, 2007).
Interviews with staff, parents and students revealed that students generally did not like school and felt that coming to school was not worth the great distances they had to travel. In other words, those I spoke with indicated that the school had to offer students and parents something ‘special’ to keep them in school or they would simply do what they had often done – migrate from one school to another searching for a meaningful educational experience.

Perhaps most significantly, I also observed that students were reluctant to progress to Years 11 and 12. Of even more concern was my discovery that many students who did complete Year 10 at the school, often after being the happiest and most industrious, merely went back to their communities and lived on social support, got into drugs or ended up in prison. The school was failing to break the vicious cycle that Indigenous people were in. This cycle consisted of students coming from communities in which the majority of youth had left school before completion, and were returning to their communities without completing their schooling. This failure undermined one of the main objectives of the school’s Governing Board in establishing the school – to open a school were Indigenous students felt accepted, comfortable, and where they would be encouraged to remain until they completed their education and moved on to viable post-schooling education and training.

Further research revealed that the curriculum being implemented at the school was a standard one based on the West Australian Curriculum Framework. It was similar to the curriculum being implemented at the neighbouring State school in terms of content and method. Both schools were having similar problems of a high turnover of Indigenous students. Students attending the school at which I was principal were not
deeply committed to learning as evident through their high absenteeism, disruptive behaviour, and poor achievement levels. The nature of participation of these students was similar to Black students attending Indian schools in South Africa and Maori students studying a westernised curriculum in New Zealand. What was common in each of the three countries was that curriculum gave little recognition to Indigenous students’ cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. This suggested to me that the lack of recognition was contributing to the low levels of participation of Indigenous students in all three contexts. It also suggested to me that the implementation of a successful strategy to enhance the participation of Indigenous students rested on my ability to implement a place-conscious curriculum that harnessed the lived experiences of Indigenous students, similar to what I had done with kaupapa Maori education in New Zealand to enhance the participation of Maori students.

I consulted with Indigenous elders on my plans to restructure the curriculum approach of the school. They indicated that the approach was exactly what they wanted for the school. However, they also indicated that over and above anything to do with the curriculum, they were keen to see me first building sincere relationships with people based on trust. Before expecting to succeed in making changes, at the very outset I had to first prove my intentions in coming to work at the school. The stakeholders (Board members, prominent families, staff and the community) had seen a number of new ideas being implemented by staff who struggled to get the co-operation from the school community. According to them, new programs could only succeed if the person who initiated them gained the respect of Indigenous people at every level of the social structure – from gardener to Board Chairperson. Gaining the respect and trust of these key participants would ensure that they would be the driving force of
any initiative implemented. This meant that any successful strategy to enhance student participation first had to be developed on a wider scale than the confines of the school. As head of the institution I had to establish relationships with the wider school community, understand the social structure of the school community and gain the approval and trust of Indigenous elders.

Realigning the curriculum

Part of the wider learning experience was getting to understand the facts behind the location of the school. The location of a large comprehensive school catering for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 in a settlement of only three thousand people intrigued me and would have intrigued many observers. The school was quite a distance away from resources and the city. But the issue of the school’s location seemed central to the reason why the Governing Board of Indigenous elders felt that the school should be successful. According to the Board, the location of the school had much in common with the cultural background and lived experiences of majority of the parents and students associated with the school. These parents and students had strong links with similar locations like that of the case study school community. Like the location of the school, many parents and students also lived in mining towns surrounded by red sand, open plains and thriving gum trees. The vast natural environment around the school was home to exquisite native fauna and flora which seemed integral to the lives of Indigenous people in the area.

The dilemma facing me at this point was that I had insufficient knowledge of the merits of place-conscious curriculum for Indigenous students to establish its principles as a framework for a strategy to enhance Indigenous student participation.
From my experiences in South Africa, I had some evidence of how the ignorance of place in education discouraged participation of Indigenous students. In New Zealand, I had implemented kaupapa Maori as a pedagogy that embraced some recognition of students’ lived experiences and cultural backgrounds and experienced some success. My strategies therefore to motivate staff to develop and implement a more comprehensive place-conscious education program had to be restricted to the areas of curriculum content and methodology. More specifically, the curriculum implemented had to: (a) strive for achievement of student outcomes as contained by the Curriculum Framework of Western Australia, (b) use Indigenous-appropriate methods of curriculum delivery and (c) use Indigenous-appropriate curriculum content.

Adding relevance to the curriculum

The core curriculum courses of English, Mathematics and Sciences became the focus of the strategy for enhancement of participation. These were the three curriculum areas that the founding members of the Board wanted to improve because Indigenous students were not making significant progress in State-run schools especially in Years 11 and 12. Curriculum enhancement took the form of orientating curriculum content in these core curriculum areas so that students’ lived experiences were recognised – such as locations from which students’ originated, relationships with extended families and practical interests. My experiences in New Zealand led me to believe that in taking this step, students and parents would be able to see the relevance of the curriculum to their own lives. This orientation was made achievable by the structure of the Curriculum Framework of Western Australia. The framework was structured such that it specifies student outcomes but not content used to reach the outcomes. Familiar content, drawing on the vast background of students’ lived experiences,
meant that students became confident enough to interact in lessons. For example in History, the lives of famous Indigenous boxers, athletes and political figures brought passion back into learning. In the Sciences, tracing the life cycle of the ‘bardi grub’⁶ yielded intense interaction seldom seen previously in students. Greater scope was provided for the input by elders in the form of storytelling in Studies of Society and Environment.

Similar success was achieved in terms of curriculum methodology. Culture-appropriate methods such as greater scope for working in groups, stronger links with the natural environment and practical, hands-on action research activities linked to academic knowledge resulted in more interest shown by students. Already popular courses such as Aboriginal Studies, Horsemanship and Bushrangers which were enjoyed because they were previously just an escape from indoor class activities were strengthened in terms of their alignment with the Curriculum Framework. Students continued to enjoy the outdoor nature of these study areas but activities had closer links to carefully identified student outcomes extracted from the Curriculum Framework of Western Australia.

In the process of establishing relevant curriculum, some differences between conventional theories and Indigenous schooling emerged. For example, principles for effective group work strategies in conventional schooling as advocated by Killen (1996) had to be revised when implemented at the school. Killen (1996) claims that heterogenous groups of students in terms of gender, abilities and personalities are likely to be most effective as a collaborative learning strategy. At the school however,

⁶ A bardi grub is the larvae stage of an insect found living in the roots of some trees. It is a delicious form of bush tucker for Indigenous people living in the school community.
I found Indigenous high school female students unwilling to participate in the company of boys, especially when they were not confident about their knowledge on a topic. Other students who belonged to the same extended family worked well together whilst those students belonging to feuding families preferred to work away from each other. As staff, we had to consistently modify our practice of conventional schooling strategies to cater for Indigenous students’ ways of learning.

Another example of differences experienced between conventional and Indigenous schooling was in the area of affective learning theory. According to Canter & Associates (1998), a learning community is primarily the classroom or the school in which the student feels safe and is supported by peers and staff. At the school however, staff began to understand the concept of a learning community in a broader context that embraced the wider community. This wider community consisting primarily of extended family was also an important source of knowledge for students that needed to be integrated into the daily curriculum.

Over a period of two years, as a result of consistently adjusting our curriculum implementation at the school, aspects of participation such as attendance, engagement and retention improved exponentially. In terms of attendance, more students started to seek enrolment at the school. Students were also deeply engaged in the learning programs and in terms of retention fewer students were discontinuing their schooling. Clearly, an effective strategy to enhance the participation of Indigenous students at the school had materialised.
After the first year of my tenure, the growth trend of the school was not all positive. It was clear that the increased retention of students led to swelling in numbers between Kindergarten and Year 10. However, the number of students interested to move on to Years 11 and 12 or to TAFE and other tertiary options was negligible. The school’s basic form of place-conscious education, consisting of enhanced place-conscious methodology and content, had made strong connections with students during the compulsory years (Kindergarten to Year 10) but had failed to launch students into post-compulsory avenues. This trend suggested that curriculum content and methodology would only be parts of a holistic approach in the enhancement of Indigenous students in education. The larger picture was most likely to appear from findings of a more detailed and systematic study.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, my lived experiences in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia were described. In all three contexts, my experiences in working with Indigenous students, their families and staff indicated that Indigenous students were lagging behind non-Indigenous students in terms of participation in education. I have observed Indigenous students to drop out of school before completion of Year 12, have high rates of absenteeism, perform poorly in assessments and show disinterested in school.

My observations also revealed that students’ lived experiences were integral to the successful education of Indigenous students. More specifically, strategies to enhance Indigenous student participation seemed to rest on the extent to which such strategies recognised students’ place-related lived experiences. In South Africa, I witnessed how
the absence of a place-based curriculum focus contributed to Indigenous students’
origins and lived experiences were disregarded by the school’s mainstream
curriculum which led to a high disengagement of Indigenous students from
participation. In New Zealand, the limited success I experienced as a class teacher in
implementing the place-based kaupapa Maori curriculum indicated that there was
some merit in the recognition of students’ place-related lived experiences in strategies
to enhance the participation of Indigenous students in education. In Australia, the
merits of place-conscious education in strategies to enhance participation became
stronger when curriculum methodology and content were orientated to students’ lived
experiences and cultural ways of learning led to improved attendance, high levels of
engagement in learning activities and improved student retention. My experiences in
these three contexts led me to undertake this study with the aim of understanding the
role of place in the participation of Indigenous students in a broader, more holistic
context. Figure 1.1 consists of a summary of the main points in Chapter One and
introduction of the next chapter.
Chapter One

*Introduction to the research*

- **South Africa**: previous spatial separation makes it difficult for Black students to integrate into non-racial schools.
- **New Zealand**: kaupapa Maori curriculum that recognises students’ places of origin leads to higher levels of participation compared to other programs for Maori students.
- **Australia**: culturally appropriate curriculum content and methodology that gives recognition to Indigenous students’ lived experiences results in success in the participation of these students up to Year 10.

Chapter Two

*Participation of Indigenous students in education*

SYNOPSIS OF REMAINING CHAPTERS

Chapters Two and Three consist of a review of literature that further explore the themes of *participation* of Indigenous students and *place* respectively. These concepts emerge as significant ones in Chapter One. In Chapter Two, the concept of participation is discussed. This chapter also examines literature that informs how participation is understood to be the outcome of a broad range of factors that have varying degrees of influence on Indigenous students’ decision to complete their education.

Chapter Three consists of a review of literature on curriculum as a broad construct and the significance of place-conscious curriculum in the participation of Indigenous students in education. Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidimensional framework of place-
conscious education is examined and used to develop a conceptual framework of understandings of how place is significant to the participation of Indigenous students. In Chapter Four, the methods employed in conducting this research are discussed. Discussion focuses on the interpretive approach to this study, why the case study approach is used in this study, selection of the research site, selection of respondents, gaining access to the school, the issue of ‘persona’, use of in-depth interviews and the interview process and the outcomes of applying Gruenewald’s (2003a) framework to the data.

In Chapter Five and Six, the findings are analysed and presented. Findings for the first two identifiable elements of participation: Curriculum Method and Curriculum Content are presented in Chapter Five. Here, analysis focuses on how methods employed in teaching Indigenous students and the content of learning activities are significant to participation. Chapter Six features analysis of the three remaining identifiable elements: Careers, Partners and Identity. Here, analysis focuses on how careers, partners in the education process, and how Indigenous respondents viewed themselves as citizens, are related to student participation respectively.

In the final Chapter Seven, the study concludes with a holistic response to the research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education in Australia? This includes an overview of the main implications of the study and some questions that this study raises for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

Participation of Indigenous Students in Education

But to go to school in a summer morn,
Oh, it drives all joy away!
Under a cruel eye outworn,
The little ones spend the day –
In sighing and dismay.
(William Blake)\(^7\)

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described how my lived experiences in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia indicated that Indigenous students were not participating at the level of other population groups. During these experiences, students’ lived experiences and their associations with place emerged as potentially important considerations in strategies implemented to enhance the participation trends of Indigenous students. This chapter and the next consist of a review of literature related to participation of Indigenous students in education in Australia, and the significance of place in participation respectively.

The review of literature in this chapter focuses on how literature relates to the way participation has come to be defined by my lived experiences. More specifically, literature will be reviewed to establish if researchers also conceptualise participation holistically to represent attendance, engagement and retention of Indigenous students in education. In this holistic conceptualisation, attendance refers to whether students are getting to school each day, engagement refers to whether students are

\(^7\) In the poem *The Schoolboy* by William Blake, artist and poet, 1757-1827.
enthusiastically involved in the learning activities facilitated by the curriculum, and retention refers to whether students remain in school until completion of Year 12 or equivalent. Some of the research reviewed are not specifically related to Indigenous students but, due to other factors, are considered significant to Indigenous student participation. For example, rurality is related to the participation of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students but, because the majority of Indigenous students live outside major cities in regional and remote places (MCEETYA, 2006), is considered important for discussion.

CONCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Aspects of participation

In Australia, evidence indicates that researchers also define participation in terms of attendance, retention and engagement. However, these aspects have generally not been researched holistically but rather independently. For example, research by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (2002) focuses primarily on retention of Indigenous students in school until the completion of Year 12 or equivalent. This report by DEST (2002), based on data from the Australian National Bureau of Statistics, argues for more effective initiatives to enhance retention on the basis that only 38% of Indigenous students completed Year 12 compared with 76% of non-Indigenous students.

Another comprehensive research focussed on attendance of Indigenous students. In this research Gray, Hunter & Schwab (2000), used the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Census data to reveal that an average 3.25% of Indigenous students have never attended school as compared with 0.75% of non-Indigenous students. In addition, although
Indigenous children and youth comprise 3% of the student population, they make up 12% of school suspensions in New South Wales. This establishes the issue of Indigenous student participation as more serious than is first evident. The collective impact of these disruptions is that, over the period of schooling from kindergarten to Year 12, Indigenous students are likely to lose between two and four years of schooling through absenteeism whilst rates for the total population are less than half these. Attendance trends then, according to Gray et al (2000), is an indicator of participation and the basis for the need to implement measures for enhancement.

In a study by Eckermann (1999), the level of engagement of Indigenous students in the learning process at school is the focus. According to Eckermann (1999: 2), even if statistics do indicate a high level of attendance, it does not mean that students are engaging in high levels of participation. For example, interest to attend school to Year 12 means little to students “who, on the whole, did not enjoy school”. A report by The University of Melbourne (1999) states that almost 60% of Aboriginal students at Year 12 level perform in the two lowest performance bands (Quintiles), almost double the rate for non-Indigenous students. These reports therefore claim that healthy participation should refer to how interested students are in participating rather than remaining in school whilst resisting participation.

**Added dimensions to conceptions of participation**

Although researchers generally define participation in terms of attendance, retention or engagement, these definitions are also intricately linked to a variety of factors such as rurality, education programs, employment trends, cultural composition of
communities, family influence, preconceptions and misconceptions, institutionalism, administration of grants, health, self-identity and self-efficacy.

**Rurality**

There is evidence to suggest that it is generally expected that Indigenous students will inevitably reflect negative trends in school attendance because of their strong affiliations to country, regional and remote locations (MCEETYA, 2006). Schools in such locations are few and widely distributed thus imposing financial costs and inconvenience on students. This is true especially for students in senior secondary school where Indigenous students have shown significantly higher levels of absence (Gray et al, 2000). The situation is not helped by findings reported by the Australian National Training Authority (1998) regarding infrastructure in place for rural students. In a report titled: *A bridge to the future: Australia's national strategy for vocational education and training 1998 – 2000* the authority reveals that infrastructure related to students wishing to attend senior secondary school are lacking and indicates an acceptance that erratic school attendance is an unavoidable consequence of scarce social services in rural locations.

The acceptance that attendance and retention of students living in rural locations is a natural outcome of locations with low population densities appears at government level. According to government authorities more than sixteen years ago, they were meeting their responsibilities by allocating resources in a fair manner to develop such locations (The National Board of Employment, Education and Training [NBEET] Report, 1991). MCEETYA (2006: xi), however found that “despite considerable effort and expenditure on the part of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, industry and rural communities themselves, the provision of post-
compulsory education and training in and for non-metropolitan Australians remains uneven and unique”.

Acceptance that rural students’ retention and attendance will be disproportionate to city dwellers is not only ingrained but also widespread across Australia. In Tasmania 37% of non-metropolitan students completed Year 12 (NBEET, 1991). This is despite the Tasmanian Department of Education stating that it has effectively introduced a number of initiatives to retain young people in education and training (Abbott-Chapman & Kilpatrick, 2001). “The completion rates for non-metropolitan Northern Territory were even lower (18%), reflecting the reality that in most Indigenous communities outside Darwin and Alice Springs there is very little provision for secondary education” (NBEET, 1991: 33). Marks, Fleming, Long & McMillan (2000) found that over the past 20 years, non-metropolitan students who have reached Year 12 relative to metropolitan students had not improved. In all contexts, there was general acceptance by education authorities that they were doing all they could and that retention differences between residents of cities and rural locations were ‘natural consequences’ of the nature of Australia’s spatial development pattern.

Of greater concern, research indicates that, within the mind-set of authorities believing that they were doing everything possible to enhance rural students’ attendance and retention, trends are worsening. James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis & Stephanou (1999) found that the gap in participation between rural and urban students had actually increased. According to James et al (1999), in a study commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth
Affairs (DEETYA) findings indicate that “university students from rural and isolated backgrounds comprised 19.2% of the total student population in 1997, a participation share dramatically below the equity reference point of 28.8% derived from 1996 census data” (James et al, 1999: 1). According to James et al (1999), as costs of travel increase, participation of rural dwellers in education is likely to decrease and travel is already a considerable debilitating factor to participation (Clark, 1987). This cost is also proportionate to distance travelled. For example, a study by Abbott-Chapman et al (2001) of participation trends of students in Tasmania indicates that poor participation in education is due to the great distance students have to travel. In particular, students have to move to one of the eight senior secondary colleges around the state, located in Hobart (4), Launceston (2), Burnie (1) and Devonport (1). Consequently, students from rural and isolated areas have to move away from home to live in student residences or to board with relatives. Almost a decade earlier, similar trends were noted by Choate, Cunningham, Abbott-Chapman & Hughes (1992) and NBEET (1991). These strands of evidence indicate that new initiatives to enhance the retention and attendance of rural students will need to be effective enough to counter an already sliding trend.

Rurality, then, is intricately connected with retention and attendance trends of students living far away from large cities. Since it is difficult to predict how future governments will approach the challenges that rurality places on the nature of participation of students, these trends may therefore need to be understood in terms of how to enhance them within existing infrastructure and operating frameworks.
Inflexible education programs

The scarce facilities available to Indigenous students in rural locations also contribute to such facilities offering fewer options to students in terms of study directions compared with urban facilities because such facilities are smaller and there are fewer specialist staff available (NBEET, 1991). The resultant inflexibility, according to NBEET (1991), results in a negative impact on student retention because when students are forced to pursue a study direction with limited choices, they view education as inappropriate preparation for job requirements. The report by NBEET (1991) urges the development and delivery of new learning pathways and targets education and training options to be appropriate to students’ circumstances and aspirations. It states that programs offered in schools need to be both relevant and adequate for rural young people to avoid eroding the confidence of youth, leading to education facilities being underutilised and facing closure. Relevant programs are only likely to materialise if there is a democratic partnership between students, staff and parents that encourage input and feedback from all parties.

However, the general perception that retention of students is the concern of schools means that establishing democratic partnerships between parents and staff is likely to be difficult. The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (1999) found deeply entrenched systems behind the mismatch between programs offered by schools and available opportunities for students to follow once they completed their school education. NBEET (1991) found schools reluctant to make significant changes when such mismatches were revealed even though staff members had the skills to effect such changes. Grace (2001) states that, although university trained staff are better prepared to help students develop cognitive and meta-cognitive skills to cope with
flexible delivery programs, they are unable to be effective unless they know what parents and students want from the education system in terms of preparing students for adulthood. Consequently, a study that reveals perspectives of each group on participation is likely to contribute towards establishing a framework for a democratic partnership between them.

**Employment trends**

There is some literature suggesting that the retention of Indigenous students in education may be related to the nature of job opportunities available to them in commonly occupied regional, rural and remote locations (Zubrick et al, 2006). Usually there are only a few jobs available for students after they complete their school education, leading them to see little point in finishing their education. Forcing students to remain in school under such conditions is unlikely to be effective (Abbott-Chapman et al, 1986; Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001). When jobs are available in such locations, they are usually unskilled requiring minimum academic attainment. Students are therefore encouraged to leave school after Year 10 and not progress to Years 11 and 12 (Fullarton et al, 2000).

In contrast however, Sercombe, Cooper, Drew, Love, Omaji & Trudi (2002) suggest that the lack of employment opportunities does not necessarily lead to a decreased interest to stay in school. Sometimes, unemployment results in pressure on students to stay in school so that they could become best qualified for the few jobs available. Sercombe et al (2002) found that the increased growth rate of Year 12 completion and university enrolment during 1984 – 1994 in Australia was in response to the high unemployment rate of youth during this period. Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler (1999)
agree with Sercombe et al (2002) that unemployment puts pressure on students to stay in school but are of the opinion that merely because students remain in school does not mean that they are more interested to learn. They may be doing so only so that they can secure scarce jobs. Therefore, what courses students study or how well they perform at senior secondary school, are not seen as critically important or being of any benefit to their careers. Abbot-Chapman et al (2001: 8) summarise students’ predicament by stating that “post-school outcomes for rural school leavers involve even more risk and uncertainty than is general across the population because of more restricted work and lifestyle choices, and the economic and labour market uncertainties associated with rural and remote regions”.

The contrasting views regarding the impact of the employment market on student retention makes compelling argument to seek clarification from students and parents how they perceive this employment market, and how this perception impacts on student retention. Literature indicates that it should not be assumed that student retention trends are influenced by the employment market only in one way or another – the influence may be quite complex.

Cultural composition of communities

One study suggests that the attendance of Indigenous students is the outcome of the cultural composition of rural and regional towns most commonly occupied by Indigenous people. Eckermann (1999) states that it is incorrect to assume that non-Indigenous people erode the cultural basis of Indigenous people thereby weakening the social structure that contributes to students remaining in school. In a study of Rural Town, Eckermann (1999) found that after integration with the rest of the
population, Indigenous residents quickly came to terms with life in a largely foreign environment – socially, culturally and educationally. Having to live with non-Indigenous people on a day-to-day basis was initially new, but the presence of other cultural groups in the community contributed to Indigenous students starting to experience more years of schooling.

However, a multicultural population does not always have positive outcomes for attendance of Indigenous students. Eckermann (1999) also found that although the multicultural population of Rural Town enhanced attendance, this increased schooling did not lead to better or an increased rate of employment because there was a general reluctance to employ Indigenous people except for labouring jobs. The reluctance by businesses to employ Indigenous people except for purposes of casual, unskilled, low-paying labour undermines the interest of students to remain at school because students believe that no matter how well they perform at school, they will not be employed. Attempts to create harmony and acceptance between the community and employers are likely to be guided by a good understanding of how these groups feel about issues contributing to their relationship.

Family influence

A number of studies indicate that families are often at the centre of participation trends in combination with other factors. For example, the investigation by James et al (1999) of the plight of rural students in participation trends demonstrates how the influence of families and rurality combine to affect attendance. The researchers considered whether distance and isolation are equally as influential, if not more, than socioeconomic status for the lower participation rates of rural youth in further
education. They found that the lower attendance rates of rural students were “due in the main part to the characteristics of families related to rurality, rather than to rurality itself – the economic and educational backgrounds of families living in rural areas” (James et al, 1999: 10). According to Morgan (2006, 41-42), even when parents themselves have had no formal education, their influence can be considerable:

[Students] do not interpret this as a result of their parents lacking ambition on their behalf. These people often made valiant efforts to encourage their children towards educational success, including relocating to areas where they felt the opportunities would be greater. However, their own lack of formal education meant that they were unable to steer a course, to provide the sorts of narrative maps and social templates, which might have persuaded their children of the possible outcomes or purposes of conforming to the educational institutional regime.

Studies by Anderson & Vervoorn (1983); Connell, White & Johnston (1991) and Williams, Clancy, Batter & Girling-Butcher (1993) supported the argument that low attendance and retention rates were products of a combination of rurality and various other factors. The study by Anderson & Vervoorn (1983) of Queensland school leavers found a correlation between aspiration and social class in rural settings. The researchers found that students who belong to families that earn higher incomes and have higher standards of living stay in school longer. Studies by Connell et al (1991) and Williams et al (1993) showed that rural disadvantage was in the main part related to family and community attributes. In other words, being located far away from big cities has a more significant impact on family sizes, closeness of family units and interrelationships between community members than on school participation directly.

Another way in which families of Indigenous students play a significant role is the way they influence student engagement. When Indigenous families accord adult status to their teenage children (Sercombe, 2002), Indigenous students experience conflict in
that, on the one hand they are recognised as adults by their communities and on the
other hand, they are treated as children within the education system. This puts
pressure on students to disengage from schooling. Eckermann (1999: 2) found that
school means little to students:

[Who] were aspiring towards adulthood and adult status. Remaining at school
guaranteed that young men and women continued to be classified as children
by their community – leaving school, gaining some sporadic employment or
unemployment support, ensured at least a measure of independence and hence
status, even if full employment remains illusive.

However, Indigenous student participation in education is not always negatively
influenced by families. For example, Indigenous students are less likely to be
subjected to gender stereotyping by parents (Gray et al, 2000). This can be a
significant advantage over students from other cultural groups because, according to
findings in a longitudinal study by Marks et al (2000) on the patterns of participation
of students in Year 12 and higher education in Australia, parents in general expected
girls to proceed along academic lines and boys to be more practically inclined. This
resulted in early school leaving amongst boys, a trend which was predicted to increase
in the future. According to Gray et al (2000), the difference between gender
participation rates of Indigenous students is about 1.5% compared to the average of 7
to 8% amongst the general population (Marks et al, 2000). This suggests that gender
differences may be less of an issue for Indigenous students when compared to other
students.

Societal and family influences can be major factors in students’ interest to attend
school but operate in tandem with other factors and vary from one community to
another. An in-depth understanding of the complex relationship between these factors
is likely to contribute towards clearer strategies to establish and maintain high levels of student engagement with education.

Preconceptions and misconceptions

Student engagement with school programs can also be the product of influence exerted by school staff. Tasmanian research shows that pressure applied by staff especially on higher achieving students to take academically oriented Year 11 and 12 studies, implied that staff considered VET options to be intellectually inferior to academic courses (Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001). Students were thus pressurised to endure academic options for fear of being labelled as underachievers. Abbott-Chapman et al (2001) claim that even when members of staff referred to career choices as ‘post-school pathways’ it reflected preconceptions. The concept post-school pathways failed to convey the complexity of young people's lived experiences (Dwyer, 1993; Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler, 1998 and 1999; Williams et al, 1999; Wyn, 1998) with Beck (1992: 43) having stated that the increasingly competitive market place for jobs and training, and “risk in being able to negotiate life successfully, when there are no apparent rules or guidelines” makes generalisations increasingly invalid.

There is also a misconception that all Indigenous students who disengage from school early do so because they dislike school. Sercombe et al (2002), for example, found that a possible reason for students leaving school early but not taking up part-time study is because Indigenous students are likely to leave school early so that they are recognised as adults. According to Schwab (1996) Indigenous people see the benefits of education not in terms of higher future earnings, but rather a gain which is realised by the entire community in the form of increased cultural capital when students are
able to take their place as adults in society. It is important to know from students and parents how schools are able to negotiate between issues of cultural and financial investment to enhance participation of students in education. This information will give researchers and policy-makers information as to how this can be achieved without infringing on cultural values. A better understanding of these complex issues will also enable school staff and education authorities to effectively deal with poor Indigenous participation trends rather than regard it as endemic or inevitable.

Institutionalism

There is some evidence to suggest that Indigenous students are disengaged from education because they no longer have input into the process. Ownership of the process has been largely handed over to institutions. Research by Edgar (1979), Clark (1987), James et al (1999) and Smith (1994) showed that when ownership of education is handed over like this, programs become increasingly detached from addressing students’ needs and students begin to feel unconvinced that the programs are relevant to their career aspirations, leading to disengagement. Morgan (2006) states that many ethnographical studies of Indigenous students have revealed that there is generally a clash between institutional expectation and the subcultures of Indigenous students. Morgan (2006: 42) states:

[The studies] show the failure of schools and teachers to recognise and incorporate in pedagogical practice the different modes of Indigenous communication and creativity, and the ways in which the communal culture of Indigenous children and their families produce situations of resistance and opposition.

Evidence to support claims that institutions play a significant role in the participation process of students in education goes back almost three decades. Edgar (1979) found that a major reason for students not continuing with education until completion or
aspiring to achieve university entrance grades was because of their unfounded negative perceptions of tertiary studies. These unfounded perceptions were perpetuated by the level of misinformation that existed in schools. According to Edgar (1979), institutions were ill-informed about further education options and were therefore not contributing to students’ attitudes that led them to maintain high work ethics. He attributed this inadequate information base to the closely guarded autonomies of each school which led to such schools becoming isolated from other institutions. Edgar (1979) maintained that these schools, instead of pooling their resources to increase the range of services available to students, functioned independently with each providing a limited range of learning experiences.

Years later, Clarke (1987) supported the position of Edgar (1979) by stating that parents and students had lost ownership of the education process. Clark (1987) claimed that students’ awareness of even basic information such as accommodation, tertiary education options, work or even post-compulsory schooling options was limited and this lack of awareness was contributing to students leaving school early. More recently, Smith (1994) found that when asked for reasons for working towards university admission, students were usually vague. James et al (1999) described how students grew up with fears of metropolitan areas and mentally set themselves to remain in their own communities even if their communities did not have the facilities to provide them with education facilities beyond Year 10.

There is evidence to suggest that the efficiency of institutions alone cannot guarantee success in engaging Indigenous students. Such is the case in the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Plan (AEP) by the Aboriginal Education Directorate of the
Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST, 2002). The policy embraces 21 goals to promote the effective retention of Indigenous students (DEST, 2002: 106 – 107). The goals are meant to encourage involvement of Aboriginal people in education decision-making, equality of access to educational services, equity of educational participation and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes (DEST, 2002: 106 – 107). Despite a well-researched and well consulted plan, the participation of Indigenous students continues to lag behind that of the wider population (MCEETYA, 2006), and may indicate that a stronger partnership between institutions and school communities may be required.

When ownership of the education process is re-established, curriculum practice will start to reflect the needs of students. Eckermann (1999) found that when this happened, increased participation through enhanced engagement of students was inevitable. This is evident in the way Eckermann (1999: 14) described the growth of a school in her study:

From [a] small beginning, the Aboriginal community set its own agenda by highlighting, exploring, researching and publicising its cultural vitality. This process has led to real change – real community development – of which extended educational achievement will undoubtedly be one measurable outcome.

However, the same study also found that community involvement should be genuine interaction between members of the wider community, staff and students rather than just the existence of committees and complex policies. Eckermann (1999: 5) comments on the ineffectiveness of such situations by stating that committees:

[H]ad relatively little direct impact on Aboriginal children's academic achievements. The number of children successfully completing the Higher
School Certificate (HSC)\textsuperscript{8} with aggregates which would enable them to gain tertiary entry, for example, did not rise significantly.

This revelation by Eckermann (1999) indicates that students, parents and staff needed to have more than a superficial understanding of each other in order to foster and maintain relationships. Participation in education should have its roots in the communities that institutions serve. When this happens, the education process is likely to be supported by a wider range of participants who feel that they have a valuable input to make.

**Administration of grants**

There is some evidence indicating that Indigenous student participation is closely linked to the administration of grants by the government. These grants have not always made a positive impact. Eckermann (1999), for example, states that grants usually lead to enhanced student retention because it is a condition that students have to attend school in order to receive the grants. This is evident in the implementation of the Aboriginal Secondary Grant Scheme and the Aboriginal Study Grant, both important in moving Indigenous people towards self-determination. Eckermann (1999) states that although the grants initially led to an increased willingness of Indigenous students to remain in school, students were not experiencing any greater satisfaction at school. Higher retention rates were related to the fact that parents were legally obliged to send their children to school up to Year 10. Students were not engaged with school programs and poor participation trends continued.

\textsuperscript{8} The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is a qualification for students who successfully complete secondary education (Year 12) in New South Wales, Australia (New South Wales Department of Education, 2007b).
Gray et al (2000) found the poor response of participation trends to financial measures not surprising. According to Gray et al (2000), policymakers tend to rely too much on quantitative data to formulate policies which direct how grants should be administered. Gray et al (2000) state that policies founded on principles extracted from the lived experiences of people are likely to be more effective. Edgar (1979) expressed similar concerns twenty years earlier. Edgar (1979) and Gray et al (2000) are of the opinion that grants need to make meaningful connections between education programs and students’ lived experiences as well as practical life skills that they need for the future such as understanding transport, budgeting, job seeking, using newspapers and how to function within bureaucracy. A deeper understanding of parents’ and students’ needs may be a good basis to understand the context in which they exist, and more fully revealed through qualitative research.

**Health of students**

It is reasonable to expect that health would feature as a significant factor in the trend of poor participation of students in education. If students are unwell they are likely to miss out on regular schooling. However, research on the participation of Indigenous students in education yielded mixed views on the impact of health on participation. A report by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 2006) states that nine health issues have the potential to be barriers in the participation of Indigenous students in education. They are: low life expectancy, low birth weight, poor diet, high disease rate, social/emotional well-being, substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy, childhood trauma, and childhood injuries. A report by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) (2004) confirmed that health and nutrition are key determinants of Indigenous student
participation in education. However, research carried out by Zubrick et al (2006) in which a number of health variables were examined with respect to participation, found that none of the highlighted health issues have any direct bearing on student participation. The only factor that Zubrick et al (2006) established as being significant to student participation was adequacy of sleep. The study found that there was a positive link between the number of hours students had restful sleep and students’ levels of participation. It is possible therefore that sleep is associated with a wide range of factors related to students’ lives and these may need to be understood in order to adequately understand the participation trends of Indigenous students.

Students’ self-identity

Some researchers suggest that the participation of Indigenous students is intricately linked to students’ perception of their self-identity. One group of researchers stated that a positive self-identity increases the chance of a student completing schooling and thus gives students access to the full range of further education, training, employment and chances of an improved life (Lamb & Ball, 1999). These researchers used Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM) to establish that “only about 15% of the variation in rates of entry to university was related to differences between courses rather than between individuals” (Lamb & Ball, 1999: 30). According to these researchers, how students felt about themselves was the overwhelmingly stronger factor responsible for student retention until school completion, meeting university entrance requirements and starting tertiary studies. This study therefore highlights the need for schools and other educational institutions to make greater contributions to students developing a sense of positive self-identity rather than focusing on academic attainment alone.
Another researcher found that there was a strong link between self-identity and domains in which success is considered to be important by students. Harter (1988) states that when students value and regard themselves as adequate in domains such as scholastic competence, behavioural conduct, athletic competence, social acceptance and physical appearance, they are likely to feel positive about themselves and experience high levels of success in their engagement at school. This indicated that it was important for schools to establish how different students regard themselves in terms of the domains that constitute their participation in schools and to be actively involved in creating opportunities for students to demonstrate positive self-identity.

A third group of researchers found negligible links between self-identity and participation of students in education (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone & Fanshawe, 2000). In a study examining the relationship between school outcomes and the self-identities of young Indigenous Australians, these researchers found that the self-identities of young Indigenous Australians concerned “both who [they] are, and what [they] think of who [they] are” (Purdie et al, 2000: 4). The researchers found that although Indigenous students have a sense of positive self-identity, this existed and was demonstrated only within the context of their own communities away from school. The same level of positive self-identity was not evident in situations outside community contexts such as in schools resulting in the belief that “high self esteem and a positive self-identity as an Indigenous person did not appear to be necessarily linked to successful educational outcomes” (Purdie et al, 2000: 38). It is not uncommon, therefore, for Indigenous students to feel positive about themselves, their culture and their family, and yet not feel positive about school. Whilst this study will
inform policy makers and school leaders about the relevance of self-identity in the participation of Indigenous students, the concept is a complex one that needs to be researched independently.

**Students’ self-efficacy**

One study indicates that Aboriginal students show contrasting levels of self-efficacy between tasks which could be contributing to their disengagement from school. Purdie et al (2000: 6) state that “Indigenous students may have high self-efficacy beliefs about their sporting abilities, greater attention needs to be focussed on helping them develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities in classroom settings”. It is possible that students have high self-efficacy beliefs in sport because they view sport as an escape from academic tasks in the classroom or it could also be because playing sport is a community activity where they play as a team. A deeper understanding of this issue may indicate a basis for attempts at raising students’ level of self-efficacy in the classroom. A higher level of self-efficacy in the classroom is likely to lead to greater academic success and prolong participation in education.

**CONCLUSION**

Participation, then, similar to the way the concept emerged in my lived experiences, is also defined in terms of attendance, retention and engagement. The aspects, however, have generally not been researched holistically but instead have been independently the focus of researchers. Furthermore, evidence indicates that researchers view participation as intricately linked to factors rooted within the fabric of wider society, beyond the boundaries of schools. In the next chapter, the multi-dimensional framework of place-conscious education is presented as an effective strategy to
holistically embrace the different aspects of participation and their wider links. Figure 2.1 presents a summary of the main points from Chapter One.

**Figure 2.1: Summary organiser of Chapter Two**

Chapter One  
*Introduction to the Research*

Chapter Two  
*Participation of Indigenous Students in Education*

- Aspects of participation
- Influence of rurality, inflexible education programs, employment trends
- Influence of cultural composition of communities, family influence and preconceptions
- Influence of institutionalism and the way grants are administered
- Influence of dissemination of information
- Influence of health of students, self-identity and self-efficacy

Chapter Three  
*Place-conscious education for Indigenous Students*
CHAPTER THREE
Place-conscious education for Indigenous students

There has never been a time when it is so clear that typical instruction wedded to textbooks and teacher lesson plans and characterised by discipline-bound classes throughout the school day must be changed. These conditions do not improve learning – they inhibit it. (Yager, 2003: 9)

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter revealed that the participation of Indigenous students is generally defined by researchers in terms of attendance, retention and engagement. Research also revealed that these aspects are intricately connected with a variety of factors that extend beyond the confines of school sites. Although the studies shed some light on what researchers consider to be essential aspects of effective participation, they did not clarify why varied associations between students’ lived experiences and school curriculum were observed to have had corresponding degrees of success during my lived experiences as an educator. For example the literature does not adequately explain why, in South Africa, when Black students travelled great distances to the previously exclusive Indian schools and encountered a curriculum that did not recognise their lived experiences and ways of learning, they disengaged from learning and dropped out of school in large numbers. Neither does the literature adequately explain why, in New Zealand, some Maori students made excellent progress in curriculum when their lived experiences and preferred ways of learning were considered, displaying higher levels of participation than those in other classes. In Australia, when greater acknowledgement was given to students’ lived experiences, enrolments doubled within the space of three years.
In this chapter, the pedagogical significance of students’ place-related lived experience to participation in education is explored. More specifically, the chapter presents a theoretical basis for the significance of place-conscious education in promoting holistic participation of students. Holistic participation includes all three aspects of participation generally recognised by researchers: attendance, retention and engagement. In order to prepare the reader to consider place-conscious education as curriculum, the chapter begins with a discussion of curriculum as a broad construct that encompasses a range of understandings, and how place conscious education is one such understanding that may be particularly relevant to Indigenous students.

The next section consists of a review of literature related to how researchers understand the pedagogical significance of place in the participation of Indigenous students. Due to place-conscious education being a relatively recent concept (Wither, 2001, Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000), the review begins with a discussion of the status and origins of literature in the text. The literature review then reveals how researchers’ contributions to the curriculum construct fall within main themes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Gruenewald’s multi-disciplinary framework for place-conscious education draws the research themes together and provides a framework for the analysis of data in this study.

**CURRICULUM AS A BROAD, EVOLUTIONARY CONSTRUCT**

In this study curriculum is understood as a broad, multi-dimensional construct that is open to change through curriculum inquiry and curriculum theory (Brad & Kennedy, 1999; Moore, 2003; Reynolds & Weber, 2004; Scott, 2003; Walker, 2003). In seeking to understand how place may be related to the participation of Indigenous students in
education, the findings will contribute to the multiplicity of curriculum theory.

Reynolds & Webber (2004: 2 – 3) state:

Curriculum theory moves when in multiplicities and lines of flight, not in dualisms or either/ors. Curriculum theory IS not this or that – defining it leads to this or that. Curriculum theory considered as the number of ideologies or methodologies does not define multiplicity.

In order for this research to contribute to the multiplicity of curriculum, it must add to what already exists rather than present alternate approaches or ideologies. Reynolds & Webber (2004: 3) add:

We do not escape dualism in this way, since the elements of any set whatever can be related to a succession of choices, which are themselves binary. It is not the elements or sets which define the multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something, which has its place between the elements or between the sets.

The multiplicity of curriculum presents policy makers and leaders with the responsibility that whatever selections they make has a significant bearing on students’ lives (Moore, 2003). Ultimately, the selections that educators make will determine the nature of experiences that students will encounter at school and how they will progress towards adulthood. Moore (2003: 5) states that “what we know affects who we are (or perceived to be). Issues of knowledge entail issues of identity”.

Brady & Kennedy (1999: 9) add:

If the curriculum is seen as the means by which young people and adults gain the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to be productive and informed citizens in a democratic society, then everyone in the community has a stake in the shape and form that the curriculum takes.

Of even greater significance is the expectation by modern societies that schools have the ultimate responsibility for the way students become adults in the community. In support, Walker (2003: 4) contends that:

Communities expect schools to help them address poverty, crime, threats to public health, a waning sense of community, and needs for cultural
enrichment. Many communities also expect schools to prepare young people for jobs in industries important to the local economy.

Curriculum, then, that is broad, flexible and evolutionary will give educators a better chance of constructing and implementing effective school programs. In the education of Indigenous students, the understanding of effective curriculum is important in light of the marginal gains they are making compared with other places in Australia (MCEETYA, 2006). This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of curriculum as a broad construct so that it offers educators greater options to facilitate more effective education programs for Indigenous students. The study will achieve this by seeking to establish the pedagogical significance of place-consciousness in Indigenous education.

PLACE-CONSCIOUS EDUCATION AS A CURRICULUM CONSTRUCT

Place-conscious education, also sometimes referred to as place-based education, adds to the multiplicity of curriculum by strengthening the connections between curriculum and students’ lived experiences and ways of learning (Gruenewald, 2003a). Gruenewald, a contemporary educator who has theorised place-conscious education, makes a compelling case for the pedagogical significance of place. Pedagogical significance refers to ways in which place-conscious education enhances student attendance, engagement, and retention.

Gruenewald (2003a: 620) argues that when curriculum becomes more conscious of place related to students’ lives, “pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualised so that place matters to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways”. A tangible
outcome, according to Haas & Nachtigal (1998), is that place-conscious education connects students to local geographic places leading them to be active local citizens. This point may be significant in explaining why the trends amongst the Black, Maori and Indigenous Australian students showed such participation trends – trends reflected the degrees to which the curriculum recognised students’ associations with place in each context. Gruenewald (2003a: 620) states:

Place-conscious education, therefore, aims to work against the isolation of schooling’s discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling. Furthermore, it aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there.

The aim of providing students with “firsthand experience of local life” and “shape what happens there” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 620) is so that students are able to excel academically and become empowered to improve the quality of life in local communities respectively (Wanich, 2006). Place-conscious education is therefore broader than ‘outdoor education’ and ‘environmental education’ (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Outdoor education is more contextual and tends to be dominated by print and media (Knapp, 1996: ix) and environmental education focuses on developing citizenship amongst students so that they care for the environment (Orr, 1994: 14).

RESEARCHERS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE-CONSCIOUS EDUCATION

A review of literature related to the significance of place-conscious education reveals that it is a relatively recent concept. This observation is supported by Wither (2001) and Woodhouse & Knapp (2000). Evidence-based research pertaining specifically to place-conscious education and Indigenous students in Australia is limited,
necessitating having to draw from a range of contexts and sources. The theoretical literature by Gruenwald (2003a), central to this study, is based on a context in the USA. A number of other evidence-based studies are also American. It is appropriate therefore to indicate the status of the literature in the text. Appendix A\(^9\) indicates whether the various strands of research have origins in Australia or overseas, and whether such research is evidence-based, policy or philosophy. A number of significant observations can be made from the way researchers have contributed to understanding the term place-conscious education. First, most of the research is philosophical with overseas origins. They are also recent, with most research dated after 1990. In this category, research with Australian origins is more recent with most research conducted within the last five years. Second, evidence-based research is not as extensive as those that are philosophical. Here, the overseas studies (Loveland, 2003; Meichtry & Smith, 2007; Williams, 2002; Wither, 2001) are specifically place-related. Australian studies (DEETYA, 1997; Zubrick, 2006; MCEETYA, 2006; NBEET, 1991) are not specifically place-related but contain data that support the argument for place-conscious education. Third, research on place-conscious education has not found its way into policies to any significant extent. It is only in recent years that policies implemented by Australian education departments are showing greater recognition of the significance of connecting curriculum to place in efforts to enhance Indigenous student participation (Lester, 2006a, 2006b; Percival, 2006; Singleton, Smyth, Roos & Daley, 2006). The Schools in Partnerships Program implemented by the New South Wales (NSW) Government is one example of such recognition (Lester, 2006a). This initiative seeks to enhance “local knowledge, aspirations and job opportunities in the curriculum” (Lester, 2006b: 12). Percival (2006) states that

\(^9\) Appendix A also performs another function. The summary it contains facilitates the development of a conceptual framework discussed later in this chapter.
teaching students about connections to Land and Place should be key features of effective policies in Australian education. Singleton et al (2006), in a report on the New South Wales (NSW) curriculum, state that curriculum needs to have direct contact with local geographic places and communities especially in study areas such as Human Studies in Its Environment (HSIE). Singleton et al (2006: 28) state:

> Aboriginal communities need to be consulted throughout the decision-making processes involved in strategic planning at a school and regional level for the success of Aboriginal programs. Community consultation fosters a sense of ownership and inclusivity, contributing to the programs to achieve desired outcomes and support.

Overall, literature reviewed reveals the emergence of common themes: place and enthusiasm of students to learn, place and individual rights of students, place and student-centred methodologies, place and inclusivity, place and integrating school and community, place and learning, place and recognition of students’ lived experiences, place and a holistic approach, contexts of place: local, national and international, and place and spatial balance of power.

**Place and enthusiasm of students to learn**

A common misconception by many systems of education is that all students eventually become less enthusiastic to learn about place as they grow older (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999). The researchers state that this misconception rests on the assumption that older students are generally only interested in curriculum that prepares them for future careers. Kiefer & Kemple (1999) ask: “Why do we so readily assume that the demands of the ‘real world’ will eventually prevail and that [students’] innate sensitivity to the earth will be abandoned or at least put aside, in pursuit of a career, or fortune, or material security?” (p. 22). Due to this assumption, the researchers hypothesise that some schools plan curriculum that embrace place-conscious
principles in curriculum for students in earlier grades but gradually replace such learning experiences with text-based tasks in the later grades. The authors contend that the lack of connections between place and the curriculum in the later grades could be having a significant impact on the way students participate in education. Gruenewald (2003b) cites Sobel (1996) as stating that children will grow up to have consistently meaningful associations with education if they are allowed to flourish and develop through engagement with issues related to place.

Years ago, Tuan (1977) and later Gruenewald (2002), theorised how a child’s behaviour, from birth, is shaped by connections with place. This connection lasts throughout the child’s life and the enthusiasm to affect and be affected by place never diminishes within the individual. However, Sobel (1997) cautions that teachers should avoid laying the weight of the world’s ecological problems on very young students because this may lead to fear and disempowerment which he termed ‘ecophobia’. Instead, Sobel (1997) suggests that, between the ages of 4 and 7, the key for place-conscious learning experiences should be empathy with the natural world; between 7 and 11, the key should be exploration of, and engagement with, the natural world; and from the ages of eleven to fourteen, the core idea should be social action. Place-conscious curriculum then, according to Sobel (1997), should strive for emotional connectedness between students and place before proceeding to introduce students to active engagement with place issues.

For Indigenous students, the assumption of fading enthusiasm is particularly significant. According to Zubrick et al (2006), the percentage of Indigenous students attending school in the younger age group (6 to 14 years old) is equal to that of the
wider population. However, in the later years of schooling, there is a much greater rate of disengagement of Indigenous students from school than is the case for the wider population. The positive trend between participation of Indigenous students in the earlier grades followed by a negative trend in the later grades could be related to the way the curriculum is structured in terms of recognising the developmental stages of students (Sobel, 1997).

**Place and individual rights of students**

There has been a tendency for curriculum throughout the world to focus on preparing students to be, firstly, global citizens rather than citizens of local geographic places (Orr, 1994). Orr (1994) further theorises that these systems of education propose that good citizenship involves awareness that the global economic system is primarily wealth orientated and is responsible for soil erosion, toxic wastes, pollution, and other problems that threaten our survival. The results of this curriculum focus were students who gradually became preoccupied with global issues and less concerned with problems related to their own local geographic locations. In Australia, research by James, Baldwin, Hepworth, McInnis & Wyn (1999) and Purdie et al (2000) found that young Indigenous people in rural Australia are strongly committed to the welfare of their local geographic locations. It is possible, therefore, that students are disinterested in school because the curriculum does not give them many opportunities to understand problems of local geographic locations. It is also possible that students feel discouraged that they are unable to acquire skills that would take them into careers in which they could make positive contributions to solutions in their own local communities. Place-conscious education, on the other hand, enables students to have an objective perception of where their communities are positioned in relation to the
world and to assume balanced roles as both local and global citizens (Gruenewald, 2003a). In so doing, students are able to see a connection between schooling and their future roles as active citizens within local geographic places. This connection is likely to deepen their engagement with education.

**Place and student-centred methodologies**

Some research indicates that, where schools are expected to implement standard curriculum across the country, questions may arise about the relevance of such approaches for different disciplines and whether these approaches are changing as society changed (Bowers, 1999; Galloway, 2003; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999). Galloway (2003) highlighted the difficulties faced by Indigenous students when teaching methods at schools did not accommodate ways in which students learnt effectively. Place-conscious education provided that commonality (Bowers, 1999).

According to Bowers (1999), “ecologically sustainable cultures co-evolve in ways that take account of the changing characteristics of the bioregion. That is the narratives, technologies, foods, medicines, and clothes encode a deep knowledge of place that is passed from generation to generation” (p. 165). It is important therefore that students learn in ways that reflect the changes in locations around them. Indigenous people of any region generally perceived the same locations in a far more coherent way because of their practical engagement with such geographic places (Rose, Mander & Hossack, 2007). According to Rose et al (2007), anthropological evidence indicates that Indigenous Australians have demonstrated this practical engagement through the way they have managed their resources over many centuries. Bowers (1999: 166) states that: “The curricula, teaching methodologies, and often the teacher training associated with schooling are based on a world view that does not
always recognise or appreciate Indigenous notions of an independent universe and the importance of place in their societies”. This has led to a separation between Indigenous Australians and their country (Rose, 1996).

In the USA, an example of the effectiveness of the student-centred focus of place-based education can be found in West Virginia, USA (Butera, Phillips & Richason, 2000). Here, a place-based education program called Energy Express\(^\text{10}\) has used students’ intimate knowledge of their own strengths, their knowledge of local place and intellectual activities based primarily on direct experience to enable students to make substantial progress in reading.

In Western Australia, the Western Australian Curriculum Framework\(^\text{11}\) (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 2007) allows staff the latitude to vary their programs according to students’ needs whilst working towards common outcomes. Staff members therefore have the opportunity to plan curriculum delivery that reflect the position of society in time and place specific contexts as proposed by Gruenewald (2003a). Changes made to learning programs that reflect the way features of geographic places associated with students change will contribute to relevance of programs (Bartholomeus, 2006). This process of change may not be happening adequately in Western Australian schools for Indigenous students and is likely contributing to students discontinuing their schooling because they feel detached from the education process.

\(^{10}\) Energy Express is a summer nutrition and literacy program implemented in the USA. It consists of weekly themes that progress from myself, family, friends, home, and community, to the ideal world. During the final week, children complete a community service project. The literature used in the program tap into children’s sense of place (Butera et al, 2000).

\(^{11}\) The Curriculum Framework of Western Australia is a framework that provides a structure around which government and non-government schools in Western Australia can build education programs that ensure students achieve agreed outcomes (Curriculum Council, 2007).
Place and inclusivity

Researchers in the USA suggest that consideration of place-conscious issues in curriculum raises awareness of how familiarity of place impacts on student participation amongst teachers (Cajete, 1999; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999). Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999) claim that alienation is the most significant factor regarding Indigenous student participation in education throughout the world. According to these researchers, Indigenous students have problems with education systems in their current forms not because of a lack of intelligence, but because of the alien culture that these students encounter at schools. Cajete (1999) and Stewart (2002) also discuss the debilitating effects of alien environments. Cajete (1999) states that having to survive in two worlds presents special challenges to Indigenous people. Quoting the example of the Pueblo people, he illustrates how successful Indigenous people are in maintaining their environments. Even with such successes, they are often forced to adapt to “hostile social environments insensitive to their cultural orientations” (Cajete, 1999: 205) by having to create learning environments for their children that conform to standards set by central government departments.

In Australia, school environments may also have various dimensions that challenge Indigenous students in terms of feeling accepted. For example, Huddleston (2004) describes some of the demands created by Christian educational contexts on Indigenous students who may already be challenged in trying to adapt to westernised school environments. According to Gruenewald (2006) and Partington (1998), such unpleasant experiences can lead to students to disengage from school.
Evidence indicates that some education systems do not help in reducing marginalisation of groups of people. Systems sometimes take the position that these groups whose lives do not conform to the norms of mainstream society need to be shown how to move towards the centre, or towards acceptance of the values system of the resident population group (Gruenewald, 2003a). Place-conscious education however, promotes a different approach to eliminating marginalisation of people. Instead of trying to empower marginalised groups to move towards accepting all the values of mainstream society, place-conscious education advocates creating opportunities that promotes learning from such communities. It achieves this by making students more aware of the spatial dimension of social relationships (Gulson, 2005). For example, learning experiences in Australia could give non-Indigenous students a theoretical perspective of life in a regional or remote Indigenous community from the perspective of Indigenous people. Gruenewald (2003a: 633) states:

The political dimension of place-conscious education, therefore, demands a radical multiculturalism, a multiculturalism that continually challenges the regimes of accountability that are designed to move everyone to the political centre, a multiculturalism that embraces “the spaces that difference makes”.

An education system where learning experiences are designed so students understand and appreciate the Indigenous way of life is likely to win the allegiance of Indigenous communities. This allegiance is likely to contribute to greater support of the programs offered by schools in terms of Indigenous people making their input into curriculum and assisting staff to establish culturally appropriate learning environments.
Place and integrating school and community

Recent research in Australia indicates that integration between place and participants in education may be the key ingredient to enhance participation because such integration leads to effective relationships between schools and their communities (Lester, 2006b; Singleton et al, 2006). Lester (2006b), in a statement that reflects the shift in policy focus on Indigenous education by the NSW Department of Education, states that “the development of genuine partnerships, based on the principles of cross-cultural respect between the school and the Aboriginal community, remains the primary platform to productive, stimulating and responsive highly effective schools servicing Aboriginal students” (p. 36). Nachtigal (1982) suggests that schools need to focus on curriculum, but also just as much with place and communities associated with schools. This integration between place and students was never achieved by Environmental Education in the past because of its focus on nonhuman issues (Gruenewald, 2004).

Lester (2006b: 36) goes on to state that genuine links between the school program and Indigenous communities will ensure that such programs are “effective and sustainable” because they recognise “the right of Aboriginal people to determine their own priorities, and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development”. Singleton et al (2006) support the views of Lester (2006b) by stating that that genuine links between place and curriculum areas such as History are practically achievable and that the benefits are far-reaching. These researchers state that “community consultation fosters a sense of ownership and inclusivity, contributing to the capacity of programs to achieve desired outcomes” (Singleton et al, 2006: 28). This consultation leads to Indigenous students eventually becoming valuable members of
the community in which they find meaningful roles (Bryden & Boylan, 2004). This leads to their strengthening of relationships with older generations rather than being blamed for failing to preserve cultural values (Rose, 1992).

When there is community consultation, curriculum for Indigenous students is likely to provide more opportunities for students to draw on their lived experiences (Lester, 2006a). Lester (2006a: 12), representing the NSW Department of Education on curriculum for Indigenous students states that “schools should respect the knowledge that [Indigenous] students bring to school and build on that knowledge to foster their understanding of the world, and that is particularly relevant to Aboriginal communities”.

Research also indicates that allowing students to draw on their lived experiences within community contexts “helps keep students rooted to their heritage so that they have a strong sense of who they are. This sense of identity is an important stabilizing factor in an increasingly materialistic and hedonistic world” (Reyhner, 2004a: 1). The Director of the American Bureau of Indian Affair’s Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP) states that “individuals who are strongly rooted in their past who know where they come from are often best equipped to face the future” (Reyhner, 2004b: 1). This confidence about the future could be a key issue in the low levels of participation of Indigenous students in senior secondary and tertiary education (MCEETYA, 2006).

However, evidence from the USA indicating the merits of connecting curriculum to students’ lived experiences is not enough to win teachers over (Kiefer & Kemple,
1999). The high level of interest in the success of place-conscious curriculum in enhancing the participation of students in education, observed by Kiefer & Kemple (1999), did not lead to any inroads into traditional subject areas. Teachers saw the new integrated approach as an added burden to work loads that were already considered excessive. From an Australian perspective, this information is important in that schools with high Indigenous student populations are in locations that find it difficult to find adequate staff for schools (MCEETYA, 2006; Zubrick et al, 2006). It is possible that the perception of place-conscious education by staff in such schools will also be perceived as an added burden. This negative perception is likely to lead to parents and students missing out on engaging with meaningful, relevant curriculum (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999).

Whilst proponents of standard curriculum, where comparative assessment is a key indicator of achievement, may claim that such curriculum provides excellent opportunities for students to achieve academic skills, research overseas indicates that place conscious curriculum also contributes to academic excellence (Loveland, 2003; Nachtigal, 1997; Meichtry & Smith, 2007). Loveland (2003: 6) states:

When learning is rooted in real issues and needs, students can become both academic achievers and good citizens. They can meet the most rigorous academic standards while also helping to improve their communities and solve real-life problems.

To the contrary, standard curriculum with a focus on assessment can isolate children from culture and the ecosystem (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999; Smith, 2002; Tuan, 1977). According to Kiefer & Kemple (1999) the lack of connection between the curriculum and the outside world has led to a cultural crisis of students who know little about who they really are. Smith (2002) cites Dewey (1938) as stating that the lack of
connection between curriculum and schools result in schools failing to harness the 
natural enthusiasm that students have towards learning. Tuan (1977) claims that 
Indigenous students are likely to have strong commitment to their local geographic 
places because of long associations with such locations. When a person lives in a 
place for a long time, according to Tuan (1977), merging between place and 
personalities occurs. Tuan (1977: 183) goes on further to describe the bonding process 
as:

Made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after 
day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and 
smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of 
sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of a place is registered in one’s 
muscles and bones.

This point is significant to this research in that the case study school is located in a 
place occupied by the resident Indigenous clan for many decades. It is likely therefore 
that the ‘the feel of a place’ being ‘registered in one’s muscles and bones’ that Tuan 
(1977) describes is an important factor in the establishment and implementation of 
curriculum that makes a strong connection with Indigenous students from the case 
study school.

Tuan (1977) also states that imprinting of images of people and physical structures in 
the minds of children as they progressed through primary school indicates that if 
children did leave their communities to continue their schooling, they are likely to 
adapt better to environments that closely resembled their own childhood communities. 
Therefore, students originating in rural and remote locations are more likely to move 
to other schools located similarly to their locations of origin.
The research by Tuan (1977) further indicates that when there is a physical separation between students and locations of origin as is the case of Australian Indigenous students who have to leave their communities to attend secondary school (DEETYA, 1997; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000; NBEET, 1991), the implications are likely to be significant. Tuan (1977) states that first, in new locations, students could not take for granted their most fundamental needs would be met. For example, that in times of sickness they would be cared for and made well because they are not living with extended family and surrounded by people whose families have associated with theirs for many previous generations. The separation between place and school therefore is a significant factor in the participation of Indigenous students in Australian schools. Second, by students forced to leave their communities to board in schools elsewhere, they are likely to become detached from geographic places because cognitive maps of the new locations can erase those that students have of their original communities. Tuan (1977: 184) states: “A brief but intense experience is capable of nullifying the past so that we are ready to abandon home for the Promised Land”. The time period spent by boarding students in the communities of their boarding schools can be such an intense experience. It is possible that the resultant detachment that students and their families feel from their original communities is contributing to the degradation of local geographic places because students are not returning to their communities as permanent residents when they finish school. Degradation contributes to the vicious cycle of education and other facilities being neglected forcing students to seek education elsewhere.
Place and learning

Evidence indicates that the basis for effective place-conscious education as a pedagogy is its relevance to students’ lives. Yager (2003: 9) states:

By integrating place into the school curriculum, learning can be seen as important for daily living; it deals with issues, enables students to participate in societal decisions, and can be related to economic improvement. Place-based education provides a real-world context that is missing from a prescribed curriculum, (i.e., strict adherence to a textbook, the recall of information or replication of specific skills that provide the instructional and assessment focus for ninety five percent of typical instruction in most classrooms.

However, there is evidence to suggest that the range of learning experiences of students may sometimes be compromised when school staff members are reluctant to implement programs that they do not feel comfortable with (Cajete, 1999). For example, if an educator does not feel comfortable with teaching aspects of the natural environment, students could miss out on adequate learning experiences that integrate them with place. Cajete (1999) uses two key concepts to explain why school staff may dislike curriculum areas: “biophilia” and “biophobia”. According to Cajete (1999) the term biophilia was first used by Harvard zoologist E. O. Wilson to describe what he perceived as “the innate human urge to affiliate with other forms of life” (p.190). Cajete (1999) also stated that biophilia has “an aberrant and counteracting sensibility called biophobia” (p.190) which refers to the fear of nature eroding the primary concern of human interests when relating to the natural world. “Because biophobia underlies aspects of the prevailing mindset of modernism, it influences the hidden curriculum of modern Western education” (Cajete, 1999: 190). As a result of the interplay between biophobia and biophilia, school curriculum can be biased against place-making in favour of wealth creation skills.
Place-conscious education presents a conscious reminder to educators of their obligation to allow students to find their own positions within the natural world and for this process of discovery to shape the way they interact with the natural environment (Bartholomeus, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003a). Meichtry & Smith (2007) found that when educators opened themselves to learning place-based teaching strategies their levels of confidence and effectiveness of classroom strategies improved significantly. According to Loveland (2003), when staff confidence leads them to form partnerships with members of the school community, the task of establishing links between learning and the real world of students becomes easier. Loveland (2003) describes the experiences of staff at Guffrey Community Charter School in the USA, where place-conscious education has been enthusiastically embraced by staff because of community involvement. At this school, community volunteers brought their skills into the classroom and enabled teachers to successfully implement programs requiring skills and time that they themselves did not have.

Research indicates that educators are reluctant to embrace place-conscious pedagogy because implementation meant change. However, once they start to develop and implement place-conscious curriculum they are likely to see a range of positive results (Wither, 2001). In a study of schools in a rural setting in the USA, Wither (2001: 25) found that “teachers involved in creating new activities, attending workshops, and establishing closer school-community collaborations found themselves dealing with new issues, learning new methods of teaching, sharing their learning, and becoming excited about place-based education”.

Schools with Indigenous students may have to support teachers in four aspects in order to encourage them to develop local place-conscious curriculum: vision building, inquiry, vision building, and collaboration (Fullan, 1993 cited in Wither, 2001). First, according to Wither (2001), opportunities need to be provided for reflection and communication about their desires to improve society. This is especially relevant since many teachers have chosen the profession because they wanted to make an improvement to society. Second, time and opportunities need to be provided for teachers to engage in inquiry and continuous learning. Third, by providing teachers with opportunities to become experts by experiencing and expressing new behaviours. Finally, by providing the time and opportunities for teachers to meet new people, share ideas, support each other, and learn new instructional methods. Initial reluctance by staff, then, is understandable in light of the challenges that the implementation of new curriculum may involve. However, schools can be effective agents in facilitating change.

Current education systems can also be responsible for contributing to the assumption by students that much of their surrounding environment consisted of optimal living conditions and that there is therefore little need to be active place-makers. When this happens, we “fail to recognise that a place is an expression of culture and that it represents the outcome of human choices and decisions, that its present state is one of many possible outcomes” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 627). Place-conscious education challenges this conditioning of students by encouraging students to question and seek suitable explanations for the way things are. “In other words, the range of perceptual experiences of students and teachers must be expanded so that they may begin reflecting on how a diversity of places, and our ideas about them, became what they
are” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 627). This is a potentially significant point for the education of Indigenous students since most teachers employed in schools with Indigenous students are non-Indigenous (Zubrick et al, 2006). Staff therefore may need a curriculum that explicitly points them towards providing culturally appropriate learning opportunities that motivates students to re-evaluate their positions within their surroundings. When this happens:

Students can be engaged in practical action. Teachers can attempt to share their knowledge, interests, and enthusiasms, from nature poetry to evolutionary biology. None of these ensures that we can save the world, but all of them, sensitively handled, can encourage us to consider our place within it, and the ways in which the human and nonhuman are interwoven. (Stables, 2004: 238)

Place and recognition of students’ lived experiences

There is some evidence in Australia and in the USA to indicate that standard curricula are generally performance-orientated and do not adequately provide students with opportunities to make more sense of their own lives (Breen, Barrat-Pugh, Carr, Lloyd, Louden, Rhydwen & Rivalland, 1994; Gruenewald, 2003a; Krapfel, 1999). Breen et al (1994) found that in many Australian schools, curriculum in rural locations where most Indigenous students reside (Zubrick et al, 2006) are similar to curriculum in urban locations despite students’ different learning experiences in each location. According to Gruenewald (2003a) academic tests are also similar between locations enabling students to be ranked in their performances. Krapfel (1999) states that the focus on testing and accountability deprives students and educators of the opportunity to be involved in the continuous process of learning from the realities of their own community lives. This distracts students from “the larger cultural contexts of living, of which formal education is just a part” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 620).
In Australia however, the Western Australian (WA) Curriculum Framework allows staff in schools the latitude to design and implement curriculum that is situation-specific. This flexibility is essential for the success of place-conscious education which, according to Gruenewald (2003a), cannot be bound by rigid frameworks that lead to standard curriculum being ineffective. This freedom enables teaching, learning and accountability to be extended spontaneously outward toward geographic places making education more relevant. Gay (2004), using an example from a Mission School in Alaska, found that through place-conscious education differentiated levels of outcomes were achieved even in the most extreme geographical contexts.

The issue of curricula being detached from daily living experiences is a potentially significant one regarding the participation of Indigenous students because many of these students have connections with regional and remote Australia (Zubrick et al, 2006). They are therefore less likely to identify with curriculum based on foreign spatial settings which can so easily be implemented in Western Australian schools if staff members do not exercise their freedom to make effective curriculum choices but choose instead to implement curriculum from other locations in the State.

**Place and a holistic approach**

A common feature of curriculum systems throughout the world is its fragmentation of discipline knowledge into ‘subjects’ and may be impacting on the way students will spend the rest of their lives (Gruenewald, 2003a; Kiefer & Kemple, 1999). According to Kiefer & Kemple (1999):

> The way we learn about the world both reflects and recreates that world. We have come to believe that our disjointed, piecemeal approach to dealing with endemic social and ecological problems in the wider society is both cause and consequence of our splintered education system. (p. 28)
Whilst the fragmentation of subjects in schools may have created the opportunity to increase the academic focus in these ‘disciplines’, they have also prevented teachers from presenting educational experiences in a holistic context based on real-life experiences (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999). In so doing, educators have potentially lost the opportunity to effectively address numerous local problems in society through their curriculum.

For Indigenous students, a fragmented rather than holistic curriculum is significant in two important ways: First, a fragmented, results-focused curriculum is often based on the studying of texts indoors (Gruenewald, 2003a; Kiefer & Kemple, 1999; Krapfel, 1999). This style of learning may not suit Indigenous students and that, even for urban-raised Indigenous students, a balance between the indoors and outdoors may be more effective (Hughes, 1997; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999). Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999) state that Indigenous students learnt most effectively through direct experience from the natural environment. Such experiences are holistic in which skills in Mathematics, English and Science are acquired spontaneously. Hughes (1997: 10) states that most learning by Indigenous students “is achieved through real-life performance rather than through practice in contrived settings, as is often the case in schools”.

Second, fragmented curriculum is associated with standard testing that does not accurately assess learning by Indigenous students. Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999), for example, state that for Indigenous students in the USA, survival is the ultimate measure of learning. A student either had survival skills or not. It is possible therefore
that the main features of the current standard systems of education are conflicting with effective ways of learning and learning goals of Indigenous students. This could be discouraging students from remaining enrolled in education until completion.

Place-conscious education on the other hand, adopts a holistic approach to learning. Reyhner (2004a: 1) states: “Place-conscious education teaches intra-dependence rather than independence. It emphasises the fact that we can’t change one thing without having many other linked changes (often with damaging unintended consequences)”. Jaycox (2001: 5) adds that “place-based methodologies can be used to integrate separate disciplines and subject matter with home and community projects”. Place-based programs such as the ‘Foxfire’\textsuperscript{12} program in the USA (Foxfire Fund Inc., 2007) integrate learning areas holistically and focus on research topics arising from local communities. These programs are likely to appeal to Indigenous students who learn significantly from direct lived experiences in their local communities (James et al, 1997; Marks et al, 2000).

\textbf{Contexts of place: local, national and international}

There is some evidence to suggest that when curriculum is fragmented into ‘subjects’, students are able to effectively perceive their roles within local, national and international contexts (Gruenewald, 2003a; Orr, 1994). Gruenewald (2003a) states that many education systems are failing to prepare citizens for the democratic process of local place making. As a result, people are occupying local geographic places that are shaped by the ideologies of people many centuries ago. In other words, locations

\textsuperscript{12} The Foxfire program is a well-known example of rural place-based education initiated by Eliot Wigginton in the USA. In this program, youth interview members of the local community, unearthing and publishing stories from residents (Jaycox, 2001).
occupied by many societies today have not evolved as they were inhabited over time by different people with different life philosophies. Occupying places created by others can mean continuing to be disadvantaged. For example, according to Gruenewald (2003a) and Orr (1994), maintenance of unequal power balance occurs when students are taught that the uneven balance of power is a pre-requisite for the global economy to operate. These researchers state that the uneven balance of power allows the richer, more developed regions to acquire resources they claim are needed to provide for poorer regions. It is possible that on a smaller scale within countries, wealthier regions get richer at the expense of isolated geographic places further away from financial centres. This point is therefore of potential significance to the participation of Indigenous students because geographic places occupied by these students are usually situated away from the cities and usually under-resourced (MCEETYA, 2006). This then forces students to seek education in larger cities leading to aging rural populations as is evident in rural Scotland (Gougeon, 2004), Regional Canada (Kelly, 1993) and Rural Australia (NBEET, 1991; Northern Queensland Priority Country Area Program and Tablelands School Support Centre, 1993). Students living in regional and rural locations are deeply committed to their local geographic places and would prefer to continue living there after completion of schooling (James et al, 1999; Nachtigal, 1997). It is possible that Indigenous students believe that the current system of education does not prepare them to be active place-makers of their own communities. This belief then can potentially have a negative impact on their participation in education.
According to Yager (2003) relatively undeveloped rural locations are the best environments for the successful implementation of place-conscious education. Yager (2003: 9) states:

Rural schools have an advantage in that they are generally smaller, closer to nature, less bureaucratic and therefore, can be more flexible in terms of new learning models that engage students. Local contexts can enliven the school program and succeed with mind engagement of students, both of which rarely occur in school-based learning. Dealing with real problems in a local context in a rural school could provide the needed model to change the focus of education to show that place-based learning can make a real difference in students’ education and their lives.

Rural locations, then, where a large proportion of Indigenous students attend school (MCEETYA, 2006), may be geographically disadvantaged in terms of resources and investment but have a combination of features which are ideal for establishing engaging learning environments for Indigenous students.

**Place and spatial balance of power**

The issue of the underdevelopment of locations occupied by Indigenous people is a significant point in this study. The lack of schools in such locations occupied by many Indigenous communities is forcing students to seek appropriate schooling many hundreds of kilometres away from home (DEETYA, 1997; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000; NBEET, 1991). When students are dislocated from their original communities, their participation in education is compromised (Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001; Clark, 1987). Place-conscious education challenges the view that the imbalance of power between geographic places is a prerequisite for the operation of the larger economy (Gruenewald, 2003a). Indigenous students therefore may be getting the idea that the relative state of underdevelopment of their communities is a natural occurrence and may therefore not be inclined to address the inequalities between
geographic places. The perpetual state of underdevelopment of their communities may, in turn, be impacting on their school attendance because of the poor state of education facilities in these locations.

According to Gruenewald (2003a) place-conscious education offers an approach to renew damaged human and non-human communities by providing place-conscious education with a “meta-framework that is responsive to the ecological, political, ideological, sociological, and perceptual dimensions of places” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 635). This framework, according to Gruenewald, will raise socio-ecological awareness of students. For Indigenous students in Australia, this may lead students to become more active local place makers thereby contributing to the development of geographic places they currently occupy.

If Indigenous students assume ownership of the development of their own local geographic places, this ownership is likely to deter outside investors who often exploit the natural resources of such underdeveloped locations (Orr, 1994). According to Orr (1994), outside investment is likely to lead to rapid increases in commercial activity which primarily benefits outsiders while degrading values important to residents. In Australia, many Indigenous communities are located in geographic regions likely to yield abundant natural resources such as minerals and exotic timber (Zubrick et al, 2006). It is likely that these locations have been exploited over the years. Orr (1994) states that many education systems throughout the world subtly advocate that this exploitation by multinational corporations of local geographic places is essential for larger economies to operate efficiently.
According to Bowers (1999), evidence that educational reformers have the interest of local geographic places in mind is revealed when this question is asked: is such reform a part of global trends or does it have principles of ecological design? Place-conscious education raises the awareness of educators and students regarding curriculum reform and curriculum philosophy. This increased awareness can inform Indigenous students and parents how to take ownership of curriculum so that, through the curriculum, they can understand how they could be effective local place-makers and contribute to a wider basis of support for participation in education. Students will be able to achieve this by learning “new fields of knowledge such as restoration ecology, conservation biology, ecological engineering, and sustainable forestry and agriculture” (Orr, 1994: 164). When these skills are reinjected into the community the economic disparity between the outer lying locations occupied by Indigenous people and the already-developed cities is likely to become less apparent. This eroding of economic disparity between geographic regions is likely to lead to less overcrowding in the large cities and greater economic independence of locations occupied by Indigenous people.

An example of success in which place-based education has contributed to the economy of a local community can be found in Miner County, South Dakota, USA (Williams, 2002). Here, a local place-based curriculum has successfully established strong links between schools and the local community in terms of providing students with relevant skills for employment in local businesses. “As a result of these changes, Miner County is finding new life and its students are learning the skills to succeed without having to leave town” (Williams, 2002: 17).
Place-conscious or place-based education, then, has drawn the attention of researchers over the past few years. Although there is not much evidence-based research in Australian contexts, there is a significant range of understandings of the concept in terms of its significance to Indigenous and rural students. In the next section, these different understandings by researchers are developed into a conceptual framework using Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidimensional framework for place-conscious education.

**GRUENEWALD’S MULTIDIMENSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PLACE-CONSCIOUS EDUCATION**

Gruenewald (2003a: 621) uses five ‘dimensions of place’ to:

(a) [reveal] the relevance of place as a unit of cultural and ecological analysis, (b) [demonstrate] the many ways that places are pedagogical, and (c) [support] the claim that educational research theory, and practice need to pay more attention to places.

The five dimensions of place are the perceptual, ecological, ideological, political, and social. According to Gruenewald (2003a: 623), each of the dimensions “is interrelated with the others, and each is in its own way an expression of the fundamental idea that places are pedagogical”. According to Gruenewald (2003a) the main aspects of each dimension are:

**Perceptual**: people have the natural ability to perceive features of place and learn from direct experience with the environment but such ability can be either “thwarted or fostered by educational experience” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 625). Most of the education systems today provide minimum opportunities for students to learn from direct experience and perception.
**Ecological**: place has ecological limits that need to be acknowledged. Education systems need to promote the significance of biological diversity and global cultural diversity even though such an approach goes against the grain of emphasis on economic development.

**Ideological**: places should reflect the ideologies of previous and current occupants and natural elements. Education systems need to teach students political and economic relationships at micro to macro levels especially the global consequences of capitalism.

**Political**: place is characterised by geographical terms such as ethnic space, marginality, territoriality, movement, disruption, displacement, exile, annexation, division, segregation, and absorption are used to describe spatial relationships that shape political landscapes, cultures and identities. Education systems can promote a high level of understanding of these concepts by providing students with the opportunity to debate the validity of marginalisation and the merits of multiculturalism.

**Sociological**: place is the product of culture. Students often become oblivious to the cultural significance of features of places over time. Education systems need to provide students with experiences that enable them to reflect on a diversity of geographic locations, their ideas about them and how place evolves.

These five dimensions form a productive framework in this study in the way it organises the understandings of researchers on place-conscious education. Figure 3.1 illustrates this process (see Appendix A for summarised detail within each theme).
Gruenewald’s (2003a) perceptual dimension of place-conscious education that students learn best from direct experiences with the environment draws the following themes together: place and enthusiasm of students to learn, place and student-centred methodologies, place and learning, and place and a holistic approach. In these themes researchers state that it is natural for students to be enthusiastic to learn through direct experiences with place (Tuan, 1977) and that this enthusiasm lasts throughout their lives at school (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999; Gruenewald, 2003b). This is especially true for Indigenous students (Rose et al, 2007) who have had close associations with place for decades. Direct experiences are especially effective when they are relevant,
changing with society (Bartholomaeus, 2006; Bowers, 1999; Galloway, 2003; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999), holistic (Kiefer and Kemple, 1999; Krapfel, 1999) and balanced with indoor text-based lessons (James et al, 1997; Kawagley and Barnhardt, 1999; Marks et al, 2000).

The ecological dimension draws the theme of place and spatial balance of power from the literature reviews on place-conscious education. Researchers support Gruenewald’s (2003a) assertion that students need to know that the earth has ecological limits by stating that local place is often neglected so that the larger cities continue to grow (DEETYA, 1997; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 1999; NBEET, 1991) and that this eventually results in Indigenous students having to leave their communities in search of more appropriate schooling facilities (Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001; Clark, 1987).

Gruenewald’s (2003a) ideological dimension in which he states that students need to be active place-makers draws the perspectives of researchers within the theme of place and inclusivity. Researchers within this theme emphasise the need for students to carve their own identities in geographic locations (Cajete, 1999) and that the failure to do so results in students struggling against alien environments (Huddlestone, 2004; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999; Stewart, 2002) resulting in student resistance to participation (Gruenewald, 2006; Partington, 1998).

In the political dimension, Gruenewald (2003a) states that students should be encouraged to challenge marginalisation and embrace multiculturalism in places where they live. Researchers state that standard curriculum does not achieve this
because it favours global to local citizenship (Gougeon, 2004; Kelly, 1993; NBEET, 1991; Northern Queensland Priority Country Area Program and Tablelands School Support Centre, 1993; Orr, 1994) despite rural students being strongly committed to local place (James et al, 1999; Nachtigal, 1997).

Gruenewald (2003a) states, in the sociological dimension, students should know how places become what they are. This assertion draws perspectives of researchers from the theme of place and school and community. According to researchers, place is integral to curriculum (Nachtigal, 1982). Place strengthens bonds between generations (Bryden & Boylan, 2004; Rose, 1992) and gives students stability (Reyhner, 2004a, 2004b). This integration of place and curriculum can still enable students to gain academic excellence (Loveland, 2003; Nachtigal, 1997; Meichtry & Smith, 2007). In contrast, the separation between home and school deprives students of their full potential (Dewey, 1938; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000).

Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education functions effectively as an organising framework for the different understandings of the significance of place-conscious education. Each of the five dimensions draws contributions from different researchers that enhance the efficiency of the framework to interact with the complex empirical data in this study. More specifically, the different contributions add depth and breadth to the dimensions to enable the framework to productively interact with the vast and complex data that emanate from the interviews. This interaction is discussed in detail in the next chapter.
CONCLUSION

The review of literature on place-conscious education reveals that it is a relatively unexplored concept especially regarding its merits for specifically enhancing the participation of Australian Indigenous students in education. However, perspectives of researchers from the USA and Australia indicate that there is a considerable basis for the argument that ‘place’ is a significant factor in the participation of Indigenous students in education. Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education is a productive framework in this study in the way it draws the different perspectives of researchers into five dimensions of place.

This chapter, together with the previous chapter that reviewed literature on Indigenous participation, provided the theoretical basis for the research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Australia? One way to examine this question is to conduct a detailed study of a school that is successful in enhancing the participation of Indigenous students in education in order to understand the connection between ‘place’ and ‘participation’. Figure 3.2 presents a graphic organiser of the main points in Chapter Three. The next chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used in this study to inform the research question.
Figure 3.2: Summary organiser of Chapter Three

Chapter One
Introduction to the Research

Chapter Two
Participation of Indigenous Students in Education

Chapter Three
Place-conscious education for Indigenous students
- Perspectives on place-conscious education
- Gruenewald’s (2003a) Multidisciplinary Framework as a productive framework in this study

Chapter Four
Methodology
CHAPTER FOUR
Methodology

How is knowledge created? By and for whom? And with what consequences for individuals, groups, and society? (Richardson, 1997: 102)

INTRODUCTION

In chapters two and three literature reviews of the concepts of participation and place, as significant concepts in Indigenous education, were conducted respectively. The literature reviews on participation indicated that researchers understand effective participation in ways that do not adequately explain the significance of Indigenous students’ lived experiences on participation as I had observed as an educator in different contexts. Review of literature on place indicated that researchers considered place to have a range of significant links with Indigenous student participation. Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidimensional framework for place-conscious education effectively draws these perspectives together to present a theoretical framework in this study.

In this chapter the methods used in this study are discussed, beginning with a discussion of the interpretive nature of the study which focuses on the challenges faced by studying lived experiences. The relevance of phenomenology and hermeneutics is discussed to show how these approaches have specific relevance for the research.

In the next part of this chapter, justification for the use of the case study approach is presented. This justification includes how the case study is effective as a spotlight on
one instance and examination of this instance in detail, how the case study school can reveal intricate relationships required to inform reasons for success, and the importance of understanding the trend of participation of Indigenous students in its natural setting.

Discussion then shifts to why the particular selection of the case study school and some of the challenges this raised in terms of my position as researcher. This is followed by a discussion of how respondents to the in-depth interviews were selected and how access was gained to the school and the issue of my ‘persona’ as researcher and ex-principal. The basis for using in-depth interviews in this study is then discussed followed by the processes involved in the analysis and interpretation of results.

**INTERPRETIVE APPROACH**

This is an interpretive study in which lived experiences are researched. The context of making meaning from lived experiences demands that a variety of approaches be employed to address various challenges. First, the study has its roots in my lived experiences as principal in an Indigenous school community and those of Indigenous participants from the case study school. It is important therefore that the study maintains a connection with this Indigenous context. This means that the methodology will be linked to tenets of phenomenology. According to Van Manen (1990: 36):

> Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful.
Second, the research question in this study is based on the premise that effective participation is linked with students’ connections with place. The interpretation of data needs to reveal these links. Principles of hermeneutics enable this revelation. Van Manen (1990: 2) states that “pedagogy requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the life-world in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and living with children”.

**RIGOUR**

Using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach in this research achieves six aims that contribute to rigour in the study. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olsen & Spiers (2002: 2) state: “Without rigour, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility”. However, establishing rigour in an interpretive study is quite different to that in the natural sciences. For example, it may be impossible to replicate the study as is required by reliability in the natural sciences because the variables associated with the case study school would have changed since the interviews. It is also problematic to expect the interpretations of data in this study to be identical to others that may have been conducted at the research site as is expected by validity in the natural sciences. So too, it is not possible to be completely objective in the interpretation of data especially because the researcher is an ex-employee of the case study school. In order to address these issues, a strategy to establish rigour was developed using the principles of Van Manen (1990) and Gubrium & Holstein (1997). According to these researchers, the following steps promote rigour in an interpretive study:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and which commits us to the world of people (Van Manen, 1990) and noticing detail of their
experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The issue of participation of Indigenous students, observed in two other countries, is such an issue. This study seeks to understand the experiences of Indigenous people themselves in relation to participation in education;

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it (Van Manen, 1990) because social life is continuously and actively constructed as part of a process that constructs and transforms social life (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). In this study the researcher is in the midst of living relations and shared situations with participants, drawing on his own lived experiences to ‘become’ the respondent in the quest to understand how participants perceive the world;

3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon – requires that the researcher be sceptical of common sense when interpreting the data (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997) in order to distinguish “between appearance and essence, between the things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience” (Van Manen, 1990: 32). In this study, as a non-Indigenous researcher and an ex-employee of the case study school, steps were taken to support interpretations with theoretical and empirical evidence;

4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Writing and rewriting demands that writing and speech are not seen as separate activities to the research process. Van Manen (1990) states: “to do
research in a phenomenological sense is always a bringing to speech of something” (p. 32) in a way that provides a rich, clear and nuanced description of social life (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997);

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990) even if such action is subjective, since social life is integrally subjective and cannot be understood without examining this subjective experience (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). To establish a strong relation with a certain question, phenomenon or notion, the researcher cannot afford to adopt an attitude of so-called scientific disinterestedness. To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense. To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities” (Van Manen, 1990: 33).

In this study, this was achieved by consistently relating the data to my own observations as an educator;

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. Phenomenological human science demands that the researcher remains strong in his or her orientation to the fundamental question (Van Manen, 1990) and show tolerance for complexity (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The researcher must balance the research context by considering parts and whole and “constantly measure the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure” (Van Manen, 1990: 33). Consequently, in this study, understanding how lived experiences are related to place and how this is linked to Indigenous student participation will involve studying various knowledge forms (theories, concepts) that
The six steps in the plan to establish rigour all contribute incrementally and interactively in the study to ensure rigor or “trustworthiness”. In striving to achieve these aims in the study, the researcher is consciously taking the position of establishing mechanisms inherent in the research process (constructive) rather than relying on evaluative (or post hoc) procedures to determine reliability and validity (Morse et al, 2002).

JUSTIFICATION FOR USING THE CASE STUDY METHOD

A case study method was used in this research. This is because it offers a powerful way to reveal answers to the main research question which is: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Australia? According to Denscombe (2003), case studies have the following characteristics that lend themselves to this investigation:

Spotlight on one instance: A case study presents an opportunity to acquire data from an instance that is not common but has wide implications.

There may be insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications and, importantly, that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances – the survey approach. The aim is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular” (Denscombe, 2003: 30).

In this research, the case study school is a rare case of success in terms of participation of Indigenous students in Australia (Gibson, 2004: 7) – a country where Indigenous students lag behind the rest of the population in terms of participation (Department of Education Science and Training, 2002; Eckermann, 1999; Gray et al,
Therefore a spotlight on this school, rather than on schools in general in order to reveal strategies for success, is appropriate.

**In-depth study:** The case study approach presents the opportunity for close scrutiny. Moore (2006) states that a large-scale survey often does not provide the depth of understanding required. In this study understanding the ‘detail’ is necessary because the trend of successful participation of Indigenous students in education is uncommon and specifically related research on the underlying processes related to it is inadequate (James et al, 1999; Gray et al, 2000; Eckermann, 1999; The University of Melbourne, 1999).

**Focus on processes and relationships:** “The real value of a case study is that it offers the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes might happen – more than just what those outcomes are” (Denscombe, 2003: 31). In the case of this research, the outcome is already known. The case study school is one of the fastest growing independent schools in Western Australia (Gibson, 2004). What is not known is how processes, of which the school is only a part of, have combined to contribute to this success.

**Natural setting:** “The case that forms the basis of the investigation is normally something that already exists. It is not a situation that is artificially generated specifically for the research” (Denscombe, 2003: 31). The case study school is ‘something that already exists’. It existed prior to the research and is therefore ideal to study without having to recreate a successful environment for the participation of Indigenous students. Furthermore, the case study school consists of Indigenous
students who belonged to a variety of Indigenous clans thereby contributing to a more holistic understanding of the research question.

SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE

Apart from being one of the fastest growing independent schools in Western Australia and thereby making it the ideal subject for study, the school selected for the case study also has other important features that make it ideal as a subject for study (See Appendix B).

Boarding facility: The school’s boarding facility enables the participation of students from many towns and remote communities in Australia. The facility provides accommodation for an average of 50 students who originate from country, rural and remote locations. It is not uncommon for students living in the facility to have origins in other Australian States. There are usually equal proportions of girls and boys ranging in ages from 13 to 18. This means that the participants in this study represent a broad range of geographic and demographic backgrounds.

Neutrality of place: According to some members of staff, the location of the school is regarded by many Indigenous people as a tribally neutral area. This means that people from different tribes perceive the location as one in which they could live in harmony with each other. Although the resident tribe or clan play a major role in all decision-making and probably have preferences over other groups in terms of jobs, this neutrality still means that more families and students from different tribal groups are likely to be part of the school community compared to other locations.
Familiarity: As researcher, I was already familiar with the school community as a place and as an Indigenous community. During the time spent at the school as principal, I had spent much time establishing genuine relationships with people. Consequently, I understood the social structure that prevailed in the community. However, in terms of my persona as researcher, I found the research context to be complex and faced two challenges:

First, I am non-Indigenous and this means that it is likely that the cultural barrier would be an obstacle during the interviews. I had the impression that Indigenous people in the community were generally suspicious of non-Indigenous people carrying out studies based on them. As one Indigenous board member stated: “I take offence to the fact that many non-Indigenous people think that we are some strange species that need to be understood”. It is understandable for Indigenous stakeholders to have such views if researchers behaved insensitively in the past. This meant that if I was given permission by Indigenous stakeholders to conduct the study, I had to be mindful of cultural sensitivity and avoid presenting myself as an ‘expert’ on the topic of Indigenous student participation.

Second, my role as ex-principal meant that there was a possibility that respondents would say things that I wanted to hear. Green (2002) describes her similar predicament when she carried out a study to establish what lifelong learning meant in a secondary school context. She asks the following questions: “What will the school community tell me? What will they think I want to know? Will valuable insights and information be kept from me…?” (p. 55). These are questions that I raised as well and had to take steps to address them.
My first challenge was overcome by the fact that I enjoyed a positive relationship with members of the Indigenous school community. This included people from all walks of life including those parents who I had occasionally met and who did not play a role in decision-making at the school, to key stakeholders such as members of the Indigenous Governing Board. Occasionally, I was told by Indigenous staff, students and parents that they appreciated me most for not marginalising Indigenous people as ‘some curious anthropological phenomenon’ that did not conform to society’s norms. This observation, together with my commitment to consistently draw on advice from Indigenous people as the real experts on factors contributing to student participation throughout the duration of the study, and to keep in contact with the Board regarding my findings, prompted the Governing Board to grant me permission to conduct the study.

The second challenge in establishing my persona as researcher rather than ex-principal was met by the proactive steps I had taken in maintaining contact with the school in the lead-up to the interviews. These steps are discussed later in the section on gaining access to the school. During the contact period, I made my position clear to participants that I wanted to know what they thought about Indigenous participation in school and that as ex-principal, I had no personal attachment to whatever response they had to any particular question. Even so, I needed to be mindful of the subjective influence of my persona as ex-principal in the interpretation of data.
SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

Participants in this study are part of the particular school community located in rural Western Australia. They were selected using purposeful sampling (Ezzy, 2002). According to Ezzy (2002: 74), a purposeful sample is “one that provides a clear criterion or rationale for the selection of participants, or places to observe, or events, that relates to the research questions”. In this study, there were a number of criteria that participants had to meet. First, the perspectives of students, parents and staff were required to inform the research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Australia? Interviewing all three groups revealed their different perspectives. Students, for example, were able to reflect on how they viewed the school and their interest in education. The combination of both day and boarding students enabled the study to include the perspectives of students living locally as well as those students living many hundreds of kilometres away. Parents provided a different perspective. For example, they were able to describe their understanding as to why their children were not completing their school education and how they felt about aspects of the education program provided by the case study school. Staff members provided an academic perspective on the participation of Indigenous students in education at the school.

Second, it was imperative that participants were able to engage in intense dialogue required in the in-depth interviews. Random or stratified sampling may not guarantee this. Some of these students are from remote communities and I have come to know them as being shy, especially with non-Indigenous people like myself. Some parents and staff members too, may also have reservations about being interviewed. Steps therefore had to be taken in the selection process that increased the chance of
respondents being able to talk freely about their lived experiences and views on education at the school. These respondents had to be purposefully chosen. A larger group of respondents were chosen randomly from each category before consulting with Indigenous Teacher Assistants whether those chosen were able to engage in dialogue for the duration of the interview (Maxwell, 1992).

Third, it was important that participants represented a wide range of perspectives within each group regarding the research question in order to produce ‘thick description’ (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). To this end, 18 participants were interviewed representing all three groups. This number consisted of ten students, four parents and four staff associated with the secondary phase of schooling. The ten students consisted of five ‘day’ students and five ‘boarding’ students and were selected to represent their relative proportion of the total school population. The five day students consisted of three students from the local suburb in which the school is located and two students who travelled daily from the neighbouring town forty kilometres away. The five boarding students consisted of three students who lived in regional towns and two students who lived in remote towns.

All four parents were Indigenous consisting of two with children in the secondary school phase and two with children in the primary school phase. Two parents were also employed at the school as Teacher Assistants, one living locally and the other travelling daily on the school bus from the adjacent city. The other two parents also consisted of one living locally and the other travelling daily to and from the city. It wasn’t practical to interview parents from the remote communities because of the lack of telephones in these communities and the difficulties that I anticipated in talking
with an Indigenous person who had not met me in person before. However, the views of these parents are still likely to be heard through interviews with students, parents and staff who made frequent visits to extended families in remote locations.

The four members of staff consisted of two Indigenous and two non-Indigenous participants. Both Indigenous members of staff were on the school’s Governing Board and were considered to be senior members of the community with strong links to founding Indigenous members of the school. The two non-Indigenous members of staff had overseas origins. The staff complement represented the school administration, the primary school, the high school, and Indigenous teacher assistants. The fact that two members of staff were also members of the Governing Board meant that the perspectives of the Board could also be heard.

The selection of student and parent participants was complex. Advice was sought from Indigenous Teacher Assistants. A list of students and parents was developed using the school’s attendance register (Refer to Appendix C). On this list, students and parents were categorised so that they met the criteria described. For example, students were grouped according to whether they lived locally, in the adjacent city or remote (boarding students), and according to gender. Parents were grouped according to whether they had children in the primary or high school or whether they lived locally or in the adjacent city. Once the Teacher Assistants had ticked off their recommended participants, a list of commonly suggested names was compiled which I used for the interviews.
GAINING ACCESS TO THE RESEARCH SITE

The issue of gaining access to the research site was critical to the success or otherwise of the research for a number of reasons. First, although I had served as principal of the case study school for a number of years, it could not be assumed that this was enough to have unreserved access to the school. Over the years members of the Governing Board have been known to be protective of their autonomy and ownership of the school because the school was a symbol of sacrifices made by their past generations and was evidence of their ability to successfully manage their own institution.

Although I was regarded as a person who acknowledged the contributions of past generations and had contributed to the further success of the school, it was important that I still acknowledged the school’s ownership by members of the Board. This issue was addressed by writing to the Governing Board and requesting permission to carry out the research (see Appendix D). In the request, regular contact with the Board was pledged regarding any changes that may occur during the course of the research.

Miles & Huberman (1994) state that since a qualitative research project is likely to change from its original description, it is important to report regularly to participants regarding new directions and potential outcomes. The request was discussed at a Governing Board meeting and verbal permission was granted to conduct the research.

Second, it was important that contact was maintained with the school especially during the period between my resignation as principal and the interviews for the research. This was important because, during my tenure as principal, it was often mentioned by Indigenous elders that non-Indigenous people who worked at the case study school often left without maintaining contact with them. They regarded such individuals in a negative light as people who did not have sincere concern for the
welfare of Indigenous people. Therefore, prior to the interviews, regular contact was maintained with the school.

Third, requirements by the Ethics Committee of Murdoch University were fulfilled. A key requirement was seeking formal permission from the Governing Board (Appendix D). Other requirements by the Ethics Committee were that of consent and privacy. Consent forms were signed by all respondents after the study objectives were carefully explained (see Appendices E – I). In the consent documents, confidentiality and anonymity were assured. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), taking such steps ensured that the information gained was respected and acquired the trust of respondents. In terms of privacy, respondents were informed that all audio recordings and transcripts were to be kept in a secure environment during and after the research.

INTERVIEWS

Structure of the interview guide

My experiences of living amongst Indigenous people indicated to me that I was more likely to acquire unhindered responses by carrying out an unstructured interview or by using an interview guide. Over the years I noticed that Indigenous people felt intimidated when interviews were formal or structured. They were more likely to feel relaxed if the interviews resembled a conversation or social event. Another advantage of using an unstructured interview guide was that respondents were allowed to speak from their different roles. For example, staff members who were also parents were able to talk about their views on the school program as well as how they perceived the influence of the school on the lives of their children. However, a potential
disadvantage of this approach is that the researcher may end up with data that is difficult to process. Wisker (2001: 168) states:

An open-ended, conversational interview may be rich in gathering feelings, following the thought and discussion processes of the interviewee, but could go very much off the point and be difficult either to transcribe or to analyse and compare with other interviews.

However, in order not to compromise the validity of the data to be acquired from the interview process, it was decided to proceed with the unstructured or in-depth interviews, using a question guide.

The questions in the interview guide had to fulfil an important criterion: unearthing the personal and social experiences of respondents that formed the basis of their lives as members of the school community successful in contributing to enhanced participation of Indigenous students in education. The choice and structure of questions for the interview guide were influenced by narrative inquiry. According to researchers such as Clandinin (2000), Geertz (1995), Bateson (1994), Czarniawska (1997) and Polkinghorne (1988), personal and social experiences of people are inextricably linked. Questions in the interview guide should therefore seek to establish the fabric of experiences of respondents by drawing data from the personal and social domains (interaction); the past, present and future (continuity) and combined with the notion of place (situation). Clandinin (2000: 50) calls this approach a “Three Dimensional Model of Narrative Inquiry”. A metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space has “temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third”. According to Clandinin (2000: 50) the principles of narrative inquiry guide the interviews to achieve “temporal dimensions
and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequence of places”

The theoretical influence of narrative inquiry resulted in three categories of questions which helped point me backwards and forward, inwards and outwards, striving at the same time to establish a spatial dimension to respondents’ stories. These categories included: (i) respondents’ personal background; (ii) views on school attendance and (iii) attitudes to completion of school education (see Appendices J – L). Each category assisted me in this regard by hosting a theme of indicative questions (see Table 4.1).

The purpose of the themes related to personal background is to reveal data on respondents’ lived experiences; those related to school attendance to reveal data on current school participation; and the themes related to completion of schooling to reveal respondents’ perspectives on schooling after Year 10.

Table 4.1: Categories and themes of questions in the interview guide

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Themes of questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal background</td>
<td>Where respondents had spent most of their lives</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What they liked about these locations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How different those locations were from that of the case study school</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Details about immediate and extended families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Views on school attendance</td>
<td>Descriptions of schools attended</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Best schools attended</td>
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<td>How they came to be at the case study school</td>
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<td>What it was like to attend the school</td>
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<td>What their families thought about them attending the case study school</td>
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<td>What would constitute their ideal school</td>
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<td>Completion of school education</td>
<td>Education preferences after Year 10</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Thoughts on the underachievement of Indigenous students</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Steps that could encourage Indigenous students to remain in school until completion of Year 12 or equivalent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Physical setting

All the interviews were conducted in the lounge room of the boarding facility. Parents and staff regarded the location as a convenient one. Students associated the room with pleasant experiences such as having free time, spending quality time with visiting family and friends, and the place just being a refuge away from the pressures associated with the school. The room was quiet, spacious and well-ventilated. The informal arrangement of furniture and the availability of sofas instead of school chairs greatly contributed to a relaxed environment.

Interviews

Each interview started with casual conversations about students’ interests, family and friends. I had researched this information prior to the interviews. For example, if the student originated from a particular town, I would ask about well known features of the town such as the weather, mining, fishing or fruit. Responses were recorded using a Dictaphone. Earlier, I had worked hard to establish an interview guide that allowed respondents to speak widely about how they felt about issues (see Appendices J – L). The guide consisted of supplementary prompts and searching questions to ensure that responses were comprehensive enough. The prompts consisted of questions based on leads from earlier responses. For example, if students had earlier mentioned that teachers did not have to be Indigenous for students to feel positive about school, the prompt is likely to be: Earlier, you mentioned that teachers did not have to be Indigenous for you to enjoy schooling, tell me more about this.
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In this section, the analysis and interpretation of results are discussed in terms of four processes: transcription, coding, interpretation and writing. Each stage is interrelated in that they sometimes occurred simultaneously, in succession, or in response to each process. For example, although interpretation occurred largely after the coding process, there was sometimes a need to revisit the coding process if the coding did not relate adequately to the research question. In this case, the coding system was reorganised resulting in data reassigned according to the revised coding system.

**Clarification of some key concepts**

At this point, it is necessary to clarify some of the concepts used in conjunction with each other in this chapter and the ones to follow:

**Dimensions for place-conscious education:** Refers to the five dimensions of Gruenewald’s (2003a) framework of place-conscious education: (i) perceptual, (ii) ecological, (iii) ideological, (iv) political, and (v) sociological (refer to Figure 3.1).

**Dimensions of data:** Refers to the two themes emerging from data in the interviews: (i) empirical dimension of place (Figure 4.1) and (ii) empirical dimension of Aboriginality (Figure 4.2).

**Reorganised data:** Refers to the data after it has been categorised using Gruenewald’s (2003a) framework. Once reorganised, each of the two dimensions of data fit five strands of data that have a similar basis for interaction and interception with each other and with the conceptual framework (for example, refer to Figure 4.3).
Transcription

The transcription stage was complex. The interpretive nature of this research meant that my point of view and influence on the transcription process had to be contained within the role of researcher. According to Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2006) transcribing data was interactive and engages the reader in the process of deep listening, analysis and interpretation. Transcription was not a passive act, but instead provides the researcher with a valuable opportunity to actively engage with his or her research material right from the beginning of data collection.

The interpretive nature of this study also meant that it was imperative to record the multiple levels of meaning of responses. In doing so, the study displays the ‘scepticism’ of surface meanings or common sense of observations as theorised by Gubrium & Holstein (1997). To achieve this, it was important to track responses. To enable this tracking, each respondent was attributed a number (see Appendix M). It was also important to make notes of observations such as pauses, the way something was said as well as nonverbal cues given by a respondent (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In order to link pauses and other nonverbal observations to responses on the tape recordings, simple notes were made during the interview process so that this data could be included in the transcription process (see Appendix M).

Coding

In this research, the coding process employed was designed to identify themes or concepts in the data that informed the research question (Ezzy, 2002): What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Australia? The first step in this regard, after the responses were transcribed, was to collate all responses to each
question within each group (see Appendix N). These collated responses were then summarised and tabulated (see Appendix O). Key concepts were then used to represent the summarised responses. The key concepts were studied to determine whether any categories of data or themes were emerging. In this process, some of the concepts used earlier had to be refined in order to accommodate all the responses. Denscombe (2003: 120) states that this refinement contributes to the clarity of the explanatory process:

By comparing each coded instance with others that have been similarly coded, by contrasting instances with those in different categories, even using hypothetical possibilities, the researcher is able to refine and improve the explanatory power of the concepts and theories generated by the data.

Two main categories or themes emerged from the data: Place and Aboriginality. An example of the progression of coding from interview responses to key concepts and then to themes for questions 8, 9 and 10 can be seen in Appendix P. The theme of Place emerged first from responses because it was the main focus of the study. In this theme, participants attributed their perceptions of participation to dimensions of place (Figure 4.1).
The first strand of data in the dimension of place emerges when the perceptual dimension of place in the conceptual framework of contemporary understandings of place and Indigenous education interacts with the data from the interviews. Many responses in the interviews indicate that locations occupied by respondents are naturally rich sources of vicarious learning for students. This includes the outdoor physical environment and the wide network family and friends within close proximity to students’ homes.

The second strand in this dimension of data emerges from interaction with the conceptual framework’s ecological dimension. This strand indicates that Indigenous
respondents occupy locations that are relatively unaltered compared to urban locations. Curriculum that reflects the unique features of such locations may find more effective connections with Indigenous students.

In the third strand, emerging from interaction with the conceptual framework’s ideological dimension, data indicate that Indigenous people are anchored to locations occupied by their past generations and this could play a role in how they wish to be active place-makers.

The fourth strand emerges when the conceptual framework’s political dimension interacts with the data from the interviews. Responses in the interviews indicate that Indigenous respondents occupy relatively isolated locations. The isolation enables them to live culturally independent lives but students are cut off from the extensive resources and social contact available in urban areas.

In the fifth strand, common responses indicate that Indigenous people occupy locations that are enclaves of dense Indigenous settlement. This strand becomes apparent when the sociological dimension of the conceptual framework interacts with the data from the interviews.

The coding process increasingly indicated that another theme, Aboriginality, as also significant. In this theme, participants attributed their perceptions of participation to the influence of Aboriginality (see Figure 4.2).
The first strand of data in the dimension of Aboriginality emerges when the perceptual
dimension in the conceptual framework interacts with the data from the interviews.
Many responses in the interviews indicate that the natural environment is integral to
the lives of Indigenous students and is a significant source of learning.

The second strand in this dimension of data emerges from interaction with the
conceptual framework’s ecological dimension. This strand indicates that Indigenous
people have long associations with geographic locations and desire to know how to
live within their ecological limits.
In the third strand emerging from interaction with the conceptual framework’s ideological dimension, data indicate that Indigenous people have cycles of low expectation that have a bearing on their roles as place-makers. Low expectations impact on attitudes to education.

The fourth strand in the dimension of Aboriginality emerges when the conceptual framework’s political dimension interacts with the empirical data. Evidence indicates that Indigenous people desire self-determination and this can influence their roles within multicultural contexts.

In the fifth and final strand, common responses indicate that Indigenous people feel a sense of belonging in a community when their heritage is recognised. This strand becomes apparent when the conceptual framework’s sociological dimension interacts with the data.

**Interpretation**

Data were analysed so as to inform the main research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Australia? Data were also analysed to inform why Indigenous students are successfully retained in the earlier years by the case study school but not in the last two years of schooling.

The analysis was conducted by mapping three dimensions of data illustrated in Figure 4.3. The first dimension consisted of contemporary understandings of the significance of place in Indigenous education as embodied within the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Three. The second dimension consists of place emerging from
the empirical data and the third dimension consists of Aboriginality emerging from the empirical data. Elements of these three dimensions are mapped so that they interact and intercept to reveal factors contributing to the participation of Indigenous students in education at the case study school.
Figure 4.3: Key identifiable elements for participation emerging from interaction and interception between dimensions of data

Empirical dimension of Place

- Places are rich in physical and human stimuli
- Places occupied are resource-rich but relatively unaltered
- Identities of past generations anchors people to places
- Places both support and undermine self-determination
- Places are enclaves of dense Indigenous settlement

Empirical dimension of Aboriginality

- Natural environment integral to lives and is an important source of learning
- Long associations with places and desire to know how to uphold community values
- Alien school cultures create cycles of low expectations
- Self-determination
- Sense of belonging when heritage acknowledged

KEY ELEMENTS FOR PARTICIPATION

- Curriculum Method
- Curriculum Content
- Careers
- Partners
- Identity

- Students learn best from direct experience
- Students need to know that the earth has ecological limits
- Students need to be active place-makers
- Students challenge marginalisation and embrace multiculturalism
- Students should know how places become what they are

Conceptual Framework of contemporary understandings of place and Indigenous education
The writing process

Researching an Indigenous community placed three important considerations on the writing process for me as researcher. First, the construction of text had to carefully avoid being patronising or insensitive to Indigenous people. My experiences indicated that Indigenous people associated the former with insincerity and the latter with arrogance. Achieving a balance between the two positions was likely to lead to acceptance of the research findings by both the Indigenous community and the academic community.

Second, careful consideration needed to be made of how references were made to ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ people or groups. I had to avoid positioning non-Indigenous people as the benchmark by which Indigenous people were being evaluated. Failing to achieve this would be establishing non-Indigenous people as mainstream society and marginalising Indigenous people as the non-conforming group. This position would contradict the main aim of the study which is to establish the perspectives of members of a school community that were successful in keeping students in school.

Third, terminology used in researching Indigenous people can be difficult. Lee (2003) found that making reference to a group as having a strong cultural affiliation immediately placed other people into preconceived categories. For example, in this research regarding Indigenous people as a group with strong cultural heritage could lead to the preconception that non-Indigenous people do not have such a heritage. In order to eliminate such misconceptions, references to strong cultural affiliations are
restricted to distinctly Indigenous behaviours that have a bearing on students’
participation in education. Usually combinations of cultural behaviour and beliefs are
distinctly unique to one culture and not to others. For, example, extended family
systems may also be common amongst Australians of Italian descent. However,
extended families that have close connections with natural environments may not be
common amongst Italians but amongst Indigenous people. The reference to
Indigenous culture has to therefore be seen against the background that, in the light of
all data, it is justified to assume that Indigenous people have some distinctly different
characteristics attributable to Indigenous culture or Aboriginality.

**Pedagogical link and research balance**

The pedagogical link was maintained in this study by constantly revisiting the main
research question which is: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous
students in Australia? In Chapter One, the focus was on the poor participation of
Indigenous students in education as a trend that is common in other countries and that
students’ connections with place is a potentially important issue in the participation of
students. In Chapter Two the pedagogical link was maintained by reviewing how
participation is interpreted by researchers. In Chapter Three, although there is not
much research on place-conscious education for Indigenous students, available
research and perspectives of national and international researchers indicate that there
may be some basis for its relevance. In Chapter Four, the important issues of
conducting an interpretive study of an Indigenous context were discussed. In Chapters
Five and Six, the findings related to the research question are presented and in
Chapter Seven, the research question is revisited in light of the findings in this study.
CONCLUSION

This chapter focussed on the methodological issues of conducting an interpretive study of a specific context. The chapter began with an examination of the implications of an interpretive study in this research and steps taken in the study to achieve rigour. This was followed by a discussion of how the need to acquire in-depth understanding of a relatively uncommon phenomenon of successful participation of Indigenous students in education made the case study approach most viable. Discussion also clarifies why the school at which I was principal was chosen as the site for the case study, how participants were chosen, and how access was gained to the school. The chapter also addressed how the difficult issue of ‘persona’ of the researcher was handled.

Extensive discourse detailed why in-depth interviews were preferred and how the interview guide was constructed to achieve a three-dimensional search framework. The actual interview processes, physical setting and the significance of the use of a diary to record daily observations were also discussed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of how the analysis and interpretation of results will be conducted. Figure 4.4 presents a summary of the main points in Chapter 4.

In the next chapter, the findings from the interviews will be presented together with how these findings interact and intercept with contemporary theorising to reveal some key identifiable elements for participation of Indigenous students in education. The next chapter is the first of two chapters in which findings are discussed.
Figure 4.4: Summary organiser of Chapter Four

Chapter One
*Introduction to the Research*

Chapter Two
*Participation of Indigenous Students in Education*

Chapter Three
*Place-conscious Curriculum for Indigenous students*

Chapter Four
*Methodology*

- Implications of an interpretive study
- Justification for using the case study approach
- Selection of the research site
- Selection of respondents
- Gaining access to the school
- The issue of ‘researcher’
- Interviews
- Analysis and interpretation of results

Chapter Five
*Curriculum Method and Content as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation*
PART II: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
CHAPTER FIVE
Curriculum Method and Content as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn. (Benjamin Franklin)\textsuperscript{13}

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, a conceptual framework for analysis of the data consisting of contemporary understandings of Indigenous student participation, and two dimensions of data were identified and discussed: Place and Aboriginality. Interception and interaction between strands in the conceptual framework and the dimensions of data revealed five identifiable elements of Indigenous student participation. In this chapter, the first two identifiable elements of participation are discussed: Curriculum Method and Curriculum Content. These two identifiable elements are discussed separately from the other three because, based on my experiences in teaching Indigenous students, I regard them as areas of conventional focus. In other words, throughout my lived experiences, these two areas have commonly been the focus of initiatives to enhance Indigenous student participation and need to be discussed independently of the other three.

CURRICULUM METHOD

Curriculum Method emerges as an important consideration in the participation of Indigenous students in education when theoretical principles of perceptual place

\textsuperscript{13} Benjamin Franklin, American philosopher and statesman, 1706-1790.
interact and intercept with empirical data from the interviews. Figure 5.1 illustrates this emergence from the interaction and interception.

**Figure 5.1: Curriculum Method as a product of interaction and interception between the conceptual framework and dimensions of data**

Contemporary understandings of perceptual place and Indigenous education

According to Gruenewald (2003a), if students are given adequate opportunities to learn firsthand from the environment, their development will be accelerated because “human beings enter into a participatory relationship with other phenomena through the multisensory perception of direct space” (p. 624). Therefore, in order for schools to provide optimal learning environments, they “must develop strategies that better enable students and teachers to perceive places that are alive in the human and more-than-human world” (p. 625).
Empirical dimension of perceptual place

Place may be described as “ecology of reciprocal, interdependent relationships between bodies and forms” Gruenewald (2003a: 624). Data indicate that aspects of place such as the fauna and flora, climate and natural topographical features occupied by respondents support their inclination for close links with the outdoors. The country location of the case study school, low population density and the natural environment support opportunities for respondents to participate in appropriate “reciprocal, interdependent relationships” that Gruenewald (2003a: 624) describes. It may be important therefore for curriculum methodology to reflect this reciprocity and interdependency between students and their perceptual environments.

First, data indicate that students, parents and staff spent much of their earlier lives in country and remote towns. These towns are classified as regional and remote in Western Australia. The minimum distance that separates these locations from the largest city is six hundred kilometres. The small country nature of these settlements means that respondents did not have many entertainment options and usually knew everybody quite well. The trust between people and relative safety they enjoyed meant that students were quite free to have uninhibited engagement with the natural environment. This freedom meant more time spent outdoors making predominantly indoor, text-based education programs likely to be inappropriate for Indigenous students.

The second feature of locations occupied by respondents is the low population densities of the settlements. Students found these features to be appealing and complimentary to their lifestyles. A student said: “I like it quiet. A few people think
we should change but I would like to leave it the same otherwise it will end up being like Perth, busy and there will be rubbish everywhere”. (Student 9)

The quietness of locations then, contributes to more frequent associations between Indigenous students and extended families making extended families a major source of learning for students.

Third, the natural environment of country locations also emerges as a significant factor in the support of intimate relationships between respondents, other people and the environment. A student said:

I like the bush. I like to go out bush for shooting and riding my motorbike. I also like to go out camping in the bush and cooking kangaroo tails and damper. You can’t do that in busy places like the city. (Student 3)

Another student who indicated that outdoor experiences are associated with quality family time said: “I like going down to the beach everyday, go fishing on a boat. Before coming to this school I attended a small school near the beach. That is where all my friends and family still meet” (Student 7).

A deep appreciation of the environment is evident in this student’s response:

When it rains the creeks fill up. There is a wonderful feeling in the place. Everybody is so happy and they want to be together outdoors. The birds are out and the air smells so fresh. We usually get the family together and go down to the creek and swim all day and cook a feed. (Student 4)

Time spent outdoors in the natural environment also reflects on the nature of relationships between individuals. Two responses that reflect on the intimacy of these relationships include: “I like going out of the town to the surrounding bush with my friends. We usually go fishing and swimming in the dam. We all get along so well”
(Student 5). Another student said: “Nobody tells me not to do this or that. People are friendly and respect the needs of each other. People look out for each other” (Student 6). These responses indicate that locations occupied by students are highly likely to have personal connections with students and makes a compelling case for including aspects of place in learning contexts for Indigenous students.

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**

The empirical data on Aboriginality supports Gruenewald’s claims that direct firsthand experiences are significant to learning. The data indicate that Indigenous students learn from two significant sources: (a) relationships with family and friends, and (b) relationships with the outdoor environment. Each of these will be dealt with in turn.

**Relationships with family and friends**

Data indicate that students at this school are rooted in strong family bonds which are influential sources of learning. Evidence further indicates that students are frequently in contact with family and friends, enjoy friendships with cousins even in school, are able to easily relate to families from different generations, feel privileged to have the guiding wisdom of grandparents and are able to learn about life issues without fear of ridicule. However, evidence also indicates that close relationships with family and friends can also be negative to participation.

Amongst students, contact with family and friends is frequent, often after school hours and during weekends. It is typical for respondents to have many other related families living in the school community. Relatives’ homes are often close by thus
making it possible for interaction quite frequently as is evident from this response: “I see my cousin every day after school. I also go to school with him. After school I go to his house and only get back home when the sun goes down. This is almost daily and weekends” (Student 5). This response indicates that a typical day in the life of a student outside school hours is most likely to consist of interaction with people other than their own immediate family members.

The preference by Indigenous people to live near related families increases the likelihood that there would be many other students in the local school who are related in some way. This relatedness is likely to contribute to students feeling accepted at the case study school which, in turn, encourages students to attend school as suggested by this response: “There are lots of my cousins and friends going to this school. I don’t need to have other friends. I look forward to seeing them” (Student 6).

The frequency of interaction between family and friends is not curtailed by great distances that sometimes separate families. Contact, even with distant families, is maintained by families allowing their children to spend long periods with extended family living far away. One student describes this situation:

I have many cousins staying with me. They are from up north. I also have my nephew with us. There is also my mum’s first cousin’s son. They stay with us because they hardly go to school up north and my dad says they will learn more from us here. Things like who their family is and how, as Aboriginal people, we can learn about culture but also go to school. (Student 10)

During these extended visits, students are educated about their cultural links and way of life thereby highlighting the importance of contact with family and friends as important elements in the way Indigenous students learn.
Within the oneness of extended families, grandparents usually play a prominent role in the way students learn. Grandparents occupy the position of heads of extended families and their influence can extend across generations to the youngest in the family. The type of influence revolves mainly around everyday issues such as illness and problems at school. A student’s response reflects this relationship:

I keep in contact most often with my Nanna. Nanna asks me if I would like to go back to the same school the following year. She also asks me about my friends, teachers and what I would like to do when I grew up. (Student 1)

The physical frailty of grandparents does not reflect on the encompassing role they play in the extended family as indicated by this student:

Nanna plays a big role in my life even though she is very old. She encourages me. It feels very comfortable being around her. She looks after all the family. When the family needs money they all turn to her. When we first got there we had nowhere to stay. She said come and stay with me. Now we are all family who live in one tiny little house. It is a two bedroom house with about twelve people living inside it. Everyone turns to the old lady. Everyone gets on well. They are all very close. Nanna keeps everyone in line. (Student 4)

The impact of grandparents drawing everyone closer into one family unit is reciprocated by students establishing them as the main influence in their lives as is evident from this response: “I keep in touch with my grandmother more than anybody else. I really think that what she thinks and says is most important to me” (Student 1).

Amidst the evidence of the constructive role of extended families in the way students learn is an indication that cousins and peers can sometimes have a negative impact on students’ learning as suggested by this student when asked which was the best school attended: “The district high school was my best school because I did not have cousins around to distract me when I was working. At this school I have cousins and I don’t like that because they have bad habits and are not interested in school”. (Student 2)
The school then, whilst recognising the potential effect of drawing on positive
relationships within extended families to enhance student participation, may need to
be aware of the potential drawbacks of some close relationships.

A parent described the oneness with family members of different generations as being
inherent. He went on to state that it is quite normal within Indigenous culture for older
c folk to take a keen interest in the lives of younger members of the extended family:

My parents and grandparents always took an interest in our schooling. Even
after the children left school, the parents encouraged them as well to further
their education. As children we had to inform them all the time and it is still
the same for their grandchildren. They want to know what they are doing and
whether they are learning all the important values. (Parent 1)

This response by a parent suggests that the role of elders reaching out to younger
family members is formally or informally taught as part of Indigenous culture.
Learning from elders can therefore be a varied and boundless experience for students.

Another parent suggested that inter-generational links between Indigenous people is
maintained by younger generations making the effort to involve elders in raising new
members of extended families. As children grow and have families of their own, they
recognise that the wisdom of elders is essential in the decisions they make about their
own children. One member of staff stated:

We usually get together as a family about two or three times a week. They
come around to visit and we go to their houses. My family usually come to me
for advice because I am the oldest of the children in the family. I usually give
advice to my sisters and brothers on issues regarding their children. I expect
my nieces and nephews to see how their parents respected me and to take the
same role when they are adults. (Parent 1)
This parent’s response suggests that close interaction between different generations of extended Indigenous families is likely to continue for many generations as younger members actively maintain relationships.

However, parents were also concerned about the negative aspects of extended families. Whilst most of the students positively related how their cousins were often also their best friends, a parent brought to attention the potentially negative impact of peer influence. The parent said that sometimes peers influence students to leave school before completing their education: “Some of the cousins are a few years older and are not going to school. These older cousins often influence the younger ones to leave school. Peer pressure has just gone in the wrong direction” (Parent 3).

Responses by some members of staff also indicated that Indigenous students are significantly influenced by interaction with members of family and close friends. One Indigenous member of staff recalled his best years of schooling:

I liked where I lived because it was small and I was at school with all my family. Most of the other kids were my family, my cousins, uncles, aunts. It was important to me. I think that is why I enjoyed it because there were a lot of Aboriginal kids who were related to me there. (Staff 1)

This response indicates that the high level of enthusiasm to attend school may not be a recent trend but was also significant to students many years ago. This would suggest that a learning community consisting of students who are comfortable in the company of one another may be important in the participation of Indigenous students.

Further evidence indicates that relationships formed at younger ages between Indigenous people continue through until adulthood. A member of staff illustrated this
point by insisting that nothing had changed for her as an adult in terms of her concern for other members of her extended family which she had as a child. She stated:

The bond that we had as children is still there today. We now spend time keeping in touch and making sure other members of the family are okay. We try to have get togethers in the bush every now and again. This is the way we get to know our little ones in the family. (Staff 2)

This response indicates that strong family links exist throughout the lives of some individuals and learning by interaction may be grounded in strong intergenerational links.

However, there is evidence that suggests that whilst grandparents do exert much influence over students’ decisions, they are not always able to help students much in terms of making effective connections between their education and careers that students are capable of pursuing. Grandparents themselves are likely to have not completed their school education and may therefore not be adequately informed to advise their grandchildren regarding choice of careers or courses. Advice by grandparents is most likely therefore to be restricted to general values and the importance of education. One member of staff stated:

The aunts and grandmother exerted some influence more in terms of sport and our family history. Like when I was going to school and I was in Year 12 the support was not really in education. It was more to do with how to survive in this world. (Staff 1)

This response indicates that whilst grandparents can be significant sources of learning and influence on Indigenous students’ participation in school, they can also be limited in terms of helping students through specific educational issues such as courses and careers. These issues may therefore become the sole responsibility of the school to address.
Relationship with the outdoors

Evidence in the data reveals that the interaction between students and the outdoors is a significant factor in the way Indigenous students learn. Responses indicate that many students spend much time outdoors and relate much of their learning inside classrooms to their outdoor experiences. For example, students indicated that the natural environment is essential to their existence by stating that the natural environment around the case study school is one of the most important reasons for them being attracted to the school. When asked if he would consider attending the case study school if the natural environment did not encompass it, a student replied:

I am not sure if I would still attend this school if it was located elsewhere. It is important to me that the school is located in a place like this. I think that the school will be different if it was located somewhere else like in a busy city. I don’t think I would like it much and wouldn’t attend it. For example, on the National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Celebrations (NAIDOC) we all went out bush and cooked kangaroo. It is not like in Perth where you would not be able to do that at all. (Student 4)

Evidence indicates that some students’ desire to have direct environmental engagement with the outdoors is not their way of escaping indoor, text-based tasks. This is reflected in a statement expressed by a student about the possible impact of outdoor learning on learning time. The student, aware that increased time spent outdoors could impinge on time spent on text-based lessons, stated:

There should be more homework classes at this school so that we can enjoy the bush more. At the moment there are just two homework classes. I think kids here need homework classes so that we can cover up the work teachers say we are missing by being out of class. (Student 8)

This response indicates students’ acknowledgement that their suggestions for a balance between indoor and outdoor activities infringe on indoor instruction time but they are prepared to make sacrifices so that they are not disadvantaged in terms of
completing programs within forecasted time frames. It also indicates possible tension that could arise between staff who are in favour of place-conscious education and those who prefer to implement indoor, text-based learning programs.

Students’ concern that the school program should recognise the most effective ways that Indigenous students learn without compromising academic standards is also matched by a concern that the programs should prepare them for viable careers as indicated by this student:

For example, with horse riding, students should be able not only to ride but conduct tours around the school, know how to calculate finances, write brochures to advertise the business and know about plant and animal life so that they can talk to tourists. In this way we are learning all the subjects in a fun way. We can also become tour guides so that when we grow up they can be the same. (Student 9)

This response indicates that this Indigenous student believes that culturally appropriate curriculum methodology and content should also ensure that students are prepared for life as adults. The response confirms the earlier one that students at the research site are not trying to escape academic work for the outdoors. It may also indicate another tension in that, whilst students want curriculum to prepare them for careers, Indigenous elders may want curriculum to focus on preservation of culture.

The passion that some students at the research site have for outdoor activities is enhanced by their independence and the relative safety of much of the environment to engage in spontaneous, uninhibited outdoor experiences. A student’s response illustrated this point:

We never get bored, my cousins and friends. We pack our lunch, go off for walks in the bush, eat bush tucker and go swimming in the dams. We always have something to do. We ride horses and played with motorbikes. It is really
good because our parents do not have to worry about us like in the city. (Student 4)

In this response the inclusion of other family and friends as an integral part of the outdoor experience suggests that interaction is a key factor to enjoying the experience and sometimes helps in the classrooms as this student indicated:

I like to have more computer based lessons and less English lessons because there is too much of writing in English. At least in computers we get to read, discuss it with our friends and then actually do something on the computer. The time goes so quickly. I never get bored in class. (Student 1)

This student views Computer Studies as enjoyable because manipulation of the keyboard is a practical task and they get to participate as a community, two aspects of their similarly enjoyed time spent outdoors. The integration of technology has also added to enjoyment of the task.

Parents also indicated that they made a conscious decision to live where they and their children had opportunities for close relationships with the natural outdoors. As one parent stated:

I wouldn’t live in a big city. The laws for the land down there are different. You have to ask permission to go on people’s property. Here we can just drive a few kilometres into the bush and hunt our traditional foods whereas in the city there are no traditional foods. Down there you are seen like you are a minority. You have to dance to the tune of the authorities and all those rich fellas that own all the open spaces. Our children have much more freedom here to learn as the way we always have – by finding solutions in nature by using simple logic. You don’t have to be in a classroom all the time to learn. (Parent 1)

This response indicates that Indigenous adults associated with the school consider direct experience with the natural environment as an essential element of learning.
Parents indicated that students’ direct learning experiences with the environment provided vicarious learning experiences that contribute to the development of the whole student. A parent stated:

My kids’ leisure time is spent with horses or something out in the bush, basically country activities – nothing that people and kids do out in the big cities. My kids don’t do anything like hanging around the malls. They don’t even watch TV. They always have something to do and that is why they are so creative and independent. They have been consistent at school. (Parent 4)

A parent went as far as saying that, the need for a balance between the indoors and outdoors for Indigenous students at the research site is essential for physiological reasons:

The timetable should be arranged in a way that subjects like Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) will be split up with outdoor options so that the kids could look forward to something that is in between. If they worked a lot in Maths and went straight into SOSE their minds will become tired. I find that in Aboriginal kids. They start to get bored and they will then put their heads on the table and not listen. (Parent 1)

In this response the parent indicates that Indigenous students are typically inclined to acquire much of their learning vicariously outdoors, and that any benefit from prolonged structured indoor programs would be limited. School programs that reflect these physiological characteristics of Indigenous students at the school are likely to encourage a deeper level of engagement by these students.

Staff members, many of which are non-Indigenous, conceded that direct learning experiences for students at the research site are important. One non-Indigenous staff member stated: “I have come to know that Aboriginal students need to implement what they learn. They need to participate in activities where they reach outcomes by actually doing things” (Staff 4). However, this staff member was concerned that
indoor text-based lessons may be compromised making it important to have a
structured work environment:

    For me I think that these kids need structure and stability. If the learning
    program is structured so that indoor and outdoor programs are integrated,
    students will display confidence in both because they will give equal time to
    both. That would be the most important focus because in their own lives there
    is so much insecurity and instability. (Staff 4)

This staff member’s response indicates yet another tension in that, as a professionally
qualified person, the staff member is aware of the merits of place-conscious education
for Indigenous students but may face opposite points of view from other members of
staff. This member of staff however had support from another Indigenous staff
member who stated that if this integration between the indoor and outdoors does not
happen adequately as it does at the research site, Indigenous students will generally be
disruptive. He states: “Otherwise Aboriginal kids will constantly be seen as wanting
to go against the grain of the academic program at the school” (Staff 1). This
Indigenous staff member went on to add that implementing a balanced curriculum
will enable staff to raise disciplinary standards because students would be eager to
respond: “You can be strict too when you find that balance. Once you have that
balance of discipline and a program, like here, that really appeals to Aboriginal
students, you will have good learning conditions”. (Staff 1)

This response indicates that the Indigenous member of staff was of the opinion that
the poor participation of Indigenous students in many schools is due to such students
having to experience standard, indoor-based curriculum methodology. The case study
school is an exception because it caters for a balance.
Indigenous staff and students are thus prepared to be flexible in finding the right balance in curriculum method and in meeting standard curriculum requirements such as testing and reporting that all schools are required to meet.

**CURRICULUM CONTENT**

Curriculum content emerges as a significant factor to be considered in the participation of Indigenous students when theoretical principles of ecological place interacts and intercepts with data from the interviews. Figure 5.2 illustrates the relevant concepts in this process.

**Figure 5.2: Curriculum Content as a product of interaction and interception between the conceptual framework and dimensions of data**

Contemporary understandings of ecological place and Indigenous education

According to Gruenewald (2003a), curriculum should not be based on the premise that everyone desires to become rich in a global economy. Communities may have little interest in material wealth and, instead, may desire to live in harmony with
features of local place. Place-conscious curriculum prepares students for “local knowledge and care” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 634).

**Empirical dimension of ecological place**

Data from the interviews indicate that students and parents recognise the unique ecological forms of locations they occupy as the basis of their Aboriginality. According to Gruenewald (2003a) place has ecological limits that need to be acknowledged and that “cultural practices should be aligned with the ecological limits and features of place” (p. 634).

The sizes of towns from which respondents originated were small, averaging about two thousand people. Respondents described these small towns as having a proportionately smaller range of social and economic functions available to their local population compared to larger cities. However, they viewed the small sizes of their towns as a positive feature. Many students emphasised that they would have it no other way. When a student was asked how she felt about the case study school being located in a larger town, she said:

> The school would be so busy. We would have more students coming to this school. We won’t be able to concentrate on the work we are doing. The school is quiet now because this town is a small place. If it is taken somewhere else it would be busy and not be the same. (Student 9)

Another student said:

> The school will change. Because the school is here, it is small and this is better. Not many people want to travel out here. There would probably be more non-Aboriginals attending the school. I think we Aboriginal kids should learn as much as we can and then go and get good jobs around here so that we could make this a better place. (Student 10)
These responses indicate that students do not see the geographic locations in which they lived to be ‘limiting’. Instead, their lives fitted perfectly into the “unique features and ecological limits” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 634) of such locations. This point strengthens the argument that education content orientated towards students’ better understanding of their local place is likely to enhance the lives of students rather than preparing them for global citizenship through programs that do not adequately relate to their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

Parents also indicated that any alternate location of a successful school for Indigenous students should be in a place where Indigenous people could get back to their roots of knowing more about their culture. This, according to parents, may involve living in locations with a rich history of Aboriginality or having the natural environment around which facilitates traditional Indigenous activities.

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**

The data from the interviews indicate that the principles of Aboriginality support the need for curriculum content focusing on “local knowledge and care” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 634). The lived experiences of respondents occurred mainly in local geographic locations where previous family generations had also lived, with many never living away from such locations. In this section, data pertaining to the localised lived experience of respondents as a cultural group will be discussed. The purpose of the discussion is to demonstrate how the localised lived experiences of respondents, associations with local geographic locations, make it pertinent for curriculum to recognise the significance of local place to Aboriginality.
Localised lived experiences

Data reveal two aspects of previous schools attended by students. First, students at the research site have attended between three to four schools before attending the present school. Second, a common factor is that all schools attended are situated in remote and regional locations, and therefore similar in geographic and demographic character to that of respondent’s home towns. Movement between schools was localised within relatively small radii from their communities of origin. Students therefore had lived experiences related only to country, regional and remote locations making it important for curriculum content to recognise respondents’ localised knowledge.

Whilst students agreed that curriculum content recognising their localised lived experiences would be more effective, they also had realistic perspectives of how such a curriculum would compare to others implemented elsewhere as is evident in this response:

  I would like to learn more English because you can learn more about how to be Aboriginal but also how to behave in places far away from here. When you go to a white school, you know what they are saying and how to speak and not feel ashamed. Maths too is important if I want to be somebody. (Student 9)

This student understood that study areas such as English and Mathematics should still be central features of a locally-based curriculum if students wanted to achieve benchmarks achieved by students in other schools. The response also suggests a tension within students in that, whilst they wanted to be proficient in English, they associated the language with a loss of culture – something they did not want to happen.
Students’ concern about meeting state-wide and national achievement benchmarks also included putting sport into perspective as described by one student when asked to describe the ideal curriculum content:

There will be lots of classes like English and Maths and we’d do a lot of sports. You have to have Maths and English because you got to learn otherwise you will not go anywhere. You can’t go anywhere with just sports. (Student 5)

The type of sport that the student speaks about highlights the relevance of local place issues in curriculum content. Data indicate that students are not inclined towards sports such as cricket, rugby, swimming, soccer or athletics. Instead, they are passionate about playing Australian Football League (AFL)\(^{14}\). One student said:

“There should be more sport like football [AFL] because Aboriginal kids love to play football around here, not cricket or anything else” (Student 6). These responses suggest that not only is sport an integral part of a local curriculum but also the type of sport being promoted is likely to be determined by the popularity of a sport locally rather than nationally or internationally.

Parents’ lived experiences too had a local component to them. None of the parents interviewed have ever lived in urbanised settlements for any extended period of time. One parent said that she had spent all her schooling in a country town. She said: “I went to just one primary school which was from Years 1 to 10. To complete Years 11 and 12, we had to travel further away. It was okay because the other school was in a country place like ours” (Parent 2). Parents therefore were unlikely to play a supportive role in the education of Indigenous students if curriculum content was based on contexts outside their own localised experiences.

\(^{14}\) Australian Football League or Aussie Rules is a sport played only in Australia. The game consists of two teams competing against each other by passing and kicking an oval-shaped ball into the opposition’s goal (Barker, 2004).
Parents, who did move around between schools like students, did so within rural and regional locations. These school locations were similar in spatial and demographic nature to those where they lived even if they moved from one state to another. The common factor of rurality of most locations of origin and destination provides further evidence that both students and parents have attended schools in locations that closely resemble those in which they had grown up. This implies that Indigenous parents, as significant sources of knowledge, are likely to contribute to students’ appreciation of local rather than global place.

Evidence indicates that Indigenous parents felt that the inclusion of local historical aspects into the curriculum could preserve Indigenous culture. This preservation, according to parents, could be achieved by giving students learning opportunities in certain study areas. One parent said:

Options should include Aboriginal Studies together with Woodwork and Metalwork and Technical Drawing because a lot of the parents these days lose the culture and tradition of knowing who their ancestors were and being able to use their hands to make things. They lose it and they don’t pass it on to their children. These days a lot of Aboriginal kids don’t even know their language. They just know English and that’s it. That’s a very sad situation. (Parent 1)

This parent’s response indicates that parents want to re-establish Indigenous culture in their children through the focus of local history and local societal issues in the school curriculum.

Whilst parents are keen to establish traditional cultural content in the curriculum, they are also keen that cultural teaching should not be done at the expense of preparing students for their future roles as adults.
A parent said:

We should get away from actually teaching [Aboriginal culture] to other people. It gets into their head and they forget about everything else. The schools should give them an education to enable them to be trained in TAFE as an engineer. Schools should be teaching skills rather than too much of culture. (Parent 3)

This parent’s response may indicate another tension between those who would like to see Indigenous culture being actively promoted at the school and those who want students to simply be academically competitive for the best jobs.

There is also evidence to indicate that parents’ views of how culture should fit within a Christian environment are crucial to the success of the case study school. The case study school is operated along conservative Christian values and these values are likely to clash with fundamentalist cultural views. For example, if parents wanted to include the teachings of the Aboriginal spiritual world in the curriculum, this would clash with the Christian values of the school. Fortunately, however, parents’ views correlate with those of the Governing Board that the Christian values of the school should not accommodate such teachings as reflected by this parent:

There are lots of things our forefathers did in the spiritual and traditional way that goes against my beliefs as a Christian. Instead, the school should have activities that says to our children this is what our traditional people did for art and food, how they collected food. I would like to keep it to just that. Dancing for tribal purposes will be out. Keep it to just church and the bible. In this way they can also concentrate on the schooling. (Parent 3)

This response indicates that the preservation of culture is supported by parents only if it occurs within a Christian-based curriculum framework. Parents input enable the school to make the fine distinction between religious and non-religious aspects of culture. This enables the case study school to be more adventurous in combining
aspects of the past, present and future of Indigenous students’ lives into curriculum content whilst observing sensitive Indigenous protocols.

Parents concern about the relevance of curriculum content is not restricted to just its cultural balance. They also indicated that a culturally appropriate curriculum should prepare students for a wide range of careers as indicated by this parent:

I really like how this school teaches students about who they are and where they come from. But I would get more staff on board with many skills. A variety of staff will have many skills and interests that will give our children more options so that they can one day qualify for more careers. This will make our elders to start believing in education again. (Parent 1)

This response indicates that sometimes culture-rich schools can operate at the expense of preparing students with academic skills that enables further education and training leading to disillusionment of the education system by parents.

Localised lived experiences of rural and regional schooling are also evident amongst staff. Many staff members, even those of overseas origin, described living in demographically homogenous rural communities. An Indigenous staff member said:

I spent most of my time in the north-east. It was a typical coal-mining town of about two thousand people. It is mainly pastoral, like sheep farming. It was exciting there because at the school the Aboriginal population was about 80%. (Staff 1)

A non-Indigenous staff member said: “Most of my life was spent in the suburbs of South Auckland in New Zealand” (Staff 3). From my own observations, South Auckland has one of the largest settlement densities of Indigenous Maori and Polynesian people in New Zealand. These locations have many demographic and spatial similarities with that of the case study school. This background of staff at the case study school therefore implies that there is a link between their lived experiences and their employment at the Indigenous case study school. Localised curriculum
content implemented at the case study school is likely to gain the support and enthusiasm of these members of staff.

The inclusion of local, culturally appropriate curriculum content raised the issue of accessibility to appropriate resources by staff. The relative isolation of the case study school restricted access to resources that enabled staff to design locally-based curriculum. However, whilst an Indigenous member of staff acknowledged that this disadvantage cannot be completely overcome, he also stated that by setting realistic goals relevant outcomes can be still be achieved:

We should be trying to get the kids to be more confident, to stand up and speak in front of a group. I think in Perth you can do those things because you have people down there with the skills. This is a better place for our Aboriginal children but they should not be disadvantaged just because they are far from the city. If our Aboriginal students can only be able to relate confidently with people of any culture, they would have achieved the most from education. (Staff 1)

According to this Indigenous staff member, content that prepared Indigenous students to be more confident should be a priority and that programs in this regard did not require much resources. The response suggested that, whilst Indigenous staff members understand the challenges of schools located far away from appropriate resources, they also believe that within this restricted environment some realistic goals can be set and achieved. According to staff, the goal of increasing levels of confidence of students is one that can be effectively promoted by using appropriate curriculum content familiar to students.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter an analysis of results related to the first two of the five identifiable elements: Curriculum Method and Curriculum Content were presented. Results reveal
that, in terms of the significance of curriculum method, locations occupied by Indigenous students range from environments that provide rich stimuli from the natural outdoors to ones that provide students with challenges in the way extended families can be both sources of learning and inhibitions to learning. Yet students indicate that they are able to use these situations to learn vicariously and accept these different learning environments as integral to their lives. In terms of the relevance of curriculum content, results indicate that locations occupied by respondents are relatively undeveloped and therefore unique to Australia as a highly developed country. Students are familiar with these locations and may be more enthusiastic to engage with learning content based on elements of such locations. Furthermore, as a cultural group, students have long associations with locations they occupy making them more meaningful to their lives. Figure 5.3 illustrates the main points in the chapter. In the next chapter, results related to the three remaining identifiable elements are analysed: Career Orientation, Partners, and Identity.
Figure 5.3: Summary organiser of Chapter Five

Chapter One
Introduction to the Research

Chapter Two
Participation of Indigenous students in Education

Chapter Three
Place-conscious curriculum for Indigenous Students

Chapter Four
Methodology

Chapter Five
Curriculum Method and Content as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation
- Curriculum Method
- Curriculum Content
- Conclusion

Chapter Six
Careers, Partners and Identity as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation
CHAPTER SIX
Careers, Partners and Identity as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation

Where your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation. (Aristotle)\textsuperscript{15}

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, results related to Curriculum Method and Curriculum Content as the first two identifiable elements of participation of Indigenous students in education were analysed. In this chapter analyses of results related to the three remaining elements are conducted: Careers, Partners and Identity.

In the analysis of results related to Career Orientation, sport emerges as a significant factor in the career choices of students. The role of parents, wider society and the government also emerge as being significant in the way students end up making decisions about careers. The analysis of results related to Partners revealed how respondents felt about other people who were part of their daily lives as members of the school community and how the complex issue of Aboriginality versus Christianity was significant. Results for the final identifiable element, Identity, reveal that the nature of student participation is related to students’ identities at school. If students are identified as members of extended families, they are likely to feel a sense of belonging at the school but this raises some complications for the school. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key issues related to each identifiable element.

\textsuperscript{15} Aristotle, Greek philosopher, 384 BC – 322 BC.
Careers emerge as a significant factor to be considered in the participation of Indigenous students when theoretical principles of ideological place interacted and intercepted with data from the interviews. Figure 6.1 illustrates the concepts involved in this process.

**Figure 6.1: Careers as a product of interaction and interception between the conceptual framework and dimensions of data**

**Empirical dimension of Ideological Place**
- Identities of past generations anchors people to places

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**
- Low cycles of expectation

**Contemporary understandings of ideological place and Indigenous education**

According to Gruenewald (2003a: 628) “spaces and places are expressive of ideologies and relationships of power”. An examination of place (entities of physical land which all have perceptual, ecological, ideological, political and social properties) according to Gruenewald reveals places have inscribed politics and ideologies relating to people that occupy it. This has special significance to the landscape occupied by
respondents in this study. The families of Indigenous respondents have occupied these locations in Australia for many centuries. An examination of the inscribed politics and ideologies of these locations yield information on the current status of Indigenous students as citizens. This includes specifically what careers Indigenous students are associated with and how this association influences their participation in education.

**Empirical dimension of ideological place**

Data on ideological place reveal that common locations of origin of respondents are not political and economic seats of power. These locations lie on the fringes of the large metropolitan areas and ideologically, do not constitute the driving force behind the economic and political mechanism of the West Australian landscape. However, respondents at the research site have occupied these locations for many generations and continued to do so because of ancestral links. For example, when students were asked to describe their locations of origin, responses revealed that such locations were not vibrant economically, but responses also revealed that students were nevertheless fond of them. One student who described his place of origin said: “It is quiet” also said that “It is good to have all my family I can walk to” (Student 1). Another student described his community as: “It is near the mines. There are just mines” also added “all my mum’s family are there. It is the safest place” (Student 4). So students have strong links with geographic locations they occupy even though such locations may not have imposing roles in the Australian economic and political landscape because of their low economic value.

Parents expressed similar sentiments to students about locations they occupied as described by this parent: “It is just bush, country and hills, no businesses” but went on
to add: “the people are friendly because I know everybody. It isn’t a racist town. That is most important to me” (Parent 1). A member of staff described his community as: “a typical coal mining town of only two thousand people” but added: “it is exciting because the Aboriginal population is 80%” (Staff 1). Parents and staff then, like students, describe their locations of origin as being not economically vibrant but locations with which they have strong social and emotional links. This evidence is significant in that it suggests that students living at this location will not be attending schools with cultures alien to their own, a factor regarded as significant to participation by researchers. The strong social and emotional links also suggests that consideration be given to establishing students in careers that would enable them to continue living in such locations.

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**

Responses in the interviews generally support Gruenewald’s (2003a) statement that:

The public or explicit agenda of schooling is to prepare citizens to participate in a basically just and equitable society, one that is becoming more just and equitable through the democratic process. However, the hidden or implicit agenda is that in its lack of attention to spatial forms, education functions to maintain geographical relations of domination. (p. 629)

In other words, according to Gruenewald (2003a), many schools may be preparing students to follow careers in large metropolitan areas, leaving locations on the fringes such as those occupied by respondents to stagnate economically. Evidence in the data indicate that respondents are of the opinion that their preferred country, regional and remote locations for settlement are permanently disadvantaged in relation to the larger cities. For generations, Indigenous youth living in such locations have continued to display trends of poor participation, high unemployment and low representation in professional and qualified employment sectors (MCEETYA, 2006). Evidence also
indicates that students’ decisions about careers are related to their underachievement at school which, in turn, are products of locations that Indigenous people occupy.

Data indicated that students at the case study school were not enthusiastic about the range of careers that they are being offered. One student stated: “I would like to do hair dressing but I can’t see how what I am studying now got to do with this” (Student 1) whilst another said: “We don’t have cooking. I want to be a chef but all we do is sport. Not everybody likes sport and what job is that going to give me?” (Student 5). As a result, some students were not highly interested in meeting tertiary entrance requirements that institutions may have for these careers as indicated by this student: “At the moment I am not even sure why I want to complete Year 11 and 12” (Student 4). Some Indigenous students viewed the completion of Years 11 and 12 just as a way to see more of the world rather than as a gateway to careers: “After Year 12 I want to go to play college basketball in America. I want to go to America because I want to get out of Australia because there is nothing for me back home” (Student 5). Students who were seeking to meet university entrance requirements lacked the conviction that they would follow through and complete their tertiary studies as related by this student: “I would like to go to university or TAFE. This would be hard for me though so I don’t know” (Student 9).

These responses indicate students do not associate themselves with tertiary qualifications, are disconnected from the realities of what tertiary studies entail, what jobs tertiary studies can prepare them for, the demands these jobs may have and the potential impact of these jobs on their lives. This level of disconnection may indicate that current education programs at the case study school are not adequately preparing
students to break out of the cycle of low rates of progression to qualified careers. This may be one of the key reasons for the case study school not experiencing high participation rates amongst students in Year 11 and 12. Whilst students in the latter group contributed to the school’s phenomenal growth, the progression of students into Year 11 and 12 remains negligible. It is possible that the sharp drop in participation recorded by the school for students in Years 11 and 12 is related to the fact that students do not associate a Year 12 certificate with greater success in terms of careers.

Students’ high level of interest in sport did not benefit their careers. Whilst in earlier discussions, sport emerged as an important element of curriculum content and method, when it came to serious decisions about careers, sport emerged as an obstacle to students’ career orientation rather than of any benefit. Many students were under the impression that it was easy to establish themselves in the lucrative field of being professional sports players. This belief is related to the relatively higher level of success that students experience in sport compared to education as indicated by this student:

I don’t want to complete Year 11 and 12 at this school. I want to go to a school where I can finish Year 11 and 12 but play football – a school like Clontarf [a private school for Indigenous students that offers sports scholarships]. I haven’t thought of going to university. At least with football I can make a living doing something which I really enjoy doing and am good at. (Student 6)

This student’s response indicates that staff at the case study school may have to contend with sport as a major factor in establishing links between students and future careers. The self-efficacy that students show in sport may need to be understood better in order to understand how to develop similar levels of self-efficacy in learning.
For some students, the fear of being trapped within the cycle of unemployment and substance abuse in their communities takes priority over serious thought to careers and their studies at school as indicated by this comment:

After Year 10 I want to go on schooling. I would like to do my Year 11 at any school. I just don’t want to stay at home and do nothing. I have my cousin who finished Year 10 but did not continue with her studies. She started smoking and drinking. I’ll just carry on going to school until something come up. I feel safe here for now. (Student 7)

This response indicates that career orientation is linked to respondents’ home and community environment, as well as social service providers. The school is potentially a facilitator between these variables.

Parents were generally of the opinion that their children should at least complete their school education as one parent stated:

They can’t just come home, sit down and do nothing. It is going to be school until they get a job. As long as they are doing something and continuing with their education, I don’t mind. I will support them. I am not particular as to whether they should go to university or TAFE. (Parent 3)

Parents represent potentially effective partners in adjusting the way schools orientate students towards careers. Parents want their students to think about careers beyond the cycle of low expectations of the previous generations of Indigenous people. The views of parents would indicate that the case study school has their mandate to extend students’ ambitions beyond the cycle of poorly paid unskilled jobs into which many Indigenous students eventually enter.

Staff members at the research site were also in an important position to positively affect career choices. This is reflected in the clear expectations that they had from their children in terms of what they should do after completion of the compulsory
phase of schooling. A member of staff said: “If he doesn’t do TEE, he is going to go on and finish his Year 12 anyway. He wants to do medicine and work with little kids in our Aboriginal communities” (Staff 1). They are also prepared to think about careers for their children on a broad scope as reflected in this staff member’s response about his daughter’s career options:

The other day I asked her again what she was going to do she said that she was going to train as a mechanic. Initially I was sceptical but then realised that at least she had something to aspire towards, something she wanted to do. (Parent 3)

Besides being more informed as to what careers their own children would follow and being prepared to consider wider choices, staff members were also of the opinion that completion of Year 12 was simply necessary because it was inextricably linked to careers:

All my kids did Year 11 and 12. As long as they finished Year 12, I did not mind what they decided on after that because with Year 12 they could go on to studies in whatever fields they wanted at university or TAFE. It gives them the grounding for decisions. (Staff 2)

Another member of staff added that for the inextricable link between education and career orientation to be established, students may have to be introduced to career choices much earlier at school: “At the end of Year 8, I would suggest that they start picking their career paths so that they can be guided into their careers instead of waiting for Years 10 or 11” (Staff 4).

However, another member of staff cautioned that, developmentally, Indigenous students are only likely to be certain of what careers they wanted to follow quite late into their secondary schooling:

Quite often an Aboriginal student may not realise until they are in Year 10 or 11 that they had the potential to pursue such a path. They may therefore take
such a path later in life and schools should not discount this especially if the school hopes to have Year 11 and 12 programs. (Staff 3)

Members of staff were especially vocal about the role played by the Australian Federal and State Governments in the way Indigenous students were orientated towards careers and how this impacted on participation. This member of staff commented on the ill-effects of living-away-from home allowances:

I think that the government has made a lot of mistakes in having the living-away-from-home allowance. This causes the kids to leave their homes. They are not adults to make decisions for themselves. Kids need their family support. When they go away somewhere else, they have nobody there to support them in getting into good careers. That’s why they get so discouraged and give up. They can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. (Staff 2)

A staff member, with international lived experiences described the living-away-from-home-allowance to be excessive compared to other countries:

The living-away-from-home allowance is too easy to get in this country compared to abroad. We live in a rich country that can afford to pay people to do nothing. So there is no incentive for students to stay in school to get the best possible education for a tertiary education compared to other countries where education is the only way out. We are talking about a matter of life and death here. Education is not valued here. (Staff 4)

These responses collectively imply that the living-away-from-home allowance is regarded as the cause for students separating from their families to live independently. In the process, families are not able to exert their influence on students to remain in school and to provide them with guidance and support in career choices.

The role of government, according to members of staff, goes beyond just encouraging students to leave school early and take up unskilled jobs. The government is also responsible for eroding Indigenous parents’ authority over their children:

Governments have caused families to break up. Look at what they have done to the rights of the child. Parents can’t even discipline their children. So how
are parents going to motivate their children to get into jobs they are capable of? You wonder where the next generation is going to go. This is all contributing to the falling off of Aboriginal students. (Staff 2)

A member of staff went further by stating that the government should not only reassess its funding role in the achievement of career aspirations of Indigenous students, but should also repair some of the psychological effects of past events on Indigenous people:

There is still a lot of baggage with regard to the stolen generation with people being removed from their families. There is a lack of self-belief that they can achieve at something that they set their minds to do because when our people were taken away, they were turned into someone else because being Aboriginal was seen as being inferior. I think our people still think like that. They think that they can’t do it because they are inferior. Achievement is for the “other fella”. (Staff 2)

These responses would indicate that staff members are highly interested, knowledgeable and strategically in positions of influence to get students to complete Year 12 and move on to careers. If students are failing to establish appropriate career links at the case study school, a closer examination of the education system may have to be made to identify how staff members can be utilised more effectively in using career orientation to enhance the participation of Indigenous students in education.
PARTNERS

Society is, indeed, a contract…It is a partnership… (Edmund Burke, 1729 – 1797)\textsuperscript{16}

Partners emerge as significant factors to be considered in the participation of Indigenous students when theoretical principles of political place interact and intercept with data. Figure 6.2 illustrates the key concepts that emerge.

**Figure 6.2: Partners as a product of interaction and interception between the conceptual framework and dimensions of data**

Contemporary understandings of political place and Indigenous education

Gruenewald (2003a) states that when people are marginalised they may also have grounds to feel oppressed. When a group of people regard themselves as being marginalised then they are effectively claiming that they are being denied their

\textsuperscript{16} Edmund Burke, Irish orator and statesman, 1729 – 1797.
privileges as citizens. According to Gruenewald, the marginalisation of people groups can occur even in democratic societies. Place-conscious education empowers students to become active citizens whilst, at the same time, broadens the perspectives of those who marginalise others. In so doing, the connection between students and the education process is strengthened as students and parents are empowered as relevant decision-makers and other partners are more accepting of their input.

Empirical dimension of political place

Data from the interviews indicate that the location occupied by the case study school plays a significant role in the nature of participation of those involved in the school. Its relative isolation results in various decisions and practices that both support and undermine Indigenous respondents’ quest for self-determination and active place-making. One way in which isolation has supported self-determination is that it has given the Governing Board the opportunity for exclusiveness in terms of cultural identity. In other words, being located far away from a multicultural population usually found in large cities has enabled the Board to openly proclaim an affirmative employment policy for Indigenous people as described by this staff member:

In this way [by employing Indigenous people], we can make informed decisions about what is best for our Aboriginal kids. All the Indigenous staff members are valued. The Aboriginal secretary for example, she is the first person that the public sees when they come here. It is important that the public sees and interacts with an Aboriginal person. (Staff 2)

However, this view raised tensions with some students and staff who were generally of the opinion that such a policy should not exist and that participants in the school should be equally accessible to staff and students of any cultural background. Students said: “It should be open to everybody, black or white” (Student 4) and:
I don’t mind non-Aboriginal teachers but they should be like [our Maths
teacher] who is not an Aboriginal. He has been teaching me since I got here. It
is even better to have teachers like him instead of Aboriginal teachers who
don’t care. Teachers should be caring and be Christian. (Student 9)

Tension was also evident with parents with one stating: “Mixed students should attend
the school because Aboriginal children need to know that there are other cultures in
Australia” (Parent 3) and “We value our non-Indigenous staff. I don’t think we can do
it without them” (Parent 3).

The impact of an affirmative policy regarding who the partners in the case study
school should be is significant to non-Indigenous staff. One such member of staff
explains:

Although you are accepted as an Australian citizen, you are still just another.
You don’t feel part of, or belong to a group. You are a stranger. When I was
in Spain, there was greater acceptance. Here, it is a completely different
culture and the feeling of alienation has increased over the months. (Staff 4)

Non-Indigenous members of staff then, whilst constituting almost 100% of the
teaching staff and greatly valued by students and parents, regard themselves as being
sidelined and undervalued due to the affirmative policy of the Board. This would
indicate that the case study school is potentially being deprived of full participation by
its qualified staff which could only be having a negative impact on the participation of
students.

In reality, although the location occupied by the case study school is relatively
isolated giving the Board opportunities for exclusivity and affirmative employment of
Indigenous people, evidence also indicates that it is a tribally neutral location and
therefore home to a multicultural composition. A non-Indigenous member of staff who has lived in the case study school community for many years explains:

Amongst Aboriginal people, places are linked to skin groups. It is likely that students, parents and staff who originate from outside the territory would feel alienated in a strongly tribal area. This place is considered to be a neutral tribal area. This place has traditionally been seen as one for refuge, a place where people could come to that was on the border of tribal regions. As a result you would find a cultural mix here unlike anywhere else. (Staff 3)

The relative isolation of the case study school then, whilst largely responsible for a policy of affirmatively promoting the participation of Indigenous staff and students by the Governing Board, also presents the Board with the opportunity to have a multicultural mix of students, staff and parents who could have a more positive influence on participation trends at the school.

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**

Data indicate that, related to respondents’ satisfaction with their relatively isolated location, was the desire for political self-determination. This quest for self-determination was encouraged by the fact that the school has successfully been in existence for over twenty years and is ranked as one of the fastest growing schools in the state. In the data, respondents reflect on the influence of the Christian and Indigenous aspects of the school, their strong family ties to the origin and operation of the school, their views as to who should be partners at the school, what they expect from partners, how they view the role of the government and how non-Indigenous staff members feel as partners.

The Christian and Indigenous basis of the case study school are seen as contributing to an alternate system to the state education system because of the case study school’s
clear proclamation of a values system. These aspects of the school give students, parents and Indigenous staff the belief that, within the case study school’s education system, they have a better chance of recognition and ownership.

**Christian basis of the school**

Most of the students interviewed indicated in some way that they attended the school because of the school’s Christian basis. Responses such as: “It is important to me that this is a Christian school” (Student 2) and “I returned here because I felt that I needed to be in a Christian school with Christian staff. The State school is not. I felt out of place there. Here I know I will be treated fairly” (Student 10) indicated that students saw the Christian basis of the school as an important part of their decision to attend the school. In the second response there is an indication that the student regards the Christian basis of the school as an opportunity to be treated without discrimination.

Parents and staff too, were drawn by the Christian basis of the school. One parent, as also evident in the response by Student 10, regarded the Christian basis of the school as an opportunity for his child to be treated without discrimination: “There are Christian values here. Here, [my child] is safe and in a more friendly environment. I don’t have to worry about him being ignored” (Parent 3). An Indigenous staff member regarded her employment at the school as contribution to an alternate environment to that of the State education system as related by this staff member: “The Christian aspect of this school is very important. It is the only hope for our people, our children, to be given the help they need to move forward. At the other school, they just become another failure”.
Students, parents and staff then, see the Christian basis of the case study school as an environment within which Indigenous students have better opportunities of progressing with their education. The ground for this opinion is that the Christian values upheld by the school make it more likely that students will be treated well.

**Tension between Christianity and Aboriginality in participation**

Responses by students, parents and staff that the Christian value system of the school is one of the main reasons for their attendance of the school are met with some responses that indicate tensions when the issue of Aboriginality emerges. Students were clearly of the opinion that the Christian basis was more important than the school’s Indigenous identity: “I wouldn’t mind if Aboriginals were a minority. It is most important that this is a Christian school” (Student 2) and “I am here for the Christian education. I am not sure if it is important that it is an Aboriginal school” (Student 3).

However, some parents and staff had different opinions. A parent stated that the school should be exclusively for Indigenous students:

> It is also important that the school has Aboriginal students and staff only. They are able to go out and have first hand experiences out in the bush and doing lots of natural stuff without having to worry about non-Aboriginals who want to learn inside classrooms. The Aboriginal staff and students are more like family to them. There is a connection between the Aboriginal staff and the kids. It is very family orientated. (Parent 1)

Parents however, were divided in this matter with one Indigenous parent and member of staff strongly opposing the concept of an exclusively Aboriginal school. The parent’s argument revolves around the fact that exclusivity will deprive Indigenous
students of learning from other cultures and will disadvantage them from experiencing an effective transition between school and the workplace. The parent said:

Having Aboriginal students only is not a good idea because when they do get out into the work force they are going to be mixing with all sorts of cultures. The practice is good for them to get out there and talk to a person of another culture. When students go to the office all they do is sit and look at the ground and they can’t look up at you. If we involved a lot of other kids of other cultures they will learn to get over the shyness and shame. (Parent 3)

An Indigenous member of staff was also forthright in justifying an exclusively indigenous basis to the school. The staff member said: “The school should focus on our Aboriginal people. They are the ones we are trying to reach. This is the only way to rectify the imbalance in the country” (Staff 2). A non-Indigenous member of staff however, differed in opinion: “We do not need to have an Aboriginal school. We should just have a Christian school. There should be no need for any discrimination based on culture” (Staff 4).

The non-Indigenous staff member went further to state that the Christian basis of the school enabled him to support the Indigenous values and therefore there was no need for a distinctly different cultural ethos:

The Christianity of the school is why I am here. It gives me the freedom to express myself and you have a greater potential to influence these young people’s lives. It gives me a sense of mission, what I am about. This makes the job more meaningful. If the school was not a Christian school, I don’t think I would still be here. I think that I would have had enough by now. My commitment is also to the Aboriginal kids and the school being Christian enables me to carry out that commitment. (Staff 4)

Students, parents and staff host a complicated mix of opinions regarding how they view the Christian and Indigenous basis of the school. Students see the Christian basis of the school as an opportunity for being treated well and do not regard the Indigenous basis of the school to be of much significance. Parents and staff however, have
different opinions with some in each group expressing strong convictions of the merits of either or both.

Ownership

Evidence in the data indicates that when respondents are connected in some way to important Indigenous stakeholders of the case study school, they are more likely to be active partners in the education process. Responses such as: “I came to attend this school because my mum attended this school. Also, nanna is a member of the school Board” (Student 1), “My brother attended here so my family wanted to send me here too (Student 2), and “My mum and my aunty came to this school. Also my uncles and my cousins” (Student 3) indicate that being partners at the case study school is linked to the concept of belonging to a larger ‘clan’ that has long associations with the school.

Parents too, indicated that family connections prompted them to send their children to the school. One parent sent his child to the school because his wife worked there whilst another described how the decision was empowering: “My family think that this is the only place to go to. My son’s cousins attended here and his uncles helped in starting this place. It feels good” (Parent 2).

An Indigenous member of staff expressed the strongest sentiments regarding how ownership relates to her participation. The staff member said:

In 1981 when they started setting up the school, my father was the founding chairman of the Board. He said that they needed a secretary, somebody to help with the school doing the books. He asked if I would volunteer. I did and wasn’t paid for much of that first year. We were quite surprised that, through good management, we were able to receive a payment at the end of that year.
That is how this school started, through people like my dad having sacrificed a lot. That makes me want to be here. (Staff 2)

The member of staff went on to state that there were many families associated with the origin of the school still associated with the school. She felt that it was important that all the current partners, be aware of the roles that these people played in order that these founding members and families were given due credit and encouraged to continue supporting the school. Student participation at the case study school then, is the product of partners acknowledging the preferences and roles of each other guided by a system of values.

IDENTITY

Indigenous identity emerges as a significant factor to be considered in the participation of Indigenous students when theoretical principles of sociological place interacts and intercepts with data from the interviews. Figure 6.3 illustrates the main concepts that emerge.

**Figure 6.3: Identity as a product of interaction and interception between the conceptual framework and dimensions of data**
Contemporary understandings of sociological place and Indigenous education

According to Gruenewald (2003a: 625) we “live our lives in places, and our relationship to them colours who we are”. Over time, places too are coloured by people becoming an “expression of culture and that it represents the outcome of human choices and decisions, that its present state is one of many possible outcomes” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 627).

Empirical dimension of sociological place

Data indicate that locations occupied by respondents from the case study school contribute to extended family identities of participants. The relatively isolated location occupied by respondents means that extended families have more interaction within themselves rather than with a variety of other people. A negative aspect of this scenario is that, if extended families are plagued by issues such as violence or substance abuse, students are likely to be affected as described by this student:

In most Aboriginal families the parents are drunk and don’t care that their children see them that way. Students then say to themselves just let me become like my uncle by just sitting down and drinking. Not grandparents, they care. That is why other folk think of us Aboriginals in a bad way. (Student 4)

This place-related problem of substance abuse is evident in many generations of students’ families as reflected in this response:

I thought my brother made something of himself but then he decided to stay at home because drinking and smoking has caught up with him. My family, except my grandparents, are addicted to the stuff and it is really around him in the community. Every day he saw my uncles and auntsies smoking and drinking and he thought that it was good for him. All three of my brothers got into drinking because of my family and never completed school. (Student 9)
The above student’s response indicates that she may become caught up in a cycle of substance abuse. There is evidence however, that students would like to break out of this cycle: “That’s why [students] come here [to the school]. They don’t tolerate that stuff here. If they stayed there [community] they will get drunk and get carried away with drugs. These students look forward to leaving their communities and coming here each term”. (Student 4)

According to students, the problems in their communities are widely known and this affects their attitudes to school as described by this student: “It is terrible because whenever you tell someone that you come from there they think that you also do drugs” (Student 9). The student continued by stating: “I think that non-Aboriginals must be thinking that about all the kids here [at the school]” (Student 9). The school therefore, according to students, contends with various perceptions of its identity. First, Indigenous grandparents associated with students are not caught in this cycle of abuse and identify the school as a drug-free haven for their grandchildren. Substance abuse appears more prominent amongst parents and younger people. Second, some students are of the opinion that non-Indigenous people generally regard indigenous people in a negative light because of substance abuse. According to them, the school takes on this negative identity as well because of its high profile as an Indigenous school. These differing perceptions could be partly responsible for the high percentage of Indigenous students and the extremely low percentage of non-Indigenous students at the school even though enrolment is open to all students. A strictly substance-free environment is therefore a potentially important aspect of the school’s identity. It may also be important for the Governing Board and staff to address the way the school’s identity is perceived by the non-Indigenous sector of the
school community if the school plans to encourage wider participation by students of other cultures. Student responses earlier suggest that they generally preferred a wider, multicultural student population.

**Empirical dimension of Aboriginality**

Data indicate that when Indigenous respondents’ heritage and identities established in the case study school community are given due recognition, this acknowledgement contributes to a conducive environment for active participation. However, when this occurs, the school starts to engage with a vast, tightly knitted fabric of extended families which can be quite problematic. For example, whilst data indicated that the most influential people in extended families were often senior members such as grandparents, these senior family members did not play a constructive role in students remaining in school until completion of Year 12 or equivalent. The school, nevertheless, was expected to recognise senior members as important stakeholders.

An Indigenous member of staff conceded that, within the unconventional family structure of Indigenous people where the roles of biological parents were overshadowed by elders, students usually did not get appropriate advice about school education and careers:

> Majority of students aren’t achieving after Year 10 because they don’t have that support, the home support. I think a lot of the parents are single family parents. The kids are living with other family members, probably grandparents, aunts and uncles. The authority in the home is not as strong, and the advice that our children get is not as good as that in non-Aboriginal families. The school can have a problem knowing who to talk to. (Staff 1)

Some aspects of the extended family system therefore could be eroding the chances of the case study school achieving greater success in enhancing the participation of Indigenous students in education. Whilst the school is expected to engage with
matriarchs and patriarchs of families as stakeholders, in reality these representatives were not influential in the participation of students in education.

The strong identity of extended families that emerged once they had lived in a place for a long time also made significant impact on the identity of the case study school as an institution. A response by a student indicated that the school was seen as a place of stability by extended family rather than a place that provides a specific educational program that would take the student towards a specific career:

When I came here, my family [grandmother, uncles and aunts] felt that this was my last chance to make something of my life. They said that I only had one choice and that if I stayed at this school I would get something. I didn’t have to apply. They knew the Board Member and said they can definitely get me in. (Student 9)

This student’s response indicates that the student’s family who have had some previous relationships with the case study school and the school itself are connected at a higher level with Indigenous stakeholders of the school. Staff members are not really in the position about who should be admitted into the school or not and could be undermining their positions at the school. It may be important for stakeholders to play a role in restoring the authority of staff so that staff could establish the school’s academic identity. At the same time it may also be effective for staff to work with extended families to achieve a balance of authority so that either side do not feel a sense of a loss of power.

CONCLUSION

Data from the research site reveal that enhancement of the participation of Indigenous students in education is most likely to occur if consideration is given to aspects such as Career Orientation, Partners and Identity. Meaningful and early links between
Indigenous students between education programs and careers, careful consideration of how participants form constructive relationships in the education process of Indigenous students, and recognition of students’ and extended family identities, together with the complex identity of the school, is likely to result in effective engagement, retention and attendance by students. Figure 6.4 illustrates the main points in this chapter.

The final chapter consists of the conclusion to the study. In this final chapter, the implications of the findings in light of the reviewed literature are discussed as well as an overview of the study and some pertinent questions for future research.
Figure 6.4: Summary organiser of Chapter Six

Chapter One
Introduction to the Research

Chapter Two
Participation of Indigenous Students in Education

Chapter Three
Place-conscious Curriculum for Indigenous Students

Chapter Four
Methodology

Chapter Five
Curriculum Method and Content as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation

Chapter Six
Careers, Partners and Identity as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation
- Career Orientation
- Participants
- Identity

Chapter Seven
Effective Participation of Indigenous Students in Education
PART III: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS
CHAPTER SEVEN

Effective Participation of Indigenous Students in Education

INTRODUCTION

In the previous two chapters, evidence from interviews was presented and analysed using a theoretical framework developed from Gruenewald’s (2003a) multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. The analysis revealed five identifiable elements for successful participation of Indigenous students in education. In the first part of this culminating chapter, the research question is revisited with the findings. Here, the five identifiable elements for effective participation of Indigenous students are presented in response to the research question: What is the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education? Each element is insufficient alone, and it is in the combination of these elements that leads to more effective participation of Indigenous students. In the next part of the chapter, proposed sites of action are discussed in terms of implications of these findings for Indigenous education in Australia. This is followed by an overview of the main features of the study, some questions that this study raises for future research, and a final conclusion.

ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Place matters….in the ongoing challenge of developing a literate population, and….developing eco-ethical consciousness in our children and an informed eco-critical citizenry. (Cormack, Nixon & Green, 2007: 77 – 78)

Place matters in the effective participation of Indigenous students in education.

Findings in this study, in response to the research question, affirms that “places are
profoundly pedagogical” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 621) and matter in the attendance, engagement and retention of Indigenous students (Rose et al, 2007; Somerville, 2007). Places are centres of experience for students that are integral to their participation in education.

As centres of experience, places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy. Further, places make us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped. (Gruenewald, 2003a: 621).

Place is therefore central to the lives of students and makes it imperative for curriculum to recognise their place-related lived experiences. In this study, the way place ‘teaches’, ‘makes’ and ‘shapes’ Indigenous students are revealed, as well as what the implications are for education systems. Using a multidimensional framework, the study reveals five dimensions of students’ place-related lived experiences: perceptual, ecological, ideological, political and sociological. Each of these dimensions has a specific implication for the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education: Curriculum Method, Curriculum Content, Partners, Identity and Careers respectively. Curriculum Method reveals *how* Indigenous students are likely to be effectively engaged; Curriculum Content reveals *what* Indigenous students find engaging; Careers reveal *where* Indigenous students would like to progress in terms of the future; Partners reveal *who* Indigenous participants are most likely to regard as effective partners; and Identity reveals *how* Indigenous students want to be identified, in order to be effective participants. Contexts in which each of these five elements is given serious consideration are likely to experience enhanced participation of Indigenous students in education. Figure 7.1 illustrates these key ideas.
Curriculum Method is an important element in the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students because a significant way of learning is through vicarious learning at all ages in the form of interaction with family and friends as well as with the outdoors. This finding supports the views of Tuan (1977) and Rose et al (2007) who state that, for Indigenous people, vicarious learning is typical, and those of Kiefer & Kemple (1999) and Gruenewald (2003b) who state that the enthusiasm of children
to learn this way, in general, is constant and therefore did not have to give way to indoor text-based learning as they get older. Direct learning experiences are effective especially when learning experiences are relevant (Yager, 2003) and reflect changes in students’ living contexts (Bartholomaeus, 2006; Bowers, 1999; Galloway, 2003; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999). Place-conscious education provides students with opportunities to learning from a combination of relevant contexts (Hughes, 1997; James et al, 1997; Marks et al, 2000) and strengthens students understandings of how ‘disciplines’ are interrelated (Jaycox, 2001; Reyhner, 2004a) in the real world.

Findings reveal that Curriculum Content is a significant element in the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students because students have long associations with places they occupy and have had negligible lived experiences elsewhere. It is logical therefore to expect curriculum content to draw on Indigenous students’ vast knowledge, and concern for the preservation, of local place. These findings regarding students’ localised lived experiences are consistent with Australian studies (DEETYA, 1997; NBEET, 1991; MCEETYA, 2006; Zubrick et al, 2006). The findings are also consistent with James et al (1999) and Marks et al (2000) that Indigenous students, especially in the later years of schooling, were engaging with curriculum content from the larger cities and that this experience was having a negative impact on participation (Abbott-Chapman et al, 2001; Clark, 1987). Place-conscious education challenges teachers to integrate local content into curriculum (Bowers, 1999; Gruenewald, 2003a; Orr, 1994).

Careers are significant to the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students because findings indicate that students lack career goals and the awareness of the
realities of reaching career goals. Low expectations in terms of careers are related to
the fact that students in the study have lived in geographical locations where, for
many years, low expectations have been inscribed in their lives. Researchers’ views
that familiarity of place is important to students (Cajete, 1999; Kawagley &
Barnhardt, 1999) and that alien environments tend to negatively impact on
participation (Gruenewald, 2006; Huddlestone, 2004; Partington, 1998; Stewart,
2002) highlight an important role that place-conscious education can play in the lives
of students. Place-conscious education empowers marginalised students to have
higher expectations (Gruenewald, 2003a; Gulson, 2005) so that they set higher
standards of achievement which contributes to enhanced participation.

Partners in the education process emerge as another significant aspect in the nature of
effective participation of Indigenous students. Whilst respondents are united in their
desire for political self-determination, there are a number of tensions which emerge
within this external unity. For example, tensions exists between Aboriginality and
Christianity, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Researchers attribute these
tensions to the failure of standard education systems to make students citizens of local
places (Gougeon, 2004; Gruenwald, 2003a; Kelly, 1993; Orr, 1994). Place-conscious
education can convert negative into productive tensions by demanding “a radical
multiculturalism” (Gruenewald, 2003a: 633) that is likely to result in a wider
inclusion of currently marginalised groups into the education process.

Identity is a significant element in the nature of effective participation of Indigenous
students in education because findings indicate that when students are identified as
members of extended families, they show a sense of belonging to the school.
However, having to negotiate with a wide range of family members such as grandparents, uncles and aunts rather than just students’ parents can be quite complicated for schools because findings indicate that extended family members usually do not have the skills to assist in decisions such as career and course choices. This is not helped by standard curriculum failing to help students find their own positions in society (Breen et al, 1994; Gruenewald, 2003a; Krapfel, 1999) because of their focus on assessments and accountability (Kiefer & Kemple, 1999; Smith, 2002; Tuan, 1977). Place-conscious education strengthens bonds between generations of people (Bryden & Boylan, 2004; Rose, 1992) so that students have more confidence (Reyhner, 2004a, 2004b) to establish their own identities that are relevant to current social settings.

The nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education, then, consists of learning contexts in which place-conscious curriculum gives careful consideration to five identifiable elements: Curriculum Method, Curriculum Content, Careers, Partners and Identity. Whilst there is no specific evidence in the findings that any one element is more significant than others, a re-examination of my lived experiences would indicate that there is some connection between the extent to which place-conscious elements are implemented and the results on participation. In South Africa the absence of any curriculum that identified with Indigenous Black students’ lived experiences was accompanied by extremely low levels of attendance, retention and engagement. In New Zealand, the limited implementation of curriculum methodology and content that identified with Indigenous Maori students’ place-related lived experiences yielded small but significant results. In Australia, as principal of a school, my latitude to effect wider implementation of place-conscious
curriculum in terms of methodology and content led to the school being ranked as one of the fastest growing schools in the State as a result of its success in the retention, engagement and attendance of Indigenous students.

SITES OF ACTION IN ENHANCING THE PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN EDUCATION

The literature review on place-conscious education reveals that themes point to three sites of action for the establishment of the elements for effective participation: school, community, and government. Figure 7.2 illustrates how the sites of action were identified from the research themes and how the findings in this study are productive in contributing to the research themes. The broadest site of action relates to students’ connection with government and policy. At this level, the role played by the government especially in the administration of grants and how it acknowledges ownership of the education process is important. The local community represents a site of action on a smaller scale. At this level, Indigenous students’ interactions with extended family beyond the school boundaries, the wider community and the economic sector of society are viewed as having influence on student participation. The school represents the site of action at the smallest scale. Here, students’ relationships with peers, staff and elements of the school program are the focus for participation.
Figure 7.2: Sites of action emerging from literature reviews and the contributions by findings in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research themes on place-conscious education</th>
<th>Sites of action</th>
<th>This study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Place and enthusiasm of students to learn</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Broadens the understanding of student-centred education by showing how long-term career orientation, balanced education programs and staffing qualities contribute to participation of Indigenous students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Place and individual rights of students</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Broadens the understanding of how integration between place and participants occurs through Indigenous students’ relationships with extended families, the wider community and the economic sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Place and student-centred methodologies</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Broadens the understanding of the role played by the government in Indigenous education.</td>
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<td>• Place and inclusivity</td>
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<td>• Place and learning</td>
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<td>• Place and recognition of students’ lived experiences</td>
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<td>• Place and a holistic approach</td>
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<td>• Place and integrating school and community</td>
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<td>• Contexts of place: local, national and international</td>
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<td>• Place and spatial balance of power</td>
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**Government**

Perception of the government’s role

Findings in this study indicate that, despite evidence to the contrary, the Australian Government is perceived as an ineffective partner in the process of enhancing Indigenous student participation by Indigenous staff and parents of the case study school. Research such as that conducted by DEETYA (1997), MCEETYA (2006), NBEET (1991) and Zubrick et al (2006) indicate that enhancement of Indigenous students in education is an ongoing concern of the government. Unfortunately, empirical evidence reveals that Indigenous staff members, parents and a member of the Governing Board were not aware of the implications of these studies’ findings and, as a result, generally considered the government to be ineffective on the issue of
poor participation of Indigenous students in education. The findings in this study indicated, however, that these respondents had clear impressions of the negative aspects of government policy on their lives. For example, respondents had good levels of knowledge of events and effects related to the forced removal of Indigenous children from families (Stolen Generation) and the nature as well as the implications of the government’s living-away-from-home-allowance. This partial awareness by respondents regarding the role of the government in their lives would indicate that one of the key steps that could be taken by the government in establishing itself as a more accepted partner in education is for it to improve the way its current role is perceived.

The negative perception by Indigenous stakeholders of the role played by the government is evident even for research that highlights obvious health issues in Indigenous communities. Stakeholders were not aware of the salient aspects of studies such as the impact of the impact of nutrition (ACER, 2004) and health (MCEETYA, 2001) on student participation. This lack of awareness indicates a possibility that comprehensive government initiatives implemented so far have not established the government as a partner in education with students. Whilst a review of these studies indicates that these initiatives have contributed to understanding some important trends in Indigenous education, there is no evidence to indicate that the findings were presented to the school’s Indigenous stakeholders. Hence the views, especially by Indigenous parents and staff, that the government has been largely ineffective in addressing the issue of poor participation of Indigenous students in education. A greater degree of awareness by stakeholders of Indigenous communities of these

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The Stolen Generation is a term used to describe Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families by Australian government agencies and church missions between 1869 and 1969 under various state acts of parliament, denying the rights of Indigenous parents and making all Indigenous children wards of the State. (Reconciliation and Social Justice Library, 2007)
initiatives, made possible by stronger partnerships with government, is likely to encourage them to make inputs into the role played by the government in the process of improving Indigenous student participation.

Some steps have been taken by Australian, State and Territory governments to forge closer links with communities. The Department of Education and Training in Western Australia (2007a) has employed its own journalist to promote its programs. The Federal Government, through the Department of Education, Science and Training (2007), has established the Council for Australian Governments (COAG) to promote greater awareness of its role by communities. However, the findings in this study indicate that, unless these initiatives have strong links with communities, these initiatives are unlikely to have a significant impact. Further to community input, once drawn up, initiatives need to be taken back to stakeholders so that negotiations can be conducted as to the best way of implementing them. The impact of large scale government–backed studies such as that by MCEETYA (2006) and Zubrick et al (2006) are likely to be much more pronounced if stronger links between government and communities are established.

**Administration of grants**

Evidence in this study indicates that the role played by the government as administrator of grants is perceived in a negative light by Indigenous students, parents, staff and members of the Governing Board. Respondents in the study felt that grants such as the living-away-from-home-allowance have led to Indigenous students moving out of their homes, rejecting the authority of their families and discontinuing their education.
Indigenous stakeholders in this research felt that they had little input in the way the government administered funds in education. Stakeholders felt disconnected from the education process and were not familiar with many of the programs being implemented in their school. This situation appears to have changed little because almost thirty years ago, Edgar (1979) found that communities were similarly ostracised by the government in the way it administered funds in Indigenous education. The administration of government grants is therefore likely to continue having little impact on participation if there is no community involvement in the way funds are used.

The lack of community consultation, according to evidence in this study, has also compromised the effectiveness of funds it administers to enhance Indigenous student participation. Findings indicate that funds such as the living-away-from-home allowance encourage Indigenous students to leave home, disregard the authority of parents and generally show low levels of engagement with learning. These findings support the views of Eckermann (1999) and Gray et al (1999) who found that financial incentives given to Indigenous students to stay in school did little to motivate students to excel in their studies. Instead, students merely stayed on in school so that they continued to receive the grants. Therefore, whilst funds administered to assist students and families to afford the costs associated with attending school are necessary, conditions attached to these funds may have to be examined in consultation with Indigenous stakeholders. Another dimension of the government’s perceived role that has been highlighted by findings in this study is that related to the use of funds in the establishment of learning
infrastructure. Findings indicate that schools and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) facilities are regarded by students and parents of the case study school as inappropriate to their needs. Dissatisfaction with facilities, irrespective of how expensive or modern they may be, are consistent with findings by researchers such as Bowers (1999) and Orr (1994) who state that, generally, the construction of such facilities without proper consultation with stakeholders leads to inappropriate use of expensive educational infrastructure in locations occupied by Indigenous people. These researchers state that inappropriate use of facilities is then interpreted as Indigenous people not taking advantage of facilities provided for them and that, in time, contributes to lower investments by the government into infrastructure for Indigenous people. It is possible then, that this dissatisfaction with facilities in regional and remote locations by respondents in this study has contributed to many students leaving their communities to board at the case study school. Whilst there is no evidence that this dislocation has negatively affected students’ participation at the research site, it could be a significant reason for disrupted schooling experiences of other Indigenous students who are forced to dislocate from their original communities (DEETYA, 1997; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000; NBEET, 1991). Closer consultation by the government is likely, then, to lead to more appropriate facilities, greater use of these facilities and less mobility and disrupted schooling experiences of Indigenous students.

**Ownership**

The issue of ownership of the education process, in this study, emerges as a significant one. Evidence indicates that Indigenous respondents regard the school as belonging to them as a cultural group. This ownership was manifested through strong
links to extended family and past generations of people associated with the founding of the school. School staff members, parents and members of the Governing Board indicated that this ownership encouraged them to take a personal interest in the affairs of the school. These stakeholders considered this sense of ownership to be central to the reasons for the 20 year existence of the case study school and its higher rate of growth compared to the neighbouring state-run school. This link between ownership and success of the school was consistent with Clark (1987) who states that student participation is negatively affected when the government does not hand over ownership of education to communities, especially students and parents. It may be an important consideration, then, for schools with Indigenous students to work towards allowing Indigenous students and parents to acquire a degree of ownership that encourages them to take a personal interest in the education process.

However, although respondents attributed the success of the school to their position of ownership, they showed uncertainty that other Indigenous school communities could also successfully establish a school. Data from the interviews suggested that respondents regarded Indigenous people in general to be disadvantaged because of past social and political injustices and to be held back by substance abuse. These findings support the views of James et al (1999) who attributed this lack of self-belief to the Australian government’s failure to promote citizenship of students on a national scale. In the USA, Cajete (1999) also expresses similar views by attributing this lack of confidence to neglect by the government to successfully develop Indigenous leaders. One possible way for Australian students to be established firmly in the path to citizenship is to include them in decision-making by the government (Sercombe et al, 2002). Schools, then, have a wider role in that they are not only expected to
provide an academic curriculum but to prepare previously disadvantage Indigenous students to play more active roles in decision-making at government level.

**Community**

At the community level, Indigenous students at the case study school are participants in a relationship structure with extended family, the wider community and the economic sector.

**Extended family**

Empirical evidence in the study indicates that the close relationship of Indigenous students from the case study school with members of their extended families leads to a complex situation for the school. On the one hand, the close relationship served as an important dimension of students’ involvement with schooling. Students visited other members of their extended families frequently, enjoyed close cross-generational links with older and younger members of extended families and respected their elders as heads of extended families. However, literature (Anderson et al, 1983; Connell et al, 1991; James et al, 1999; Williams et al, 1993) revealed that whilst families may be influential sources of learning for Indigenous students, the influence of families to stay on in school was not significant by itself. This latter influence was only significant in combination with other factors such as accessibility to schools and employment opportunities available after completion of school (Smith, 1994). Therefore, whilst extended families are likely to be influential in terms of being sources of learning and contributing to ways of learning, schools are unlikely to find close family relationships useful in keeping students in school.
On the other hand, findings reveal that extended family systems can bring challenges to the relationship between the school and its Indigenous students. Extended families in the case study school had specific expectations of the school. One expectation, also noted by Marks et al (2000), was that the school have a clear values system. In reality, a values system was difficult to establish and uphold in schools because such a system is likely to be exclusive rather than inclusive. For example, the expectation that the school acknowledge the adult status of Indigenous students may clash with school rules if acknowledgement means that students have more liberties. Such a difficult predicament is not uncommon in Australian Indigenous education according to Sercombe et al (2002), who found that Indigenous students were often more inclined to satisfy family expectations rather than those of society. Schools therefore may find themselves walking a tightrope in their dealings with extended families.

**Community**

Empirical evidence indicates that students living in Indigenous communities such as that of the case study school have a great sense of freedom and independence, enjoy close relationships with people and feel empowered by living with other Indigenous people. These lifestyle qualities are made possible by the case study school, located within a small community of approximately three thousand people. The implications of this positive outlook of local place on student participation are complex. First, according to literature, these positive reflections of communities may not be significant in student participation in education on their own (Abbott-Chapman et al, 1992; Clark, 1987; James et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000; NBEET, 1991). These researchers indicate that whilst student contentment with place is important, what really matters about the influence of regional and remote communities on
participation is distance between students’ homes and schools, and the number of schools available for career choices. In other words distance weakens the resolve of students to continue with their schooling and students may discontinue even for trivial reasons. These findings in literature explain why, as students at the case study school got older, they found it more and more difficult to continue with their schooling as other issues such as peer influence added to the burden of travelling great distances. Therefore students’ contentment with community life cannot be seen in isolation, but as one of many factors influencing participation.

Second, empirical data also indicated that, associated with positive reflections of community, was the feeling of empowerment in living with other Indigenous people. Respondents recalled how their best schools were those attended by a majority of other Indigenous students, often their own cousins and extended family. However, Eckermann (1999) found that mixed cultural groups can also have a positive effect on Indigenous student participation. This happens when people of other culture groups apply positive social pressure on Indigenous students to remain in school. This positive social pressure is quite significant to Indigenous student participation because research also indicates that Indigenous youth are already empowered to make their own decisions about staying in school (Schwab, 1996). If these students feel positive about relationships with other cultural groups in the community, they are likely to experience higher levels of participation. Empowerment of Indigenous respondents does not imply living in segregation from other cultural groups. It is likely that, if schools have a considerable Indigenous student population, this would be enhanced by the presence of other cultural groups as motivation for Indigenous students to attend school.
Economic sector

Data in this study indicated that students did not have a realistic view regarding the availability of jobs and the requirements to qualify for these jobs. Many students indicated that they wished to complete Year 12 and then attend Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs but did not have the necessary knowledge or conviction to follow through with these wishes. This trend explains the findings by Fularton et al (2000), that despite Indigenous students showing high levels of interest in VET programs, institutions related to such programs were often not fully utilised. This trend indicated that schools may have to make links between students and their careers much earlier in their schooling in order for students to feel a sense of purpose and remain in school until completion.

There was some evidence to indicate that students’ interest to remain in school was being influenced by the availability of jobs after they finished school. This trend was consistent with Abbott-Chapman et al (1986), Abbott-Chapman et al (2001) and Fularton et al (2000) who found that depressed regional economic landscapes impacted negatively on students’ participation. These findings indicate that schools had to keep the labour market in perspective when planning programs to improve Indigenous student participation. This was not an easy task for schools because Dwyer et al (1999) and Sercombe et al (2002) found that depressed employment sectors prompted students to remain in school to get a better education and be more competitive in their search for jobs. However, a significant point that emerged in this study was that the students, staff and parents indicated strongly that effective partnerships needed to be formed between the school, industries and businesses. One possible way to achieve the building of such effective partnerships is to establish
career links amongst student early in their secondary schooling so that students and
the employment sector can plan ahead.

School

At the school level, students are part of a relationship structure that involves their
peers, staff and the school program.

Students and Peers

The study found that Indigenous students at the research site appeared to be happy
and eagerly looked forward to their schooling experiences and interaction with
friends. They related this contentment mainly to the presence of their cousins and
friends at the school and in the community. However, literature revealed that
Indigenous students displayed outward evidence of desiring to be in school but, at a
subsurface level they were fighting against the odds of having uninterrupted schooling
(ACER, 2004; Gray et al, 2000; MCEETYA, 2001). These research initiatives found
that Indigenous students were losing between two and four years of schooling,
especially in the early years, through absenteeism (Gray et al, 2000) and their
participation was hampered by health issues (ACER, 2004; MCEETYA, 2001).
Students may therefore be happy at school but be plagued by debilitating factors that
require effective intervention by schools to help them overcome these obstacles.
Student contentment at school, therefore, is the first step to effective participation. In
order to capitalise on the positive implications of this trend, hidden factors such as
health and self-identity needs to be addressed to assist students to attend school
without interruptions.
Data from the research site indicated that wide circles of friendship were not only responsible for students’ contentment but also for high levels of confidence evident especially in sport. However, evidence from the study did not indicate any connection between this self-confidence and high aspirations in terms of completing school and moving into tertiary studies. This would support the contention by Purdie et al (2000) that such a trend was not uncommon amongst Indigenous students. Purdie et al (2000) found that often, Indigenous students had positive self-identities within their communities but this was not linked to positive educational outcomes. This was probably a contributing factor to the low enrolment of Indigenous students in tertiary institutions (see James et al, 1999 and Lamb & Ball, 1999 for Indigenous tertiary enrolment trends). This could be one of the main reasons for the high level of participation of students up to Year 10 at the case study school but a negligible number of students progressing to tertiary education. It is possible that the low level of commitment to progress on to Year 11 and 12 that students showed in the interviews is related to them identifying these grades with progression into tertiary institutions and that they felt intimidated. Their lack of confidence is probably contributing to them preferring to return to their communities and be unemployed and unskilled than venture into the unfamiliar territories of tertiary institutions. This evidence would indicate that schools may need to find ways of getting students to develop confidence in unfamiliar areas in a way that they do in sport. It would also indicate that it is important for schools to get Indigenous students to make independent decisions so that, whilst they continue to enjoy peer support, they can also develop on their own. This would contribute towards students one day being able to take the step into further education and training on their own rather than being influenced to disengage from school by peers.
Data indicated that the contentment from peer and family support continued through much of students’ schooling lives. Students at all phases of schooling in this study indicated that their enthusiasm to learn as a community engaged with the outdoors never waned as they grew older. This trend challenged the assumption that students’ enthusiasm for outdoor engagement fades as they get older and therefore it is logical for school programs to gradually scale down opportunities for such learning towards the higher grades (Gruenewald, 2003a; Kiefer et al, 1999; MCEETYA, 2006). The findings in this study that Indigenous students remained enthusiastic about place and interaction with people throughout their lives was supported by James et al (1999) and Purdie et al (2000) who found Indigenous students committed to welfare of their local landscapes through to adulthood and would like to return to communities after qualifying for jobs. Schools therefore can encourage Indigenous students as participants in school if they engage students with exciting programs that capture students’ natural enthusiasm at all ages.

**School program**

There was evidence in the study to indicate that students, parents and staff have a realistic perception of how place-conscious education can be integrated into the current framework of having to meet standard requirements set by centralised education authorities. Respondents indicated that they were aware of place-based programs being unconventional and potentially disruptive to existing schedules but felt that steps could be taken to make implementation successful. This acknowledgement, especially by non-Indigenous staff members, removed a major obstacle to the implementation of place-conscious education principles in Indigenous schools – that the principles would involve additional work pressure as staff struggled
to implement place-conscious education and meet standard requirements. Evidence from the interviews further indicated that the key to staff members being positive about integrating place-conscious principles into the program was their belief that Indigenous students learnt most effectively when dimensions of place are integrated into their learning program. They believed that this was an Indigenous cultural trait and support the views of Bowers (1999) and Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999) who made a strong case for place-conscious learning experiences to be considered essential for Indigenous students. Therefore, the realistic perception by respondents of the cost of implementing place-conscious education, are important aspects and have played key roles in the success of the school in embracing a place-conscious curriculum that recognised the lived experiences and ways of learning of Indigenous students.

However, evidence in the study indicated that in order for the enthusiasm and preparedness of respondents to engage in place-conscious curriculum to have a meaningful connection with participation, the curriculum should aim specifically at relating education to careers. Interviews indicated that students and parents found it difficult to understand how the different subjects studied at the school contributed to progression towards potential careers that students had in mind. This negative impact of separation between education and the realities of life for students after completion of school is supported by Cajete (1999), Gruenewald (2003a), Kawagley & Barnhardt (1999), Kiefer et al (1999) and Krapfel (1999). These researchers stated that the fragmentation of curriculum and overemphasis on individual testing respectively detracted students from understanding the larger issues of relating learning experiences at school with that of real life issues. Furthermore, evidence in the study indicated that fragmentation of the curriculum prevents Indigenous students from
learning as a community where they could support each other, and understand their roles as citizens of their local communities. Instead, it pressurised students to excel individually, which goes against cultural value placed on community. Holistic, place-conscious education would strengthen students’ links to careers and encourage them to remain in school until they reach their career goals.

Evidence from the interviews indicated that, apart from the curriculum being approached holistically, another important dimension of place-conscious curriculum that needed to be centralised was achievement standards in core curriculum areas such as Mathematics, English and Sciences. Indigenous students and parents wanted a culturally appropriate learning program that enabled them to achieve standards equitable to other schools in the country. These respondents did not want culture to erode curriculum standards, a concern raised in the report by NBEET (1991). According to Indigenous parents in the study, this would contribute to their children being able to think globally but have the interests of local place in mind (see also Orr, 1994). This study indicates therefore, once more, that participants have realistic expectations regarding the balance between culturally-appropriate education and preparing students for the real world. This revelation strengthens the viability of place-conscious education to achieve on two important fronts: strengthening Aboriginality and enhancing participation of students as they remain in school longer because they can see how education leads them to be competitive in the job market.

**Staff**

Analysis of data from the research site revealed that students and parents held staff who worked at the case study school in high esteem, especially those who showed
empathy to them. These respondents regarded empathy by staff members to be more important than staff members’ efficiency at doing their jobs. This was an important revelation especially in light of the report by NBEET (1991) which found that participation of Indigenous students can often be the product of staff being inflexible in considering alternate approaches to the way they related to students. To complicate matters, staff members that are most likely to be inflexible are those working in regional and remote schools that are consistently plagued by difficulty in attracting and retaining high quality teachers (MCEETYA, 2006). Teachers in such schools are usually overburdened with work and may not be prepared for changes. Therefore, any attempt at implementing place-conscious curriculum would need to be done sensitively, bearing in mind the delicate balance between availability of staff and their willingness to being partners in the process.

Another issue which emerged in the evidence from the interviews, and one which was quite relevant to regional and remote schools where majority of Indigenous students attend school, was that of participation by non-Indigenous staff. Data indicated that non-Indigenous staff who form the majority of qualified teaching staff, felt undervalued and unappreciated. This led to them feeling frustrated. This was significant in light of research by Abbott-Chapman et al (2001), Beck (1992) and Gruenewald (2003a) who found that staff undermined participation if they were unwilling partners in the education process. Unwillingness contributed to poor understanding of goals of the school set by leadership or stakeholders. This misunderstanding often led to the implementation of own personal preferences by staff rather than what was best for the student. These findings indicated that it was essential that, especially in schools that were largely Indigenous, non-Indigenous staff
members were firmly established as key partners in the process of enhancing the participation of students.

Data revealed that Indigenous staff members, too, felt undervalued. The main reasons for this, according to respondents, were related to the fact that they often worked in the background. However, evidence also indicated that these members of staff played vital roles in the participation of students, often being of moral support to students and being their first port of call in a school where majority of the teaching staff were non-Indigenous. So, although they were not teaching students, Indigenous staff members were integral to the success of the school but this was not openly evident. According to Winkler (2006), this was a common occurrence. Winkler found that, although Indigenous staff members had one of the most diverse roles in Australian schools, the status of the job did not reflect this. Lester (2006a, 2006b) and Singleton et al (2006) stated that, although Indigenous staff members worked in the background, they were able to provide valuable advice to staff and had been found to contribute to Indigenous students’ improved participation in school. These findings indicate that, even in a school which was largely Indigenous in character, it could not be assumed that Indigenous staff members felt valued. However, the findings suggested that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff had a keen awareness of the challenges faced by Indigenous students at the school and were prepared to play more active roles. This attitude presented the ideal climate for a wider development of a sense of community.

OVERVIEW

This study investigated the trend of low levels of participation of Indigenous students in education. Recent major studies (MCEETYA, 2006; Zubrick et al, 2006) indicated
that this trend is still a major source of concern especially to the government. The study by MCEETYA (2006) also indicates that researchers are searching for a new approach to counter this trend. Researchers believe that specific intervention programs have made limited gains and what is needed is a more holistic understanding of participation of Indigenous students in education. This study has contributed to the holistic understanding of the trend of low levels of participation. It achieved this contribution by developing the notion that the participation of Indigenous students in education is a product of interactions and interceptions between elements of the perceptual, ecological, ideological, political and sociological dimensions of students’ lives.

Participation of Indigenous students in education was researched in four ways: First, through a consideration of my lived experiences of working with Indigenous students in three different contexts. This presented the basis for some tentative understandings about the participation of Indigenous students in education. At this stage, the notion of ‘place’ as a potentially significant factor in the participation of Indigenous students in education emerged. Second, through a review of literature related to the concepts ‘participation’ and ‘place-conscious education’ which indicated that researchers focused on different aspects of participation. Subsequent examination of literature revealed that ‘place-conscious education’ was a pedagogy that might be used to inform or explain the trend of Indigenous student participation in education. Third, analyses of data using a multidimensional framework based on Gruenewald (2003a) revealed the relevance of place in the nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in education. Finally, a holistic reflection on the research question including how the findings inform events that were observed during the researcher’s lived
experiences, and some practical implications of the findings on Indigenous participation at ‘sites of action’ were presented and discussed.

Gruenewald’s multidimensional framework for place-conscious education has worked effectively in this study in the way it has drawn out underlying tensions that have a bearing on participation. For example, a tension is revealed in the way some Indigenous partners prefer exclusively Indigenous learning environments for students whilst others consider mixed cultural contexts to be more effective. Another tension emerges in the way some partners consider Aboriginality to be more important than Christianity whilst others consider Christianity to be more important. Whatever the tensions, the multidimensional framework effectively presents an alternate lens through which to construct knowledge about the participation of Indigenous students in education. Through this alternate lens, tensions are viewed as the products of place rather than any person or group of people. This has allowed discourse on potentially contentious issues such as Aboriginality versus Christianity to take place productively. Somerville (2007: 149) describes a similar experience with place as a framework for discourse: “In my work with Aboriginal people place has come to offer a way of entering an in-between space where it is possible to hold different, and sometimes contradictory, ideas in productive tension”.

Whilst the study has not indicated specific reasons for lower levels of student participation in Years 11 and 12, it would seem that a number of factors would be collectively responsible for this trend. For example, it could be that the curriculum methods and content being implemented in Kindergarten to Year 10 are not being implemented in the senior years because staff members are orientated towards
preparing students for the important Year 12 examinations. The different programs
may not appeal to students. It is also possible that the absence of strong development
of career goals amongst students in the earlier grades leave students undecided about
their careers and therefore unwilling to enter into grades that they know will be quite
challenging. Whatever the reasons, a clearer picture is likely to emerge over a longer
period of time as this trend is monitored.

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section, questions that have arisen in this research are presented. These
questions are key ideas for future research, and may indicate some potential
limitations of the findings. The first group of questions relate to generalisation of the
findings in this study. The next group of questions relate to some implications that the
findings in this study may have on practical implementation at contextual level.
First, some questions arise out of the background characteristics of the successful case
study school. Evidence indicated that much of the school’s success is related to its
location in a regional place with many similarities to locations from which students
originated. However, recent studies such as those by Zubrick et al (2006) indicate that
at least two-thirds of Indigenous students live outside urbanised environments. In
what ways was the success of the case study school relevant to other schools located
in such areas? Whilst literature (Bowers, 1999; Cajete, 1999; Gruenewald, 2003a;
Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999; Kiefer et al, 1999; Krapfel, 1999; Orr, 1994) and
empirical evidence in the study indicated that Indigenous students learnt extensively
from relationships with outdoors and extended families, are Indigenous students living
in other rural, remote and urbanised environments able to gain just as much from such
relationships? If so, will relationships be different in terms of what constitutes the
‘outdoors’ and how frequently or how far students have to travel to meet with extended family in urbanised environments?

One possible way to approach these challenges is for staff in schools to perceive urban environments as they would perceive rural and regional environments. My experiences as a teacher of Indigenous students in urban settings indicate that students enjoy outdoor and social contact in similar ways as students from regional and remote locations. It is possible that the sites of action identified in this study will be applicable to urban students, with contextual features varying. For example, at the school level, peers could have an influence on participation in the same way that cousins or other Indigenous students could. At the community level, extended families may live in different suburbs but still have regular contact with students and be important sources of learning.

The next group of questions relate to practical issues which emerge in the possible application of findings in this study at the different sites of action. At the government level, literature (Grace, 2001; Lamb et al, 1999; Marks et al, 2000; Sercombe et al, 2002; Smith, 1994) indicated that the government plays a significant role in the participation of Indigenous students but respondents in the case study school did not consider that role as being constructive. How can the government’s role be effectively realigned into forming partnership’s with Indigenous stakeholders? Will stakeholders recognise the government’s role as a partnership if there is more consultation in the way financial grants (Gray et al, 2000; Eckermann, 1999; Edgar, 1979) are administered? It is possible that government initiatives are being resisted because Indigenous stakeholders have not been given ownership of such initiatives (James et
al., 1999; Cajete, 1999; Sercombe et al., 2002), and not because initiatives are themselves ineffective. How can the government continue to be architects of initiatives but be seen to be facilitators rather than ‘owners’ of initiatives to keep Indigenous students in school?

At the community level, the findings raise some questions that point towards future research. At this scale, literature based mainly on American contexts (Bowers, 1999; Kiefer et al., 1999; Tuan, 1977) and empirical evidence from this study indicates that families and relatives families of students are significant sources of learning for Indigenous students. This means that extending the learning environment to establish such learning as part of a school program may involve close dialogue between school and the home. How can schools establish such dialogue? Can positive response by families for dialogue be achieved by non-Indigenous staff as facilitators? Literature based on Australian contexts (Eckermann, 1999; Sercombe et al., 2002) indicates that this partnership between school and the wider Indigenous community is essential. How can staff members of schools facilitate effective wider relationships between students and the community? How can sensitive issues such as conflict generated between schools and students by the early recognition of adulthood of students and racial biasness of employers in communities be dealt with by schools?

Finally, at the school level students’ relationships with their peers, staff and the school program also have educational implications and raise questions for future research. For example, literature (Marks et al., 2000; Sercombe et al., 2002; Smith, 1994) and evidence in this study indicates that peers can have a negative influence on student participation. Amongst Indigenous students, where empirical evidence has revealed
that peers are often close relatives, relationships of students with peers can be a severe debilitating factor. How can school staff have a greater sense of awareness of students’ social circles and how might they play subtle but influential roles in countering the negative impact of peer relationships whilst encouraging the positive aspects? Also, at the school level, empirical evidence indicates that students’ relationships with staff members are significant to the extent that such relationships are considered to be more significant than teaching expertise. Literature (Beck, 1992; Bowers, 1999; Chapman et al, 2001; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999; NBEET, 1991) indicates that teachers can be quite inflexible in terms of reconsidering the nature of their roles. How can schools motivate staff members to develop closer relationships with Indigenous students? What are the barriers to such relationships?

At the school level, Indigenous students’ relationships with the school programs emerged as a considerably important issue. Literature (Bowers, 1999; Grace, 2001; Kiefer et al, 1999; Krapfel, 1999; Lamb et al, 1999) and empirical evidence indicates that Indigenous students are most likely to benefit from curriculum that is values-based and has a balance between the outdoors and indoors. In terms of values in the curriculum, this study revealed that parents and students were referring to a general system of principles compatible with those inherent in Christianity. Is it possible for all schools with Indigenous students to have expectations on these students by embracing a system of general values? Would such expectation be possible within a school in which Indigenous students were a minority group? Researchers such as Cajete (1999), Gruenewald (2003a) and Krapfel (1999) make a strong case for the inclusion of outdoor education into the learning experiences of students. Analysis of data from the research site indicates that Indigenous parents and students are also
aware that this outdoor program must be balanced with indoor, text-based programs. How can schools be assisted to meet with accountability to existing curriculum requirements such as State benchmark testing and still be able to present a curriculum that has a balance of indoor and outdoor learning experiences for students?

CONCLUSION

The participation of Indigenous students in education in Australia is a complex issue. Whilst it still remains cause for serious concern to policy makers and various stakeholders, the numerous studies that have been dedicated to this trend are testimonies of this complexity. This study’s findings that place-conscious can be the basis for enhanced participation of Indigenous students in education contributes to a better understanding of the trend. Whilst some of the implications in the study require major paradigm shifts in current educational practice (for example, restructuring schools in relation to government policies and funding), other implications require personal commitment rather than resources to make a difference (example, staff developing relationships with students and parents). Whatever the scope of implementation, results are bound to reflect the successes of a small community school that was successful in enhancing the participation of Indigenous students to become one of the fastest growing schools in the State. It is hoped that the stories of others who follow on from this point will add to the understanding of participation of Indigenous students in education, as a way of informing action to enhance effective participation.
Figure 7.3: Summary organiser of Chapter Seven

Chapter One
*Introduction to the Research*

Chapter Two
*Participation of Indigenous Students in Education*

Chapter Three
*Place-conscious Curriculum for Indigenous students*

Chapter Four
*Methodology*

Chapter Five
*Curriculum Method and Content as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation*

Chapter Six
*Careers, Partners and Identity as Key Identifiable Elements in Participation*

Chapter Seven
*The nature of effective participation of Indigenous students in Education*
  - Addressing the research question
  - Overview
  - Questions for future research
  - Conclusion
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PART IV: APPENDICES

LIST OF APPENDICES

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### APPENDIX A: STATUS OF LITERATURE IN THE TEXT

*Denotes Australian studies and literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research themes</th>
<th>Evidence-based</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Theoretical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place and enthusiasm of students to learn</strong></td>
<td>Higher in 6 – 14 year olds (*Zubrick, 2006)</td>
<td>Constant throughout (Kiefer &amp; Kemple, 1999, Gruenewald, 2003b); Inherent (Tuan, 1977, Gruenewald, 2002); Can turn into phobia (Sobel, 1997)</td>
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<td><em>(Perceptual Dimension)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place and individual rights of students</strong></td>
<td>Students committed to local place (*James et al, 1999, *Purdie et al, 2000)</td>
<td>Global citizenship given priority by current systems (Orr, 1994); objective perception of the world (Gruenewald, 2003a)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Political Dimension)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Perceptual Dimension)</em></td>
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<td><strong>Place and inclusivity</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Familiarity of place important (Cajete, 1999, Kawagley &amp; Barnhardt, 1999); Negative impact of alien environments (Huddlestone, 2004, *Stewart, 2002); Negative place experiences lead to resistance (Gruenewald, 2006, *Partington, 1998); Empowers marginalised groups (Gruenewald, 2003a, Gulson, 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Ideological Dimension)</em></td>
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<td><em>(Sociological Dimension)</em></td>
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### Place and learning 
(Perceptual Dimension)

- Staff confidence boosted by place-based teaching strategies (Meichtry & Smith, 2007, Wither, 2001)
- Learning linked to curriculum relevance (Yager, 2003)
- Staff can be reluctant (Cajete, 1999)
- Curriculum is required to show teachers the way (Stables, 2004)

### Place and recognition of students’ lived experiences 
(Sociological Dimension)

- Can be achieved even in the most extreme geographical contexts (Gay, 2004)

### Place and a holistic approach 
(Perceptual Dimension)

- Balance between indoors and outdoors effective for Indigenous students (*Hughes, 1997)
- Fragmentation of curriculum has a negative impact on way students prepared for adulthood (Gruenewald, 2003a, Kiefer & Kemple, 1999, Krapfel, 1999)

### Contexts of place: local, national and international 
(Political Dimension)

- Standard curriculum compromises citizenship (Gruenewald, 2003a, Orr, 1994)
- Rural students committed to local place (James et al, 1999, Nachtigal, 1997, Wanich, 2006)
- Local place often the best environments for place-based education (Yager, 2003)

### Place and spatial balance of power 
(Ecological Dimension)

- Place-conscious education can contribute to local economies (Williams, 2002)
- Place-conscious education challenges necessity of power imbalance (Gruenewald, 2003a)
- Local ownership deters exploitation (Orr, 1994)
- Educational reform should be tested for their concern for local place (Bowers, 1999)
APPENDIX B: THE SITE

School

Originally, the school occupied buildings previously used for other purposes such as the town’s first cinema and a heritage-listed building previously used by Catholic Missionaries who fostered Indigenous children. Over the years, however, new buildings were acquired but the Board has retained use of the original buildings so that now the school comprises of a combination of new and old buildings. New buildings include modern, spacious classrooms with fully equipped specialist rooms. The most recent building is a purpose-built boarding facility will be able to accommodate 60 students.

Students

Towards the end of 2003, the student population at the school was about 140, almost 95% of which were Indigenous. In 2001 and 2002, the student population was 81 and 102 respectively. Students are drawn from three main sources: the local community, the adjacent city, and regional and remote communities. Students from the local community walk to school each day and may be enrolled in various grades in the primary or secondary school. Students from the adjacent city and are transported to school each day by the school bus. These students, too, may be enrolled in various grades from Kindergarten to Year 12. Students from the regional and remote communities reside at the school’s boarding facilities. However, they have to be old enough to attend secondary school to be able to do so. These students return home at the completion of each school term.
Staff

Teaching staff employed at the school is mainly non-Indigenous. Most of them have had prior or long associations with Indigenous education contexts. Whilst there is a relatively high turnover of non-Indigenous staff at the school from year to year, there is also a core group of staff teaching at the school for at least five years. These members of staff are required to meet the academic qualification standards and be registered as teachers with the Education Department. As employees of an independent school however, these members of staff receive a salary determined by an Independent Schools Association.

Indigenous staff is employed in the school in various roles. Within the school itself, they are employed as teacher assistants and clerical staff. The Governing Board considers these positions to be important to the Indigenous identity of the school. The former group are often the first port of call for Indigenous students who feel more comfortable talking to an Indigenous person especially about matters relating to culture. Indigenous teacher assistants are also important sources of advice for non-Indigenous teaching staff regarding culturally-appropriate ways of associating with Indigenous students and parents. The latter group, according to the Governing Board, contributes to the Indigenous identity of the case study school in the community. In other words, when members of the community visit or make telephone enquiries at the school, they encounter Indigenous employees who are able to relate to Indigenous people in a culturally-appropriate way.

Indigenous staff members also occupy key positions in other areas of the school such as Head of Administration and Houseparents. Here too, the Governing Board
considers these positions as being symbolic of Indigenous ownership of the school and considers it important that they be occupied by Indigenous people. It is not surprising therefore, that these positions are considered as senior positions across the school and are regarded as being on par with that of the principal in terms of seniority.

**School program**

The school was divided into four phases: Kindergarten and Pre–primary; Lower Primary (Years 1 – 3), Upper Primary (Years 4 – 7), and Junior Secondary (Years 8 – 10). All students started the day with fifteen minutes of Christian Devotions. This session involved reading a verse from the Bible, discussion of its relevance to the lives of students, singing devotional songs and concluding with prayer.

The Kindergarten and Pre–primary students attended school for two and four full days per week respectively in accordance with Australian law. The program for these two groups of students consisted mainly of literacy and numeracy activities. The Pre–primary students were old enough to benefit from weekly sessions of Aboriginal Studies lasting for about forty five minutes. During these sessions, a qualified teacher accompanied an Indigenous Teacher Assistant or a pre–selected Indigenous person from the community to teach students about the connections between Indigenous people and place.

The program for the Lower Primary group of students also had a focus on literacy and numeracy in the mornings but engaged in Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), Library, Technology, Bible Studies, Manual Arts, Sport and
Aboriginal Studies in the afternoons. Upper Primary students had a similar program with Health, Physical Education and Horticulture as additional courses.

In the secondary phase, the focus on literacy and numeracy in the mornings continued with courses such as Computer Studies, Horsemanship and Bushrangers adding to the program in the afternoons. The programs for Horsemanship and Bushrangers were based on the Western Australian Curriculum Framework. In Horsemanship, students learnt how to care for horses, ride skilfully and maintain facilities for horses. The Bushrangers program was linked to the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) of Western Australia. Students studying Bushrangers worked with CALM personnel in programs related to conservation and management of ecosystems around the school.

Although no students progressed successfully to Year 12 during my time as principal at the school, staff had put into place programs for Years 11 and 12. These programs were linked to the School for Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Staff envisaged that students who did choose to progress to Years 11 and 12 will have the vast resource base of SIDE in terms of its qualified staff and literature.

The boarding facility

The current boarding facility provides accommodation for secondary school students who live in regional and remote locations and are unable to travel to school daily. The facility is managed by Indigenous staff. Students are funded through the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (Abstudy) in the form of fortnightly payment to students which covers their lodging and daily living expenses. Each school day begins with a joint spiritual devotion, breakfast together, completion of shared duties and leaving for
school across the road. Whilst students at school, houseparents take the opportunity to follow up on students’ progress with school staff, communicate with students’ families in the communities and purchase daily supplies from the adjacent city. A person employed to prepare students’ meals usually has lunch prepared for students when they come over for the short break during the day.

When students return to the boarding facility after school, they are given a snack and allowed some free time which they usually spend playing a game of basketball or listening to music. They then enter into a structured time period for homework completion and studying for tests and examinations. Students sit down to dinner at a set time, followed by bible studies, having a shower and getting into bed by 21:00. On Thursdays, the afternoon routine is different. Houseparents at the boarding facility take students into the city because of the late night shopping hours. This outing gives students the opportunity to go shopping or visit the cinema.

**School Community**

The tribally-neutral place occupied by the school has encouraged settlement of Indigenous people from a wide range of locations. There is however, a considerable proportion of the resident tribal group. Whilst everyone in the community relate to each other in relative harmony, members of the Indigenous school community who belong to the resident tribal group usually have preference in jobs and decision-making at the school. This preference is related to their extensive family networks and long associations with the place occupied by the school.
Most of the Indigenous parents have not completed their schooling and generally do not take an active role in the daily operation of the school. Parents rely on the Indigenous teacher assistants to act on their behalf regarding their children’s welfare at school. However, parents do take a keen interest in the number of cultural events celebrated by the school throughout the year. Contact with parents of students at the boarding facility by the school is almost entirely by telephone. The school undertakes an annual trip to the main communities from which boarding students originate as a way of maintaining contact between parents and the school.
APPENDIX C: SUGGESTED PARTICIPANTS BY INDIGENOUS TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Research Project: Participation of Indigenous students

Dear ___________________ (Name of Teacher Assistant)

Below is a list of students and parents that I have selected using the school database. Please tick who, in your opinion, would be able to participate in an interview which would be approximately 45 minutes in duration. People you recommend should be able to talk freely about themselves, their schooling experiences and some thoughts about the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
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<td><strong>Local</strong></td>
<td><strong>Remote</strong></td>
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<th>Parents</th>
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<td><strong>Children in Primary School</strong></td>
<td><strong>Children in Secondary School</strong></td>
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<td>1. ________________</td>
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<th><strong>City</strong></th>
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Please keep this document safely with you after completion. I will collect it from you.

Yours sincerely,
Prem Mudhan
PhD Research Student
APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE GOVERNING BOARD

Date: __________

Dear…………………………..[Name of the Governing Board Secretary]

I am intending to apply for a scholarship to study towards a Doctor of Philosophy Degree next year. I would like to conduct research to understand some of the reasons why ______________ [school name] is so successful in the way it facilitates the participation of Indigenous students.

My request is related to observations that I have made as principal of ______________ [school name] and also as a teacher of Indigenous students in South Africa and New Zealand. There may be some important reasons for the success of this school which I did not observe in the other two countries. The findings will help us to understand what can be done to help other schools to improve the participation of students.

I am aware of the sensitive nature of researching Indigenous people. However, I have the support of some key Indigenous staff and parents who have agreed to assist me so that I conduct myself in a culturally-appropriate way in the research process. I also intend to present a summarised report of my findings to the Governing Board and discuss its potential implications.

Your favourable response in this regard will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

_________________
Prem Mudhan
APPENDIX E: LETTER TO ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Research Project: Participation of Indigenous students

Dear ………………………………..[participant’s name],

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating the participation of Indigenous students in education under the supervision of Dr. Judy MacCallum and Dr. Peter Wright. The purpose of the study is to understand what Indigenous people may think about education.

You can help in this study by consenting to share your perspectives and experiences about various issues related to school. It is anticipated that the time to complete the interview will be no more than 45 minutes. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from this research. Feedback on this study will be provided to you if desired on completion of this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details on the attached form. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Prem Mudhan, on 9571 8550 or my supervisors, Dr. Judy MacCallum, on 9360 7847 or Dr. Peter Wright, on 9360 2242. My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Your contribution to this research will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Prem Mudhan
PhD Research Student
APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM (All Participants)

Research Project: Participation of Indigenous students

I …………………………………………………………………………have read the attached information.

Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this activity, however, I know that I may change my mind and withdraw at any time with no disadvantage to myself.

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I understand that all tapes are strictly confidential. They will be stored securely and be accessible only to the researcher.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided my name or other information which might identify me is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative (please print) ______________________

Participant’s/Authorised Representative’s signature_______________________

Date: ______________

Investigator’s name: Prem Mudhan

Investigator’s signature: ______________

Date: ______________

Please return to:
Prem Mudhan
School of Education
Murdoch University
South Street
Murdoch WA 6150
APPENDIX G: LETTER FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Research Project: Participation of Indigenous students

Dear ………………………………..[participant’s name],

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating the participation of Indigenous students in education under the supervision of Dr. Judy MacCallum and Dr. Peter Wright. The purpose of the study is to understand what Indigenous people may think about education.

You can help in this study by consenting to share your perspectives and experiences about various issues related to school. It is anticipated that the time to complete the interview will be no more than 45 minutes. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify you will be used in any publication arising from this research. Feedback on this study will be provided to you if desired on completion of this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, could you please complete the details on the attached forms. Your parent or guardian’s permission is also required.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Prem Mudhan, on 9571 8550 or my supervisors, Dr. Judy MacCallum, on 9360 7847 or Dr. Peter Wright, on 9360 2242. My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Your contribution to this research will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,
Prem Mudhan
PhD Research Student
Dear [parent’s name],

I am a PhD student at Murdoch University investigating the participation of Indigenous students in education under the supervision of Dr. Judy MacCallum and Dr. Peter Wright. The purpose of the study is to understand what Indigenous people may think about education.

Your son/daughter [participant’s name] is invited to help in this research by participating in an interview relating to various issues about attending school. I am requesting your permission for this to occur.

It is anticipated that the time to complete the interview will be no more than 45 minutes. All information given during the interview is confidential and no names or other information that might identify [participant’s name] will be used in any publication arising from this research. Feedback on this study will be provided to [participant’s name] if desired on completion of this study.

[participant’s name] has been informed about the study and will be asked to sign an individual consent form. If you are willing for [participant’s name] to participate in this study, please complete the details on the attached form.

If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Prem Mudhan, on 9571 8550 or my supervisors, Dr. Judy MacCallum, on 9360 7847 or Dr. Peter Wright, on 9360 2242. My supervisors and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, or alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Your contribution to this research will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Prem Mudhan
PhD Research Student
APPENDIX I: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Research Project: Participation of Indigenous students

I …………………………………………………………have read the attached information.

Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow [participant’s name] to participate in the interview, however, I know that I may change my mind and withdraw permission at any time with no disadvantage to [participant’s name].

I understand that all information provided is treated as confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to do so by law.

I understand that all tapes are strictly confidential. They will be stored securely and be accessible only to the researcher.

I agree that research data gathered for this study may be published provided [participant’s name]’s name or other identifying information is not used.

Participant/Authorised Representative (please print) ______________________

Participant’s/Authorised Representative’s signature_______________________

Date: _______________

Investigator’s name: Prem Mudhan
Investigator’s signature: __________________

Date: _____________

Please return to:
Prem Mudhan
School of Education
Murdoch University
South Street
Murdoch WA 6150
APPENDIX J: INDICATIVE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Personal

1. Tell me about the town in which you live?

(Prompts):
Is it huge and busy or quiet?
How did you come to live there?

2. What do you like most about the place?

Do you have many friends?
What do you get up to during your free time?

3. In what way do you think that it is much different to this town?

Size, busy, buildings, bush, people, friends?

4. Tell me about your family.

How many?
Who?
What do you enjoy doing with them the most?

5. Tell me about relatives that you keep in touch with regularly?

Who?
How often?
What do you do?
Do they take interest in what you do?

School

6. Tell me about some of the schools that you have been to.

Kindergarten? Did you go to school?
Then where?
Must have been exciting.

7. Do you remember the best school that you have been to? Tell me about it.

Buildings?
Students?
Friends?
Teachers?
Community?
8. How did you come to be in this school?

Against your will?
You have family here?
Your parents or relatives went to school here?

9. What’s it like coming to a school like this?

Safe?
Friendly?
Good education?
Mainly Aboriginal students?
Aboriginal staff?

10. What does your family think about you coming to this school?

Happy?
Proud?
Right thing to do?

11. Did they go away from home to attend school? What was it like for them?

Dad?
Mum?
Uncle/Aunt?
More exciting?
Learnt differently?

12. What might it mean if this school was located elsewhere?

Would you still like it?
How would it be different?
More students of other cultures?
Different school program?

13. If you built this school, where would you put it?

Same place?
Closer home?
In a city?
More in the outback?

14. What would the school be like?

Activities?
Rules?
Teachers?
Program?
15. Who would attend the school?

Only Aboriginals?
Only girls/boys?
No little kids?

Post-compulsory education

16. What are your plans after Year 10?

University?
TAFE?
Year 11?
Trade?

17. Some people would say that it is a concern that Aboriginal students are not continuing with their education after Year 10. What would you say?

Haven’t heard?
Disagree?
Agree?
Students not interested

18. Is there anything you think that this school could do to make students come back after Year 10?

Change rules?
Change programs?
Change staff?
Better facilities. Like?
APPENDIX K: INDICATIVE QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

**Personal**

1. Tell me about the town in which you live?
   (Prompts)
   - Is it huge and busy or quiet?
   - How did you come to live there?

2. What do you like most about the place?

   - Do you have many friends?
   - What do you get up to during free time?

3. In what way do you think that it is much different to Coolgardie?
   - Size, busy, buildings, bush, people, friends

4. Tell me about your family.

   - How many?
   - Who?
   - What do you enjoy doing with them the most?

5. Tell me about relatives that you keep in touch with regularly?

   - Who?
   - How often?
   - What do you do?
   - Do they take interest in what you do?

**School**

6. Tell me about some of the schools that you have been to.

   - Kindergarten? Did you go to school?
   - Then where?
   - Must have been exciting.

7. Do you remember the best school that you have been to? Tell me about it.

   - Buildings?
   - Students?
   - Friends?
   - Teachers?
   - Community?
8. How did your child come to be in this school?

Against your will?
You have family here?
Your parents or relatives went to school here?

9. What’s it like sending your child/ward to a school like this?

Safe?
Friendly?
Good education?
Mainly Aboriginal students?
Aboriginal staff?

10. What does your family think about you sending your child/ward to this school?

Happy?
Proud?
Right thing to do?

11. Did you go away from home to attend school? What was it like for you?

Dad?
Mum?
Uncle/Aunt?
More exciting?
Learnt differently?

12. What might it mean if this school was located elsewhere?

Would you still like it?
How would it be different?
More students of other cultures?
Different school program?

13. If you built this school, where would you put it?

Same place?
Closer home?
In a city?
More in the outback?

14. What would the school be like?

Activities?
Rules?
Teachers?
Program?
15. Who would attend the school?

Only Aboriginals?
Only girls/boys?
No little kids?

Post-compulsory education

16. What would you like your child to do after completion of Year 10?
University

TAFE?
Year 11?
Trade?

17. Some people would say that it is a concern that Aboriginal students are not continuing with their education after Year 10. What would you say?

Haven’t heard?
Disagree?
Agree?
Students not interested

18. Is there anything you think that this school could do to make students come back after Year 10?

Change rules
Change programs
Change staff
Better facilities. Like?
APPENDIX L: INDICATIVE QUESTIONS FOR STAFF

Personal

1. Tell me about the town in which you spent most of your life?
   (Prompts)
   Is it huge and busy or quiet?
   How did you come to live there?

2. What did you like most about the place?
   Do you have many friends?
   What do you get up to during leisure time?

3. In what way do you think that it is much different to Coolgardie?
   Size, busy, buildings, bush, people, friends

4. Tell me about your family.
   How many?
   Who?
   What do you enjoy doing with them the most?

5. Tell me about relatives that you keep in touch with regularly?
   Who?
   How often?
   What do you do?
   Do they take interest in what you do?

School

6. Tell me about some of the schools that you have been to.
   Kindergarten? Did you go to school?
   Then where?
   Must have been exciting.

7. Do you remember the best school that you have been to? Tell me about it.
   Buildings?
   Students?
   Friends?
   Teachers?
   Community?
8. How did you come to teach at this school?
   
   Was it a preferred choice?
   You have family here?
   Your parents or relatives went to school here?

9. What’s it like coming to a school like this?
   
   Safe?
   Friendly?
   Good education?
   Mainly Aboriginal students?
   Aboriginal staff?

10. What does your family think about you teaching at this school?
    
   Reserved/unsure?
   Happy?
   Proud?
   Right thing to do?

11. Did you go away from home to attend school? What was it like for you?
    
   Uncle/Aunt?
   More exciting?
   Learnt differently?

12. What might it mean if this school was located elsewhere?
    
   Would you still like it?
   How would it be different?
   More students of other cultures?
   Different school program?

13. If you built this school, where would you put it?
    
   Same place?
   Closer home?
   In a city?
   More in the outback?

14. What would the school be like?
    
   Activities?
   Rules?
   Teachers?
   Program?
15. Who would attend the school?

   Only Aboriginals?
   Only girls/boys?
   No little kids?

**Post-compulsory education**

16. What are your children’s plans after Year 10?
   University?
   TAFE?
   Year 11?
   Trade?

17. Some people would say that it is a concern that Aboriginal students are not continuing with their education after Year 10. What would you say?

   Haven’t heard?
   Disagree?
   Agree?
   Students not interested

18. Is there anything you think that this school could do to make students come back after Year 10?

   Change rules
   Change programs
   Change staff
   Better facilities. Like?
Notes made during interview

Student No._____  

**Question 1**  
Pause after weekends  
Hesitates after ways, looks down

Notes inserted in transcription

Student No._____  

**Question 1**  
Mt. Isa in Queensland. My dad lives in Kalgoorlie and I am boarding at the school. I hate Mt. Isa sometimes. That is why I sometimes go to Kalgoorlie for the weekends (pause). (It seems like you really don’t like home. Why?) Mt. Isa is very hot. It is near the mines so there is a lot of sulphur in the air. The air quality is not very good. You wouldn’t want to live there. The noise level is high. (What do you mean?) It is mainly the breathing quality of the air. They use dynamite in the mines and the ground can get a bit of a shake. (How did you end up living in Mt. Isa?) My mum’s family is from there and then mum and dad separated and went their separate ways (hesitates, looks down). (You don’t have to talk about that if you don’t want to). No, it is just that we then went from town to town. We started to have a few issues at home so we went to Mt. Isa because all my mum’s family are there. She thought it was the safest place where a person will not follow so she went there.
APPENDIX N: COLLATION OF RESPONSES BY QUESTION

(From parent data)

Question 8: How did your child/you come to be in this school?

Parent 1

My wife used to work here as a teacher aid. She was coming out in the bus from Kalgoorlie so I thought it would be convenient for the children to travel with her while I was working in Kalgoorlie as a glazier. The kids would come with her out here and go back on the bus with her. It was more convenient. (Was it just out of convenience?) Because it was a Christian school as well and an Aboriginal one that played a part too. All these reasons made up our decision. (Pauses) Earlier it was not so important that it was a Christian and Aboriginal school. It was more convenience. Now it is important.

Parent 2

I started off working at the school and decided to enrol them here. I liked the school program. It was Christian based. The Aboriginal programs are also important in that it gives students the opportunity to identify themselves. There should be a balance between the Aboriginal and Christian aspects to education. There is a lot of respect that children can learn such as family values which Christian education can give our children.

Parent 3

The main reason for sending our kids here was that it is Christian, and Aboriginal. If the school was Christian with a mixed population I would still send my kids here. If it was Aboriginal and not Christian I am not quite sure. I don’t mind the students being mixed but I prefer a strong Aboriginal basis. They are not getting education outside the Aboriginal influence that other kids have on them as friends. What other kids are bringing to this school is what they are all trying to get away from in their communities.

Parent 4

I was a bit concerned about issues at the other school and though that it wasn’t good enough. I have never sent my children to a school that was not Christian based. We were lucky to have this school here. We could fit in with the philosophy of this school.
## APPENDIX O: SUMMARY AND TABULATION OF RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>STUDENTS</th>
<th>PARENTS</th>
<th>STAFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. How did your child/you come to be in this school?</td>
<td>Parents attended. Family involved in governance. Sibling attended. Because Christian – not Aboriginal. Family attended, mum liked Christian aspect, not sure if Aboriginal aspect important. My dad feels Aboriginal more important than Christian aspect. Mum and dad decided – Christian aspect and not Aboriginal. Also my cousins come here and they have aboriginal staff. My mum wanted me to come here. Teachers were not nice at the state school – they don’t listen to you. Siblings attended, peers influence and Christian school. Parents felt I should attend a Christian school.</td>
<td>Wife worked here. Convenient plus Christian school. I was working here. Also Aboriginal programs and Christian values. Christian and Aboriginal. Christian more important. Prefer Aboriginal though. Christian based. Christian and Aboriginal basis. Aboriginal basis – keeps in touch with culture. Aboriginal – family orientated. Also Christian which is more important.</td>
<td>Calling from the Lord. My ministry. Father was the founding member – school needed a secretary. Worked for free – the Lord’s will. Started as hostel parent and groundsman – then got into teaching – no option Came here to work in an Aboriginal school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX P: PROGRESSION OF CODING FROM RESPONSES TO THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>SUMMARY RESPONSE</th>
<th>KEY CONCEPT</th>
<th>THEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. How did you/your child come to be in this school?</td>
<td>Parents attended. Family involved in governance (student)</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>Aboriginality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dad feels Aboriginal more important than Christian aspect (student)</td>
<td>Culture/religious tensions</td>
<td>Aboriginality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Started as hostel parent and groundsman – then got into teaching – no option (parent)</td>
<td>Scarce jobs</td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What is it like attending/sending your child to a school like this</td>
<td>Look forward to other Aboriginal students (student)</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Aboriginality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Look forward to many outdoor lessons (student)</td>
<td>Direct experience</td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What does your family think about you attending/sending your child to this school?</td>
<td>Right thing to do (Indigenous staff)</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Aboriginality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Great. The school environment is like home (parent)</td>
<td>Rurality</td>
<td>Place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>