



University of
Southern
Queensland

ABORIGINAL SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE SCHOOL SECTOR

A Thesis submitted by
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For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

2023

ABSTRACT

This project analysed the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal educators within the school system (including my own) to develop a shared knowledge of what self-determination means and how it is understood and applied in a teaching and learning context.

Collaboratively, the Aboriginal research participants and I explored the barriers and challenges to our self-determination as teachers in the mainstream school system. Specifically, this thesis promoted self-determination as the more just and effective way of addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage and offers a strengths-based approach as an alternative to popular deficit models. The research process was guided by Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being and aligns with Indigenous research methodology and self-determination by privileging Indigenous voices and the use of narrative methods including autoethnography and yarning. These methods are deemed culturally appropriate and promote a conversational and collaborative approach to knowledge development that is both familiar and favourable to the Aboriginal participants. This thesis reveals that there are indeed strong commonalities in how Aboriginal educators define, perceive and experience self-determination in the school system; and provides insight into the nature, benefits, and challenges of Aboriginal self-determination within the school sector. The thesis also shares the findings of a research process centred on an Indigenous research paradigm and methodology.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Cally Jetta, declare that the PhD Thesis entitled 'Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector' is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 15 November 2022

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I respectfully acknowledge the Country on which I live, work and study, as Binjarup Country of the Noongar nation. I also acknowledge with gratitude the traditional lands and custodians of the lands on which the three UniSQ campuses reside.

I respectfully acknowledge all the ancestors, custodians and Elders of our collective First Nations Countries and clans.

I am thankful and humble for the work so many incredible academics and educators have done to pave the way forward for my own research aspirations. My PhD journey was guided and supported throughout by the strength, wisdom and experience offered by other First Nations educators, researchers and academics.

Throughout the research process I have been privileged to have been supported by four amazing supervisors and individuals. Thank you to Professor Jon Austin and Dr Ian Davis for getting me started on this journey, and then getting me across the finish line respectively. Thank you to Dr Jacinta Maxwell for your guidance, support, wisdom and understanding during the thickest parts of the process. Thank you to A/Prof Renee Desmarchelier who initiated the research conversation that would change my life and who has patiently supported me through several collapsed thesis projects and every other step of this long process. I am so very grateful for the time, dedication and genuine care you all invested in me and my research project.

A huge thank you to the five wonderful Aboriginal research participants who willingly gave their time, energy and perspectives to this project. It was an honour and a joy to be able to yarn with you and to hear some of your stories. I sincerely hope you are as proud of the valuable knowledge we have produced together, as I am.

A PhD is quite a selfish exploit that takes a researcher away from other family, social and community obligations and activities. I

acknowledge the patience and sacrifice of those I live and work alongside in allowing me to be selfish and achieve this goal. Thank you, my dearest family, friends and co-workers.

This research has been supported by the First Nations PhD Scholarship program provided by UniSQ. I sincerely thank UniSQ; the Graduate Research Office and staff; scholarship program and staff; and the College for First Nations team for your guidance, reassurance and kind assistance.

Thank you to the lovely and talented Laura Black for working your editing and formatting magic on this thesis.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late Great Grandfather, Henryk Wachla, who shared my love of learning and knowledge and encouraged me to take my journey in education 'as far as I could'.

You planted that first seed of self-belief in me, thank you Grandpa, I finally did it!

I would also like to dedicate this work to my loving and supportive family, my incredible husband and our four beautiful sons, my dear brother and amazing parents, and my big pup Atilla, for your support, understanding and patience through a long period of late nights and secluded writing. I could never have achieved this without your backing.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIEO	Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
APAC	Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum
CIT	Cultural Interface Theory
DCT	Decolonisation Theory
EBAs	Enterprise Bargaining Agreements
FLN	Front de Libération National (The National Liberation Front; France)
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IK	Indigenous Knowledges
IST	Indigenous Standpoint Theory
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NT	Northern Territory, Australia
PD	Professional Development
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples
UniSQ	The University of Southern Queensland, Australia

CHAPTER 1: READING THIS THESIS

1.1 My thesis analogy

The following thesis is more than an academic transcript fulfilling the requirements of my PhD. It is a story of self-acceptance, struggle, resistance; and a record of the transformative process I underwent throughout this research project. It is written not just by a PhD student, but by an educator, a mother and Aboriginal community advocate, in the hope that it will connect with a wide audience and provide an engaging and evocative narrative that develops contemporary understandings of Aboriginal educators and self-determination in the Australian school system.

The thesis is compelled by a genuine moral and cultural responsibility to contribute to positive change for Aboriginal Australians, particularly in the field of education by privileging the experiences and voices of Aboriginal educators and collaboratively exploring contemporary understandings and applications of self-determination in schools.

Achieving my PhD was an important goal; equally important to me though, was ensuring my research remained purposeful, meaningful, and respectful of Aboriginal cultural values and protocols. This balancing act is a common theme in my life, and I see myself as existing within and between 'two worlds' as I am immersed in both Aboriginal and 'Western' societies and cultures. It can be a confusing experience at times, and I have found great strength in the stories of fellow Aboriginal educators and academics who have been challenged by and then persevered through the same struggle.

1.1.1 Bilya, Waardan and Darbal

In instances when I have felt overwhelmed by the challenges of walking in and between 'two worlds' I remembered the wisdom offered by a dear Noongar Elder.

My Elder spoke about our local boodja (Country) and the special interconnections between the fresh water (bilya - rivers); salt water (waardan-the ocean); and estuaries (darbal) central to Noongar survival and sustenance. She explained that fresh water and salt water were two entirely different entities, each with their own spirit, stories and physical characteristics; but these two worlds can also be bridged and connected by darbal, or estuaries. Darbal are distinct ecosystems where fresh and saltwater systems come together and influence one another to create new life and resources.

I have decided to use this analogy of three interconnected systems to structure my thesis and to represent the blending of contributing knowledge systems. The bilya, which twist and turn, connect, and intersect, represent my personal contexts and experiences and how they all connect to form a flowing story. Bilya's connection to Country reminds me of my origin and direction within this project and the need to keep my research connected to the cultural values and beliefs of Country. Bilya is written in first person and offers a subjective and personal context to the research project through the use of storying.

The waardan represents the vast sea of academic literature and theory, research paradigms, university standards and the specific thesis requirements of the project. Waardan consists of the academic writing a PhD requires.

The darbal, situated at the interface of bilya and waardan, represents my transformation, the Aboriginal research participants, and our collective findings for this project as all exist at the cultural intersection of Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems. Darbal consists of a combination of both bilya and waardan knowledge, representing the merging of personal and external data.

All three elements of this thesis are interconnected and together will provide a holistic insight that incorporates both academic rigour and cultural protocol to reveal the contemporary reality of Aboriginal

educators in the school system, and our perspectives of self-determination.

Figure 1

The three interconnected components of this thesis



As the diagram above indicates, there is no defined beginning or ending, nor hard boundaries between the three main elements which reflects the emergent and continuous nature of this research and its potential impact for influence and growth beyond the immediate project.

CHAPTER 2: BILYA

2.1 Introducing Bilya

My Bilya section begins with an introduction of myself as researcher, my Aboriginal connections and position towards Aboriginal self-determination. Bilya provides personal context to the research aims and focuses via a series of interconnecting stories that fall under the major milestones of my educational journey from a high school student to an experienced educator. The purpose of these stories was to introduce myself and the cultural, educational, professional and personal contexts motivating my research. This provided transparency around my lived experiences and perspectives of education and Aboriginal self-determination that initiated this project and informed my research intentions, ambitions and process.

Figure 2
Bilya



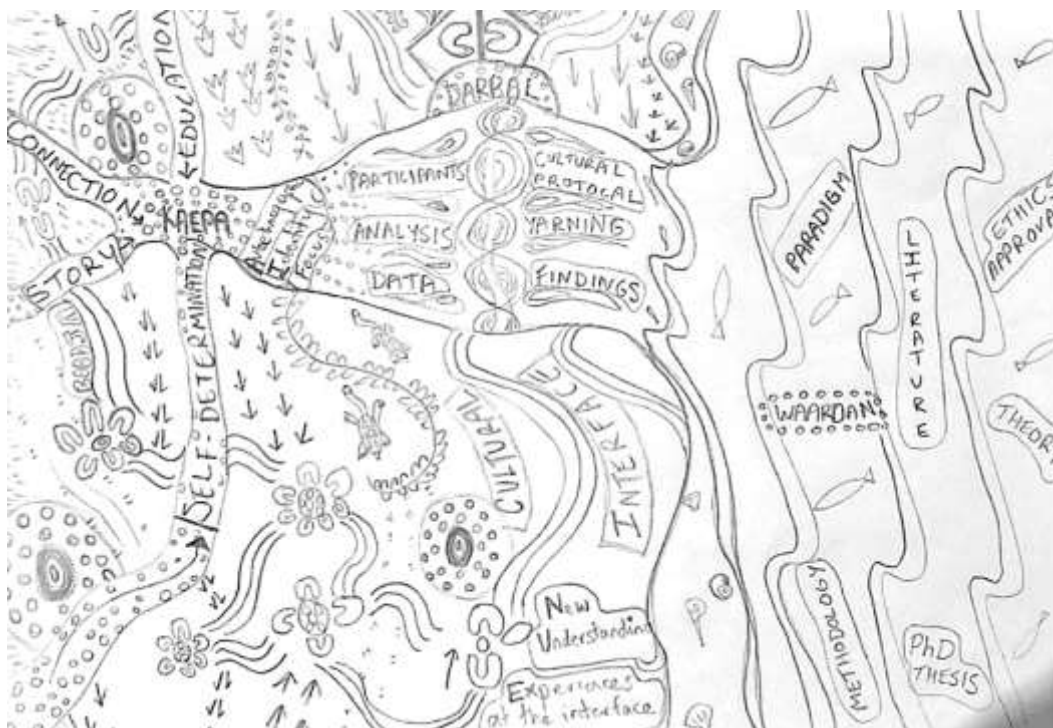
This diagram represents the four stories that flow together to form my 'Bilya'. Boodja 'land' represents the origins of the stories. The swirling space where the stories all interconnect and begin to move towards the ocean.

Dr Karen Martin, a Noonuccal and Bidjara woman from Minjerripah (North Stradbroke Island – South-East Queensland) and (central Queensland) has over two decades of experience in Aboriginal higher education and research. Martin, in talking about her own research, does not make excuses for her mixed mode of writing and explains that this messiness and disjuncture “reflects how I have mediated both my own cultural conventions and expectations and those conventions and expectations of the academy” (2008, p. 21). Reflecting on Martin’s experience, a major challenge for my research was mediating both the cultural conventions and expectations of the Aboriginal community and research participants and the academy. My choice to use mixed styles of

writing and embed storytelling, poetry and mud maps into my research methodology was my way of responding to this challenge. Where my writing is autoethnographic and documenting past experiences, such as teacher logs, the font becomes less formal.

Aboriginal protocol requires that my research remains true to myself and to the collective – Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. Part of this protocol is the expectation that I will begin with an introduction of myself, my Country, and my kin; and be transparent about my research intentions. It is for the purpose of honouring this protocol that I have chosen to begin my thesis with bilya consisting of storying that reveals my identity and positionality and allows me to speak to others directly in first person. I would ask you to please be patient in allowing the bilya (rivers) to flow in a manner that privileges Indigenous perspectives on knowledge and research; and trust that all the necessary information will be revealed in good Indigenous time.

Figure 3
Mud map of my research journey



Mud maps, or aerial view drawings are often used in Noongar teaching and learning to communicate intricate concepts or journeys. My diagram catches some of the 'messiness' I refer to and incorporates the various elements, sections and processes involved in my research. There are symbols and words used that represent my origin and connections to family and Country. The circular dot patterns represent 'camps' or places where my different kin connections reside. I began on the left-hand side of the drawing, with four 'bilya' weaving their way through Country towards the darbal/estuary.

The bilya represent the four interconnecting 'stories' included in my autoethnography and are labelled accordingly. On the right-hand side of the diagram is the waardan/ocean of formal academia and research containing key terms and methods applied in this project. The middle section that shows the overlap and connection between the bilya and waardan represents the darbal/estuary where new findings are produced at the cultural interface of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems. It is ok if not everyone understands all of it, the diagram provided the initial clarity I needed to embark on my research journey. I have used mud-maps through-out this thesis as a way to visually and conceptually map the various components and elements.

2.2 Focus and aims of the research

2.2.1 Introduction

My project aim was to tell an important story that combined my voice with those of other Aboriginal researchers, academics, and educators. To tell a story that engaged and connected with a wide range of readers. To share and present in a way that was natural for me, the Aboriginal research participants involved and their respective communities. Through bilya I provided reflective and reflexive insight into my journey and thought processes; and applied the ancient method of

storytelling that has served as an effective foundation for Indigenous teaching and learning for tens of thousands of years.

Outlined below are the major focuses informing the bilya section of this thesis.

2.2.2 Aboriginal connection focus

My project aims and choice of methodology are ultimately informed by my loyalty and dedication to my Aboriginal family and community; to other Aboriginal educators and researchers who have paved the way for me; and to making a positive contribution towards Aboriginal self-determination, specifically in the field of education. It is vital for me that this project accurately reflects me, who I am and what I stand for. That it is a true reflection of my cultural and personal identity and motivated by a desire to empower and benefit both the participants and wider Aboriginal community. I understand that globally and nationally, Indigenous peoples' historical experience of unethical and exploitative research has led to universities applying extra measures and standards to safeguard Indigenous research projects. At times however, I have found that these protective measures can create barriers that serve to restrict and define how an Aboriginal academic engages with the research process. Wherever there was space to, it was important for me to 'push back' and resist conventional expectations and structures that didn't align with Aboriginal community and cultural protocols.

I opted to use my own community networks and means for recruiting research participants and have conducted the yarning sessions in a culturally familiar manner that enabled participants to feel confident and comfortable. I aimed to give back to my Noongar and Indigenous communities by promoting the human right of self-determination and giving voice to Indigenous perspectives and experience. It is this Aboriginal connection and accountability that has grounded me and served as a constant reminder to remain true to myself and my mob throughout the entirety of this research process.

2.2.3 Education focus

I believe in the ability of education to bring about change and empower people at both an individual and social level. I see myself as a lifelong learner and this PhD research project is a personally and professionally meaningful extension of my own learning and academic education that I hope will lead to further access and opportunities to impart change and influence in the school system. I aimed to use this qualification and the learning involved in the process of attaining it, to increase my own understanding of Aboriginal self-determination in schools, and in turn, use my insight and knowledge to contribute to the education of others on this topic.

I have aspired to complete a project that is of relevance to all Australian educators; that assists non-Indigenous schools, leaders, and teachers to understand the importance of Aboriginal self-determination, and how they can best support this. I acknowledge that the project has also contributed to Aboriginal staff awareness and empowerment by centring the voices of Aboriginal educators and furthering their knowledge and perspectives of self-determination in Australian school contexts. I presented an alternative perspective to Aboriginal education that challenges popular deficit approaches and champions self-determination as a just and sustainable path forward.

2.2.4 Self-determination focus

I view Aboriginal self-determination in schools as a process wherein Aboriginal educators develop self-awareness, empowerment, and the capacity to implement considered actions and choices that preserve their cultural values and integrity. I was committed to supporting Aboriginal self-determination throughout the entirety of this project, from my methods of recruitment and data collection to my thesis structure and presentation. I have asserted my own self-determination by choosing to research what is important to me and my community; and by making the

decision to conduct and present this research in my own way. I have promoted the self-determination of others by creating an opportunity for the voices of Aboriginal educators to be heard, and a platform for others to be inspired by their contributions.

Through my research I have gained greater clarity and a more complete understanding of Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector. I wanted to know if my understanding, perspective, and experiences of Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector were shared by other Aboriginal educators and to what extent. I have combined what I knew and believed to be true about self-determination with relevant literature and research; and the contributions of the Aboriginal research participants, to provide an in-depth cross examination that revealed commonalities and new lines of thought.

2.3 Introducing the Bilya stories

There is a slight bend in the river at this point. Bilya moves away from a current context discussing my research aims and revisits the past using storying that documents my lived experiences through “narrative threads of experience unfolding and enfolding” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 1). Storying is intertwined with dated teacher logs that provide further context to my stories. The interjection of certain logs at specific points substantiates my current perspectives and highlights the connections between my lived experiences of Aboriginal self-determination.

(The included excerpts and complete ‘teacher logs’ are drawn from my personal teaching journal that I have maintained for over seven years. Labelled teacher logs will appear throughout this thesis with the original written date displayed. These logs both interrupt the stories and provide deeper insight by linking to past experiences that have directly influenced my current perspective. This structure is symbolic of the way in which bilya or my personal story intercepts and influences my research process, or waardan.

Teacher Log

February 4, 2016

I have only just started back for the year and I can already tell I have my work cut out for me. I have decided to maintain a journal or 'teacher log' that documents my experiences, thoughts and reflections as a teacher working with at-risk students. I have always found writing therapeutic and to be a great stress release. Somehow, getting it down in writing helps me to make sense of things and see it more objectively; to reflect on my practice and decide how to proceed on matters.

Below are the interconnecting stories that form the basis of my 'Bilya' and provide further context to the research aims and focuses outlined above.

Figure 4

The sections that comprise 'Bilya' or 'my story'



The interconnecting 'stories' of 'Bilya'

2.3.1 Aboriginal connection story

I begin this story is with the people it aspires to empower; those whom I am accountable to; Aboriginal Australians, in particular the Binjarup, Noongar community in the Southwest of Western Australia. This is where my boodja, or Country is, the place I was born and currently reside. While my heritage is not of this specific Aboriginal Country, (my mother is Scottish and my father's cultural connection is both Polish and interstate), this is the place I was born and know best. It is the Noongar land, language, and people that I connect and identify with and the Noongar community over time has accepted me as an in-group member. My local Elders have approved my education and study endeavours and given their blessing for me to talk and act on behalf of my community and on matters related to Aboriginal education. This level of in-group Country and community acceptance, trust and Elder approval was an essential foundation for my research project, without which I would not have been comfortable commencing this journey.

At every turn and juncture, it was vital to ask myself the questions – how will this be received by and possibly impact on Aboriginal people? What are the potential benefits and risks to those Aboriginal participants involved and their wider communities? Am I conducting research in a respectful, reciprocal, and culturally responsible way? Culturally appropriate and respectful research with Aboriginal people requires ethical considerations and provisions above and beyond those prescribed by the university and my first responsibility and loyalty was aligning my practice with these; and then tackling the systemic formalities of academic research.

I acknowledge that through this thesis, I was accountable not just as a researcher, but as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunty, niece, colleague, friend, and cousin. Everything I did and said as an educator and as a researcher has been informed by the implications for these relationships and in this way, my identity and practice as an Aboriginal educator and researcher is inseparable from my identity and practice as an Aboriginal family and community member. My desire to empower

Aboriginal people through education and self-determination is not just a job or profession. It is part of my fabric as a human being, it is like an innate drive fuelled by a lifelong commitment to learning, teaching, and contributing to a better and brighter future for Aboriginal people; my sons and prospective grandchildren included.

2.3.2 Education story

My Aboriginal and educational connections and understandings are hard to separate as they both inform and influence the other. Upon graduating from secondary school I enrolled at university to study Australian Indigenous Studies as I knew I wanted to work with and for Aboriginal people and Aboriginal self-determination before I knew exactly in what capacity. About a third of the way through my first university degree I amended my enrolment to a double degree by combining my Bachelor of Arts in Australian Indigenous Studies with the equivalent in Secondary Teaching.

The process and vision have always been two pronged. Firstly, I believe that school education which embeds local and wider Aboriginal history, perspectives, and knowledge, can significantly contribute to changing stereotypes and misconceptions and developing mutual understanding and respect between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Secondly, I feel strongly that if Indigenous Australians are to walk in both worlds confidently and maximise their potential impact to promote positive change, education is the most powerful vehicle and tool at our disposal. It was with this perspective and motivation that I embarked on my secondary teaching career some 15 years ago.

My high school days

One influential teacher could be credited with altering my entire life path. She challenged the status quo and gave the students in her class, me included, an opportunity to engage with Aboriginal content and history in a way we had never previously done. She went beyond the comfortable and safe and allowed Aboriginal stories, perspectives, and voices to reveal the confronting truths about dispossession and massacre, mission life, poverty, racism, and the Stolen Generations. For most students, it was their first real introduction and insight into such content and perspectives.

Regardless of how everyone may have felt about the content and how they engaged with it, I don't think anyone could have avoided hearing a new perspective and considering new possibilities because of the course.

Teaching can always incorporate a social justice element and intention. I believe it should. Knowledge in isolation is static, however; knowledge shared, developed, and applied with shared purpose has immense potential and power.

There were no other Aboriginal students enrolled at my private high school and as I grew older, I felt this absence more keenly, along with the casual racism expressed by other students on a regular basis. Up until that individual teacher stepped outside the conventional and delivered a unit in Indigenous Literature to my year 11 class, Aboriginal people had been a pretty much non-existent entity throughout my schooling, confined to brief historical reference and often portrayed as traditional relics from the distant past. The casual student conversation in the yard painted Aboriginal people as modern-day fringe dwellers, misfits and aggressive, begging, dole-bludgers best to be avoided. Students often referred to shabby houses and beat up looking cars as 'coon cribs' and 'boong wagons'. When some of the boys in my year group saw me in the company of Aboriginal family members and friends, they were quick to label me with the humiliating nickname 'sniffer' and asked me if I preferred paint or petrol.

Towards the end of my schooling years, I guess I was quite angry, cynical, and frustrated with the 'system', but I was more determined than ever to finish strong. I had discovered the empowerment that came with the acquisition of knowledge and the ability to articulate this knowledge effectively. I became convinced that education was the vehicle that could take me beyond a working-class background towards an important and influential career of my choosing. So invested and enamoured was I with learning that it was quite a natural progression into teaching and pairing my passion for Aboriginal advancement and equality with education became the goal.

I wanted to work towards change. Changing the status and situation of Aboriginal Australian disadvantage by empowering Aboriginal youths through education AND contributing to greater mainstream awareness, recognition and value of Aboriginal knowledge, history, and rights through my approach to teaching. I have had this dual understanding and approach to education since I began studying to become a teacher.

University

Have you ever noticed how connections and opportunities just seem to present themselves at the right time and in the right places; and the planets all seem to align, just for a spell? If it hadn't been for the right people, in this case two University Doctors, contacting me at the right stage in my life and career, I imagine I would not be writing this now and that my present situation could be hugely different.

Completing my PhD will directly impact on my capacity and opportunities to make a difference and contribute to positive change for Aboriginal people. I understand that I need to achieve at the highest level of academia if I want to be able to influence educational policy and promote Aboriginal self-determination. I want to show my children and younger relatives that it is possible to be 'two ways strong' and succeed in mainstream education without compromising cultural integrity and identity.

School teaching career

When the principal had given me her nod of approval to trial teaching Noongar language to improve the engagement and literacy of students I was delighted and jumped right in. I had the knowledge, the resources, and the motivation to get started right away, which I did. A few weeks later, when word had made its way around the staff, I was dealt a blow by the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) at the time. A well respected and connected woman who had worked in the school for longer than I had. She did not approach me directly but her

hostile body language and obvious avoidance of me in the staffroom made me aware that there was an issue. I couldn't understand why.

Soon after this, the principal pulled me aside for a quiet chat and disclosed that the AIEO was unhappy that I had started teaching Noongar language without any prior consultation with her. The principal explained that while the AIEO did not have the teaching experience or qualification needed to deliver the content, she felt she should be consulted and included when it came to developing and delivering Noongar language.

I scoffed inwardly. So, basically this woman was upset that I had knowledge of Noongar language but also the qualification needed to deliver it, which she did not. To me, it seemed petty and selfish. Looking back now I can see I was wrong and completely out of line. I acted with no cultural respect whatsoever and was looking at the situation from a very individualistic, and dare I say it, white (I said it!) viewpoint.

I was teaching Noongar language but neglecting the most fundamental Noongar cultural expectations and responsibilities simultaneously. I understand now that if ever I am considering developing and sharing (to any degree) the knowledge, culture, and language of Aboriginal people, it must only be with prior approval and blessing of the local Elders and community leaders that I proceed. Whether I am here on Country, or further afield and off-Country, the local Elders and leaders are always my first, last and main point of call.

After several years I felt I had finally proven myself to be a capable and dedicated educator in the eyes of the current school leadership and I was ecstatic when the opportunity was presented for me to develop an Indigenous Senior School Engagement Program (SSEP) from scratch. The school already had a senior engagement program in place but for some reason it did not appeal to the disengaged Aboriginal students and attendance for most of them continued to be a challenge for the school. The principal hoped that offering a more culturally inclusive program would turn this around.

The program ran concurrently and successfully for four years with 'Aunty' (a local Elder) and I teaching, and a new group of year 12 students graduating each year. The Aboriginal Engagement Program had achieved its goals in re-engaging the most at-risk students and improving Aboriginal attendance rates by offering an alternative learning program that provided regular opportunities for students to develop knowledge of their local history, culture and language.

I went on maternity leave for the fourth and final time during my teaching career. When I returned in the new year, the principal had changed and so too had the school's priorities and programs. Downsizing and regaining financial security were the priority of this new principal and he decided that in the interest of cutting costs, the two SSEPs should merge. The Aboriginal students were understandably upset, they had created ownership of this program and enjoyed the cultural familiarity and group solidarity it provided. Aunty was upset and bewildered. She couldn't understand why a school would identify the need for something and then pour time and money into building it, only to dismantle and abandon it when it is working as intended. Many parents expressed similar feelings about the decision also.

I wasn't in the newly combined SSEP for long before the principal requested I support the school's most disengaged boys with extreme behaviours at the off-site program they attended. In hindsight, I should have said no. I should have looked to find work at another school where Aboriginal education was valued, and my expertise would be also. But I truly believed the leadership had approached me because of their confidence in my ability to effectively work with at-risk students and I was so eager to please and remain on that pedestal. In hindsight, this was the worst decision I could have made, and I'd have been better staying put where I was then moving into an off-site teaching situation. Once I made the move, things started to unravel bit by bit; first professionally, and then personally. It's hard not to become invested and involved when you are working exclusively with the neediest students, day after day, and

ultimately year after year. As time passed, I became more isolated from the school, my professional colleagues, and mentors and more entrenched in the tumultuous lives of my students.

The following log consists of a poem I wrote while working in the off-site program with very disadvantaged youths. I have written it from the perspective of my students.

Teacher Log

October 19, 2016

At school they want me to be good
Follow their rules like I should
They don't listen, they just keep on
About the difference between right and wrong.
I know all that, why should I care?
Life is cruel why should I be fair?
Cos when you're walking in my shoes
Having nothing, means nothing to lose.
I don't really know what to believe
Cos everything changes the second I leave
Breaking the rules, it's just what we do
My mates all steal, my family does too.
I see the way they look down and stare
They better shift their gaze or beware
If I don't know you and respect you
You're an enemy, so f--k you.
Ready to lose it with one dickhead
For jarring me in class for what I said
They tell me to leave before I dare
Get home and as usual, no one's there.
People hear my name and think of bad

It's the reputation my family had
The police all know me, my dad's inside
Every adult I've trusted has lied.
My mum won't answer when I knock at the door
Her new man will tell me she left just before
I boot the door, 'well f--k you both then'
Looks like I'm stealing dinner from the servo again.
Nothing to stop the hungry growl
Time to head out on the prowl
I hit the street on my latest wheels
To find my boys and spin some deals.
No money, that's no problem
Find someone younger and then rob them
Spend the cash or swap the goods for smoke
Numb the guilt, just forget and toke.
School is done now, on my own
Still stuck living here at home
No hope now, the ship set sail
I never tried, I was scared I would fail.
All those people back then and there
Offering help and saying they care
I'd take it all, if I could just go back
Get my head right and my life on track.
I guess I had it in my mind
That by always starting from behind
I could never win a race
Run my hardest and still not place.
Never faced up to my fears
Wasted opportunities and years
Always thought I'd be an awesome dad

But I've given my kids the same that I had.
Don't be scared, don't fight or hide
Forget out there and look inside
Who are you? What do you stand for?
Is this life enough for you...Or do you want more??

I cared deeply for these children and as much as I strived to make a positive impact, ultimately the challenge was too great for me alone. Finally, it dawned on me. I wasn't in this position because the leadership valued my expertise and skills as an educator, but because I was willing to say 'yes' when most others would have said 'no'. Because I stayed put even when I knew my worth wasn't being realised. This realisation made me question my own worth as an educator. I had done everything right, achieved many firsts and bests for the school, yet here I was, not teaching, but supervising a handful of youths with issues far bigger and more urgent than their inability to engage with schooling. Issues bigger than I could manage or hope to overcome.

When I finally came undone, I had nothing left to give my students, no pride or self-respect as an educator remaining, and no more happy family and home to seek solace in. I was alone and every wall I had carefully laboured over and built, crashed down around me. I had no one to blame but myself really. I had made the choices that lead me to this juncture. I think the final straw was when I was called into the principal's office and ambushed by her and the two deputy principals all at once.

I had expressed disappointment in leadership for not ensuring their duty of care to myself or the students. I was strung up and roasted in that office and left a sobbing, pathetic mess with the realisation that I was valued and well received so long as I was saying yes and little else. Thirteen years or so of impeccable service and dedication, all forgotten and overshadowed by my mistakes in the final hour. It cut me deeply. It still hurts to recall.

A homeless Aboriginal man had moved into one of the demountable buildings on the off-site location where I was set to deliver the alternative education program. Before I could start teaching at the new site and feel safe about bringing the students in though, I had to deal with the current mess and the inhabitant. Six weeks into term and I still didn't have some of the essential resources I needed to run my programs. Was I being taken as a complete fool and being totally undervalued and neglected by my school? I felt I had no genuine support from my leadership anymore, or perhaps never did.

For the first time in 11 years of teaching I had to cut back and retreat to an extent for self-preservation. I was vulnerable, tired and anxious all the time, the exact opposite of what the kids need and deserve and I just wasn't able to shrug off or bounce back from incidents and interactions that I'd normally take in my stride. I considered quitting my position mid-term and doing relief work to cover the bills. I applied for remote teaching positions. I wanted to run far away from home, work and some of the people that had caused me distress and hurt this year.

I decided it was an ideal time to embark on a lifelong dream of mine of teaching and living in a remote community, immersed in traditional culture, language, and learning. I applied for leave from my permanent position at my large, metropolitan secondary college, packed up the house and family and we headed up to the far north, the Tiwi Islands. For the first time in my school career, I was a community outsider. I was not a relative to any of the kids here; I didn't speak their language or know their cultural ways. This proved to be both a little bewildering at first but also hugely liberating. I no longer had to juggle competing family and employer obligations and relationships, and it would be possible to start fresh with clear separation between my work and home life. What presented initially as an opportunity to live and work on Aboriginal-owned land at a community managed school and experience Aboriginal self-determination in education first-hand; developed into an eye-opening

discovery about the way local Aboriginal staff were devalued and disempowered by the very school aimed to empower their people.

The following teacher log excerpt is a record of this realisation and my observations at the time I was experiencing it.

Teacher Log

April 5, 2020

Our college is here on Aboriginal land, because of the efforts of local Elders to educate their youth on Country. We have non-Aboriginal staff from all over Australia working here alongside local staff and distance between the two can sometimes feel very pronounced. Non-Aboriginal staff hold the leadership positions and the control. Local Aboriginal staff fill support and assistant positions and are the essential link between non-Aboriginal staff and their Aboriginal students and communities. Too often they are valued (and used) only for their knowledge of family, community and language and not the wealth of other things they bring to the table. The students need to see their own people in positions of leadership and authority. This is empowering, inspiring and shows students that they can aspire to become teachers and school principals themselves. That is not what is happening here.

COVID-19 unfortunately brought our time in the Northern Territory (NT) to a grinding halt, and we were forced to return home to Western Australia a year or two ahead of schedule. I left feeling I had healed, grown and learned a great deal during our time remote and I feel proud

of the work and efforts I invested in the Aboriginal students and staff. More than ever though, the experience had strengthened my belief in the need for self-determined Aboriginal education and opened up my eyes to the reality that many remote schools are facing.

I managed to land the role of Indigenous Education Coordinator at an elite, private school. I had gone from one extreme to another. I was enjoying the role and had signed an initial three-year contract when the opportunity to teach at the university I was currently studying at arose. It came unexpectedly and I was conflicted about whether to take this opportunity or remain in my contract and not disappoint my current employers.

Previously, I would have gone with the latter, but after putting employer loyalty before all else for so long I was prepared at this stage to put my needs and wants, and those of my family first when making the decision. After 14 years in high schools, I felt very ready for a change of scene and I was excited to embark on my long-term goal of teaching the content I love, at the university level. That is where I am now, teaching and studying at university.

2.3.3 Self-determination story

I can't pretend that 10 years ago self-determination was a concern of mine. Perhaps not even 5 years ago. My understanding of Aboriginal self-determination then was limited to a political era in the 1960s-70s, it was the policy and focus that followed the assimilation era. Beyond that, I had not given it much consideration. I anticipated that this research journey would provide some of the answers and clarity I sought.

I realised that my academic background and related school experiences had shaped my own definition and meaning of self-determination. It was a familiar term and concept that I felt comfortable talking about. From my perspective Aboriginal self-determination refers to an ongoing process of self-awareness and informed choices and actions that contribute to greater Aboriginal cultural autonomy. I couldn't

automatically assume that other Aboriginal people working in the school sector shared my understanding of, or concern for self-determination, or that they had developed their own definitions and perspectives. My research process had to explore this.

Looking back now with lived experience, I can reflect on how my right to self-determination was being inhibited within the school system in ways that I could not yet fully understand or articulate. In my frustration with a school system that lacked any real rigour and dedication to empowering Aboriginal people and perspectives and that was largely ineffective in changing public attitudes and perceptions, I turned to social media as an outlet to speak my truth, voice my perspectives and challenge the common myths, stereotypes and ignorance surrounding Aboriginal people. It was around the same time that I was coordinating the Indigenous Engagement Program.

Whilst developing and delivering the program itself was empowering and allowed for self-determined education to a degree, behind the scenes, the power relations and leadership hierarchy served as an ongoing reminder of the barriers. I felt increasingly undermined, patronised, and used by school leadership teams and colleagues and my awareness of how Aboriginal staff were treated (or mistreated) by consecutive school leaders continued to grow.

I began on the Facebook page '*Blackfulla Revolution*' (BFR) and poured my heart and soul into building its content and following for several years. During this time, I posted dozens of original opinion articles contributing Aboriginal perspectives and well-informed responses to challenge the many common myths and misconceptions held by non-Aboriginal Australians. Self-determination for me, became a familiar term and an explicit goal because of my connections and engagement with online Aboriginal platforms and activism.

While administrating BFR I also began a closed Facebook Group called '*LogiCally Speaking*' which is a series of teacher logs that I have been writing and sharing over the past 8 years of my education career

(and that are featured in this thesis). The page is aimed primarily at those with an interest or background in teaching and/or Aboriginal education. While I would probably describe myself as an educator rather an activist, I do believe they are often the same thing. By sharing experiences and knowledge you can develop awareness and understanding that in turn, leads to action and change. Online platforms have given me the opportunity to be self-determined and to share the experiences and knowledge important to me, in the ways I wanted to share them.

Bilya storying summary

Some of these things I have not shared before and they are hard for me to say. But I can't expect you to come along on this research journey with me and have confidence in my transparency and credibility without first convincing you that what I write is genuine and straight from the heart. I believe in this research project and the deeper understanding I anticipate it leading me to. The current perspectives and past experiences that were shared through storying in bilya have significantly influenced my conviction that self-determination is the only just and sustainable approach to Aboriginal empowerment and well-being, in education and more broadly. Aboriginal-led solutions and initiatives for our communities may be the longer, harder road to take, but I am one hundred percent convinced that it is the right road.

Whilst I can tell you without hesitation that I support the concept of Aboriginal self-determination and am coming from a personal perspective of it not being enough of a reality and/or priority in schools; I couldn't assume that this is the only Aboriginal perspective or confidently speak to this on behalf of anyone else without investigating further. For my investigation to be credible and valid my stance needed to be open to criticism, debate, questions, and alternative viewpoints. I needed to go beyond my own experience and perspectives, yarn with fellow Aboriginal educators and incorporate this external data into my research analysis

and findings. These aspects of the research will be discussed in the waardan and darbal sections to follow.

2.4 Bilya conclusion

We have now reached the end of the bilya component of the thesis and 'set the scene' for the sections to follow. Now that the research context has been established and my story as researcher has been shared, it is time to move into waardan and fulfil the formal academic and ethical requirements of this PhD. Waardan will formally introduce the research rationale and specific aims and questions before leading into comprehensive literature review and methodology sections.

The following log was written during this research journey, and it is placed here to interrupt the direct movement into waardan; the same way that my personal and cultural life frequently interrupted my research focus and process.

Teacher Log

February 03, 2022

I had planned to write tonight and get stuck into my literature review draft. It is now 2am and my heart rate has only just returned to normal, I am emotionally exhausted and no longer feeling clear headed enough to do anything constructive. Except vent. Writing my stories during times of duress, even if no one else reads them, has been hugely cathartic for me.

This type of situation is nothing new, nor rare. Family dramas and emergencies occur often, turning our otherwise rather uneventful household into emotional turmoil. You see, there is no escaping the day-to-day reality of living with the legacy of massive intergenerational trauma. Many of our

family members are still struggling and hurting badly, I can see the huge divide between the well-being and lifestyles of different family groups and members and am reminded that the world of Aboriginal academia is often radically different and separate to the Aboriginal world I am most accustomed to.

Most of my mob are not directly concerned with or opinionated on self-determination, Indigenous research paradigms, or decolonisation theory. These are not common concepts and at times I question my own place and position as an academic. I need to step back and see the bigger picture and remind myself that while my academic goals may seem detached at times from the reality of my family and community, the work I am doing aims to change that and to empower my Aboriginal brothers and sisters and contribute to moving us forward as a collective.

While most of my Aboriginal family and connections are not familiar with academic and theoretical terms, I would argue that the phenomenon and theories these terms denote are both experienced and understood by many Aboriginal people at an individual and community level. I also believe that even if it is not said or understood explicitly as 'self-determination', Aboriginal people in general desire greater control over our own affairs and a school system that genuinely understands, respects, and embeds local cultural knowledge values and language through community collaboration. These desires and the attached frustrations are expressed often in my community interactions and work/education related discussions.

2.5 End of Bilya

Please proceed to Waardan

CHAPTER 3: WAARDAN

Figure 5

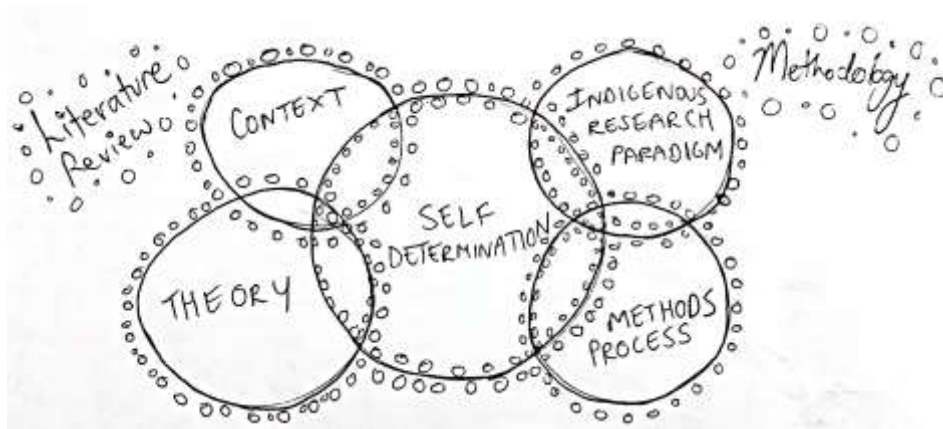
Overview of Waardan components



This section consists of the academic components and writing needed to fulfil the formal thesis requirements. Waardan introduces rigour to the research process and explicitly states the rationale and aims of the research project. Following this introduction, waardan continues to a two-part literature review that explores the contextual and theoretical frameworks of my research. The waardan section concludes with a two-part discussion around methodology; the first is concerned with methodological underpinnings while the second details the methodological processes applied within this research.

Figure 6 below is hand drawn graphic organiser that provides a visual overview of the main components of waardan and identifies self-determination as the common factor between them.

Figure 6
Waardan components



This diagram represents the formal academic writing and contents of waardan; self-determination is the central, connecting element that brings the two-part literature review and two-part methodology sections together.

3.1 Introduction

The following rationale and focuses for the study establish the explicit academic aims for the project and introduce the research questions this project ultimately responds to. The rationale discusses the current context of Aboriginal education and the problematic deficit discourse that dominates government led 'solutions' to the complex challenges presented. The rationale champions the value of self-determined education as an alternative approach. The focus provides an overview of the research project in terms of what it entails and includes. Finally, the aims component of this section identifies the two overall research questions and four additional goals that this project aims to fulfil.

3.2 Rationale for research

Aboriginal deficit discourses in education have become normalised within government policy, curriculum development and pre-service teacher courses (Beresford, 2012; Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringer & Fogarty, 2013; Vass, 2012; Patrick & Moodie, 2016). As an Aboriginal educator, I strongly reject deficit and gap discourses pertaining to

Aboriginal educational disparity and disadvantage and am committed to the cause of self-determination. I agree with Malin and Maidment (2003) that "the only way that Aboriginal people will ever become empowered through education is by doing it their own way, in their own time, and with their own people" (p. 97). When Aboriginal people take control of their own education, they are exercising their human right to be self-determined and able to develop their capacity to be self-determining.

This study has self-determination at its core and is informed by my belief that greater Indigenous control over Indigenous educational destinies is needed at the grassroots level because, as not only is it the just strategy which is being called for by Indigenous groups in Australia and around the world (Malin and Maidment, 2003; Durie, 2001), but also past efforts by Australian governments and departments of education "have not resulted in adequate improvements at the grassroots level" (Malin & Maidment, 2003, p. 95). Wehmeyer et al. (2000), refer to self-determined behaviour in the field of education as "volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one's life and to maintain or improve one's quality of life" (p. 117). I believe that this definition is applicable to my research as it reinforces self-determination as an ongoing and individual process. While I have defined my own understanding and application of self-determination within the context of my research project, it is also worthwhile noting that many formal academic definitions exist across various disciplines and the conceptualisation and definition of self-determination varies according to its theoretical underpinnings. Although the experience and influence of Aboriginal organisations in asserting community control over education has received some attention in the literature (Hunt, Smith, Garling & Sanders, 2008) "there are comparatively few scholars focused on the implications of self-determination" (Vass et al, 2018, p. 13). This project aimed to contribute to current research and understanding by providing an in-depth insight into the complexities of Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector.

3.3 Focus of the study

This is a qualitative study using autoethnographic and yarning methods to explore the importance and complexities of Aboriginal self-determination, specifically in the public school system. My focus is to create a bridge between relevant theory and lived experience to enhance others' and my own understanding of Aboriginal self-determination in schools.

This study combined autoethnographic writing that discusses my personal and professional understanding of self-determination in the school sector with the knowledge gained from yarning with other Aboriginal educators, both previously and presently employed in the school education sector.

This project has a focus on self-determination and Indigenous methodology and has sought to provide a contemporary understanding of the barriers, challenges, and potential benefits of Aboriginal self-determination in the school system by analysing the experiences and reflections of the Aboriginal research participants alongside my own. My study brings focus to the diversity of Aboriginal understandings and perspectives of self-determination in a school context and identifies common understandings and applications shared among the participant group. I have focused on the power positioning experienced and perceived by Aboriginal staff within the school sector, along with their understandings and perspectives of self-determination, including the barriers they have encountered and recommendations they have for schools and education departments.

3.4 Aims of project

This project aimed to enhance awareness around self-determination in Aboriginal education and research practice and contribute to the current knowledge in this domain by addressing the following two questions:

Q1. How is self-determination understood by Aboriginal educators?

Q2. What are the major barriers to Aboriginal self-determination in the public school sector?

The phrasing of the questions was purposefully process-focused and broad to allow for the flexibility and scope that a project concerned with self-determination and aligned with yarning methodology required.

The research project specifically aimed to:

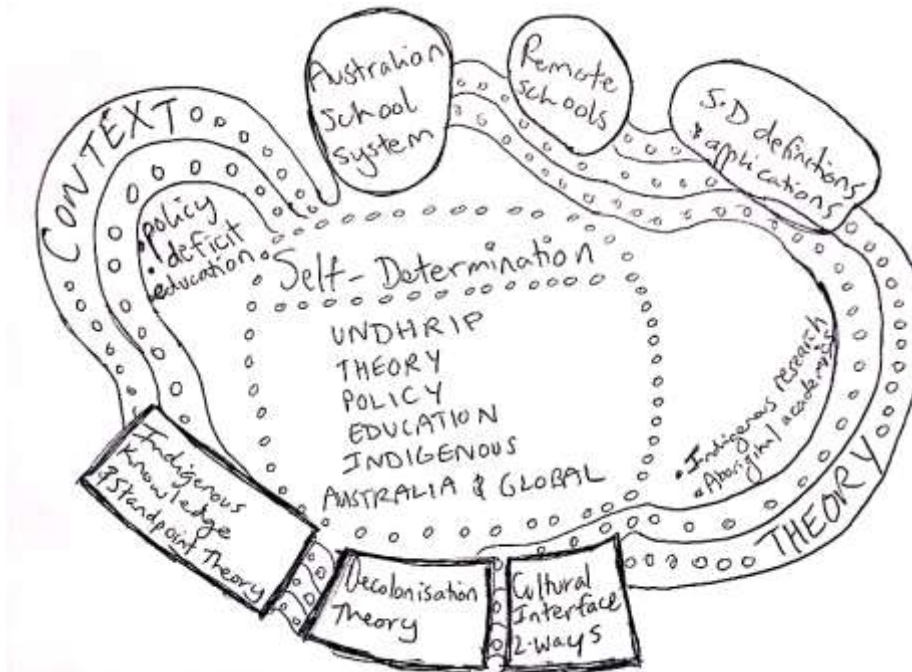
- Determine whether there are commonalities in how Aboriginal educators define, perceive and experience self-determination in the school system.
- Gain insight into the nature, benefits, and challenges of Aboriginal self-determination within the school sector.
- Document the outcomes of a research project centred on an Indigenous research paradigm and methodology.
- Promote awareness of and support for a self-determined approach to Aboriginal education in contrast to popular deficit models.

Craven et al. (2016) suggest that for Aboriginal success in education to occur, it needs to be “through autonomous actions, a blossoming of values and ideas accepted by the Aboriginal participants and experienced as congruent with other internalised values” (p. 39). I have approached this project from a social justice, self-determination paradigm that aims to centre Aboriginal voices through culturally appropriate methodology that aligns with Aboriginal values and protocols.

3.5 Literature review structure

Figure 7

Literature review components



This diagram represents the components of my literature review and how they grouped into 'context' or 'theory' sections. Self-determination is the central and connecting element.

3.6 LITERATURE REVIEW PART ONE - THE CONTEXT

3.6.1 Introduction

To commence my review of the relevant literature that frames and motivates my focus on Aboriginal self-determined education I will provide some historical context and an overview of current Aboriginal education policy and related research in Australia. Common deficit discourses and their implications are then examined leading to an introduction to self-determination and its potential to offer an alternative approach to the ongoing challenge of Aboriginal educational disadvantage. The unique challenges experienced in remote schools will also be mentioned. To appreciate the current climate and policy around Indigenous Education, it is important to have some understanding of where Indigenous education

started and the transformation it has undergone since colonisation. Without some historical context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia, it is difficult to connect the past with current educational disparities and disadvantage; and to recognise the need for alternative solutions that explore the potential of localised and self-determined approaches that resist deficit views of Indigenous education achievement.

3.6.2 Aboriginal education and policy

A review of current research and policy provides context to the potential value of self-determination in education as an alternative approach to the long-term challenges of Aboriginal educational disparity. Since the 1970s when Aboriginal people were first absorbed into the mainstream school system, federal and state governments have produced a plethora of reports, policies and initiatives aimed at reducing the statistical disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples' educational attainment. This disparity was largely created by education policy preceding the 'self-determination' era, based on exclusion, segregation, and assimilation. As Eckermann (1998) states, "any analysis of Aboriginal education clearly shows that it was marred by neglect until the 1970s" (p. 12). Prime Minister Whitlam introduced the policy of 'self-determination' resulting in dramatic changes to the way Aboriginal education policy was prioritised and developed.

Since this time, Aboriginal education policy and state and federal initiatives aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students have been produced in rapid succession. Problematically, "policies can be left ambiguous and general and lack the support and preparation needed for effective implementation and ongoing measures for evaluation and improvement" (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 22). A broad departmental approach to Aboriginal education and policy has a history of failure because of the desire to implement uniform solutions to complex and context specific challenges without the full and

direct involvement of Aboriginal people and communities. While some positive advancements and changes have resulted from national and state initiatives aimed at addressing Aboriginal disadvantage, Indigenous people's aspirations are largely still not being met and "outcomes for Aboriginal students remain considerably behind those for non-Aboriginal students" (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 277).

Indigenous scholars argue that successive educational policies implemented by the Australian governments continue to impede educational success for many Indigenous students at the cultural interface of mainstream schooling (Nakata, 2007a; Yunkaporta, 2009). Nakata (2007a) explains that "Indigenous knowledge systems and western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge" (p. 8). The cultural interface is a space characterised by competing and contesting knowledge and social systems. The ongoing prevalence of colonial discourses continue to be a major barrier to Aboriginal educational attainment and progression.

Figure 8
Colonial schooling



This diagram represents diverse students with both square and circular cultures enter schooling only to be shaped into uniform squares through colonial education.

3.6.3 Overall trend of ongoing disparity

Both the United Nations (UN) and the Australian federal and state governments have produced various reports and reviews addressing the persistent disadvantage associated with Indigenous education (Australian

Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] analysis of Schools, Australia, 2018; SCRGSP Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, 2016; UN State of the World's Indigenous People's Education, 2017). The intentions and recommendations proposed are similar and based on the fact that, despite some recent improvements in terms of Aboriginal policy direction and outcomes, "many years of policy effort have not delivered desired outcomes; indeed in some important respects the circumstances of Indigenous people appear to have deteriorated or regressed" (Banks, 2009, p. 19).

There are some great examples of best practice in terms of school and community collaboration and recent research has argued that the success of Aboriginal students is largely influenced by the ability of the school to value and nurture their cultural identity (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). The findings of this research have influenced recent Australian education policy that prioritises developing curriculum that reflects Aboriginal identities and cultures (ACARA overview, 2019). Examples include the NT Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024; The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework for WA public schools 2016-2019 and the QLD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives Statement 2017– 2020. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (Education Council, 2015) is the most recent federal policy aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. Education Council Chair, Kate Jones acknowledges that "despite determined effort much more needs to be done to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes" (Education Council, 2015, p. 1). The Strategy maintains a strong national focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and supports communities to determine and implement localised approaches.

While it is obvious that there is much being done to address the disparity of outcomes experienced by Aboriginal Australians through various programs and policies, there remains a lack of research into the

underlying factors that prevent Indigenous students from reaching the proposed outcomes (Rudolf, 2011 p. 22). Educational aspirations, values, and pedagogies differ between Aboriginal communities and their respective cultures; and unless we start local and listen, we risk providing more policy that does not align with the culture of the Aboriginal community and which “fails to recognize or focus on strengths and the provision of opportunities that facilitate growth and thriving” (Craven et al., 2016, p. 33).

Research shows that school engagement and educational attainment is influenced by a whole range of contextual factors not clearly captured in educational statistical comparisons (Hancock et al. 2013; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, [SCRGSP] 2014, 2016). Students’ self-identity and connectedness; cultural differences between the school and home environments; teacher cultural responsiveness; and the broader community challenges faced by Aboriginal students are just some of the wider contextual considerations that those involved with policy development need to consider avoiding perpetuating a damaging deficit view of Aboriginal peoples and education (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003; Craven et al., 1999).

Low academic expectations for Indigenous students can impact on the educational and career counselling offered to them, both at school and at higher education institutions. Nakata and Chin (2008) acknowledge the presence of university approaches and pathways for supporting Indigenous students based on the “recognition of Indigenous academic under-preparedness due to the historical exclusion has led to the development of various foundation, bridging, enabling, compensatory, supplementary or specially-designed programs or strategies” (p.138). Nakata and Chin warn against relying on entrenched deficit language when developing such educational provisions and assuming that all Indigenous students experience the same deficit to the same degree. Indigenous educators stress the importance of assisting Indigenous students to recognise their multitude of strengths and build on the

Indigenous knowledge they already possess (Chin & Nakata, 2008; Salik, 2003).

3.6.4 Deficit discourse

Both nationally and internationally, recent reports frame Indigenous students as being educationally disadvantaged. While Indigenous educators acknowledge the need to address this educational disadvantage, many believe that a deficit approach relies on language strongly associated with failure which can place Indigenous students in a position in which they are seen to be lacking or below the mainstream standard. "This can, produce particular barriers for participation and create a power relationship between those who name the disadvantage and those deemed disadvantaged" (Rudolf, 2011, p. 55). Smith (1999) explains that "for [I]ndigenous communities the issue is not just that they are blamed for their own failures but that it is also communicated to them, explicitly or implicitly, that they themselves have no solutions to their own problems" (p.92). Smith further makes the point that Indigenous peoples are constantly told by media, government, and wider society about the dire hopelessness of their current educational position and potential futures.

Common terminology in Indigenous education literature tends to frame Indigenous students as in a position in which they are constantly trying to catch up and match up with mainstream education standards and targets. As Rudolf (2011) suggests, there is a danger of falling into a discourse focused too heavily on the 'victim' and what they {Indigenous people} must do to improve their situation from a government perspective. In education policy, 'gap talk' codes deficit discourse as efforts to achieve statistical equality between Indigenous people and the broader Australian population (Altman & Fogarty, 2010). 'Closing the gap, behind, at-risk, chronic non-attenders, below benchmarks, most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia' are all terms commonly used in reference to Aboriginal students. Deficit approaches to Indigenous

education rely on culturally biased assumptions of inability and seek solutions to address disparity in statistical achievement rather than the cultural disjuncture between schools and Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal scholars and researchers reject colonial representations of themselves and their communities and educational challenges operating from a deficit perspective based on dominant, mainstream cultural standards (Foley & Schubert, 2013; Gooda, 2009; Pholi et al., 2009; Sarra, 2011; Langton, 2015). Often government led initiatives and the state and territory frameworks that are produced to support them at the school level are the product of an ongoing conflict “between the pressure of the political imperative for short-term, tangible results and the real need for long-term approaches, particularly preventative measures and those which are community driven” (Malin & Maidment, 2003, p. 88). Self-determination offers an alternative approach that challenges deficit approaches and aims to empower Aboriginal people and place them firmly in control of developing initiatives in response to their own educational challenges and aspirations.

3.6.5 Self-determination

The relevant theory and literature surrounding self-determination and Aboriginal education is an important element in shaping my research process. Self-determination (SD) is a broad and complex phenomenon which I needed to unpack and understand in several contexts. The following review of self-determination as an international human right; Australian policy and Aboriginal approach to education have allowed me to synthesise my own perspectives of Aboriginal self-determination against existing literature and research. At times, it has assisted me to articulate and name those phenomena I have experienced, and to view them from an objective position with greater depth and contextual understanding.

Self-determination in Australia and beyond

Self-determination has a particular application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as outlined by the Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC] *Social justice and human rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* (2003). The Commission is informed by the principles of the UN and has a responsibility to monitor Australia's commitment to meet its international human rights obligations. The AHRC defines self-determination as follows:

- Self-determination is an 'ongoing process of choice' to ensure that Indigenous communities can meet their social, cultural and economic needs. It is not about creating a separate Indigenous 'state'.
- The right to self-determination is based on the simple acknowledgment that Indigenous peoples are Australia's first people, as was recognised by law in the historic Mabo judgement.
- The loss of this right to live according to a set of common values and beliefs, and to have that right respected by others, is at the heart of the current disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians.
- Without self-determination it is not possible for Indigenous Australians to fully overcome the legacy of colonisation and dispossession. (AHRC, 2003).

Self-determination as a government policy

It has been almost fifty years since self-determination was adopted as official Indigenous policy by the federal government in 1972 and still today there is disagreement about what this term actually denotes. Reconciliation Australia strongly supports the right of Aboriginal people to be self-determined and argues that the United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) "offers the international best practice model for building suitable education solutions for Aboriginal students" (p.6). Despite this, state and federal government policies

continue to largely undermine Aboriginal demands for greater self-determination which has created debate and divergence around what and who this term actually represents.

Prime Minister Gough Whitlam set up an Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission in 1972 to examine the position of Aboriginal education in schools. The Commission aimed to assess the "... immediate financial needs of those Aboriginal schools and the priorities within those needs" (Karmel 1973, p. 3). Alternative models of education for Indigenous students were also suggested under Whitlam's leadership and support of self-determination through a "... greater emphasis on motivation, Aboriginal control over their own affairs, both educationally and generally and improved methods and resources" (Duke 1972, p. 31). Many accounts of Australian self-determination policy argue that self-determination was never genuinely attempted or achieved because the policy set limits to Indigenous choices and pushed a premature agenda of Indigenous management within government parameters as opposed to true self-determination (Mansell, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2005). Gary Foley (2007) lamented that Indigenous leaders were quickly disappointed by the gap between the Whitlam government's promises to Indigenous people and what it delivered.

Noel Pearson (2014), for example, claimed that self-determination failed because of the government's inability to give Indigenous people real choices that would reconcile their cultures with the challenges of western society. In Peter Sutton's view, the rights of the self-determination political era were not aligned with the support mechanisms necessary to assist Indigenous Australians through the "crises of occupation, discipline, motivation, conflict management and community trauma that soon erupted and by the 1990s had reached a crescendo" (2009, p. 58). Similarly, Gary Johns (2011) argues that self-determination as introduced in the 1970s was never true freedom and that Aboriginal people at the time lacked the experience and expertise to manage their own affairs and demonstrate autonomy.

Bradfield (2006), who reviewed Australian Indigenous policy from 1972 to 2005 argued that self-determination was enacted within “a logic of domestication, which served to manage and curtail Indigenous separatism, rather than give expression to it” (p. 82). Aboriginal political capacity has been contained via government appointed representative bodies since the 1970s and according to Anderson (2015), “the perpetual crisis, is attributable in part to institutional structures of our parliamentary system that have never required consultation with Indigenous people or representation of Indigenous interests” (p. 58). There has never been a dedicated framework to ensure self-determination was realised for Indigenous people.

The shift in the government’s focus towards ‘reconciliation’ in the 1990s, followed by the current policy of ‘closing the gap’, have only served to further undermine Indigenous claims to self-determination. Davis (2012) argues that a return to more conservative government in 1996 showed greater antipathy to rights-based policy agendas for Indigenous people. “Indigenous services were instead to be ‘mainstreamed’ and ‘normalised’ within a broader ‘neoliberal’ agenda” (p. 79). Within a mainstream context the deficit discourse that accompanied ‘practical reconciliation’ and the ‘closing the gap’ agenda further discredited self-determination. As Laurie Bamblett argued, describing and defining Indigenous people only in terms of disadvantage and deficit “makes it easier to deny Aboriginal communities self-determination on the grounds of incapability” (2018, p. 81).

According to Francesca Merlan (2018), under self-determination, the state replaced overt coercion with a mode of seeking to “elicit from Aboriginal people ... their own modes of organisation’ in order to ‘recast the management of Aboriginal affairs in what are seen to be Indigenous terms” (p. 150). In short, the government was never able or willing to grant Aboriginal people the decision-making autonomy they desired, and self-determination became yet another government term synonymous with empty promises and disillusionment. Gillian Cowlshaw concurs that

self-determination policy in Australia had more to do with the government attempting to reposition itself as “the liberator from past oppression and disavowing its racist past than about eradicating racial inequalities” (1998, p. 147). Perhaps this is why self-determination policy is so widely perceived as a failure by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike.

Self-determination as an international human right

Self-determination has many different definitions and applications both nationally and internationally, which vary in their reference to cultural, economic, and political rights. According to Banai (2015) “... no contemporary norm of international law has been so vigorously promoted or widely accepted, at least in theory, as the right of all peoples to self-determination. Yet the meaning of that right remains vague and imprecise” (p. 21). In international legal documents pertaining to human rights the notion of self-determination is repeatedly presented as “the freedom of each people to determine their political, economic, social, and cultural affairs” (Banai, 2015, p. 29). Self-determination as a right is contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [ICCPR] (UN General Assembly, 1966); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [ICESCR], UN General Assembly, 1966) and in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP], (UN General Assembly, 2007).

The UNDRIP explicitly mentions self-determination in Articles 3 and 4 as follows: Article 3; “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.”

Article 4; “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions” (United Nations General Assembly, 2008, p. 4-5).

The UNDRIP was not fully or immediately approved by all the members of the United Nations, notably with “Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, all states with small, historically oppressed Indigenous populations” (Ferreira, 2013, p. 13) voting against its adoption. Australia did not change its position until a change of government in 2009 and despite the UNDRIPs focus on self-determination as a human right fundamental to Indigenous well-being, cultural maintenance and educational advancement, Australia’s Governments have been reluctant to explore the potential possibilities of Aboriginal self-determination.

Ayelet Banai (2015) through an examination of self-determination in the global justice debate, identifies two major challenges related to applications of self-determination. The first is the unclarified distinction and relationship between sovereignty and self-determination. The second issue identified by Banai is the “need to explore and address the relative extents and measures of self-determination in order to develop a more robust understanding of the relationship between self-determination and justice” (p. 22). We need to redefine what self-determination means and what it entails at a personal, community, national and global community level.

Indigenous understandings of self-determination

According to Langton (2013) “the evidence is clear that nothing happens in Indigenous communities unless there is local ownership of any change process” (p. 8). Real and lasting change can only occur when it is self-determined and begins with an awareness of the operating power structures and socio-political contexts that both inhibit and motivate it. “Being able to name and discuss those power structures and imbalances that have and continue to inhibit Aboriginal self-determination is a process of decolonisation in itself” (Fredericks et al., 2013, p. 775). Such awareness is an empowering catalyst for change as it encourages individuals to consider how their actions and those of others reflect, resist

or conform to the “issue of power, the ideology of cultural superiority and the politics of knowledge” (Milne, 2017, p. 29). Conscious effort to adapt these actions for a preferred outcome then becomes a distinct possibility.

Indigenous ‘self-determination’ was (and is) under continual attack by processes of colonisation. Consequently, for many Indigenous people, self-determination cannot be ‘bestowed’ by governments and must be asserted, practised and maintained, often despite government policy. The work of Indigenous female scholars Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Megan Davis supports this view through research that distinguishes the Indigenous male from the Indigenous female in self-determination agendas. Moreton-Robinson (2013) “does not abandon the language of self-determination but is sceptical of the ability of settler colonial governments’ policies of ‘self-determination’ to empower Indigenous women” (p. 70). According to Indigenous activist Noel Pearson, Indigenous self-determination must occur on both individual and community levels. Pearson (2014) argues that “liberty, responsibility and self-determination are basically the same. They represent ‘the freedom and power to choose” (p. 43).

The fact that Indigenous Australians are a colonised people is, for some historians, sufficient basis for attributing to them a strong desire for self-determination. The aspirations and actions that characterise Indigenous political mobilisation however, are not always explicitly labelled or understood as ‘self-determination’. Wiradjuri scholar Robynne Quiggin states “we have a long history of setting our own course despite the rejection, confinement and cruelty of colonisation” (2018, p. 52-53). The question of who owns or benefits from self-determination policy has led some Indigenous peoples to adopt other frames of reference for Indigenous political mobilisation. Characterising Indigenous agency in this way, one does not need to articulate a precise Aboriginal concept of self-determination as Indigenous ‘self-determination’ is continuously practiced through resistance to assimilation.

The complex nature of self-determination as a term, policy and Indigenous agenda makes discussions about self-determination challenging and creates important considerations for how we write the history of Australian Indigenous self-determination. For instance, “in some contexts, explicit programmatic statements by Indigenous Australians are discoverable in the archive and easy to interpret” (Rademaker & Rowse, 2020, p. 327). In other contexts, however, the historian or researcher must engage in “reasoned attribution, to define what they consider to be representations of ‘self-determination’ contained in certain words and actions” (Rademaker & Rowse, 2020, p. 327).

Self-determination policy and education

The movement towards contemporary discussions on improving Indigenous education through self-determination extends well beyond Australia. The World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) has been held triennially for the last thirty years and has grown into a major international event in the Indigenous education movement, leading the discussion on global contemporary movements in education that support Indigenous perspectives. The WIPCE has determined “a range of concepts applicable to bringing about the extent of change required to improve education for Aboriginal students, including the concept of a ‘whole of school’ approach which centres on major re-thinking of the school culture, teachers’ attitudes and community relationships” (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 273). Self-determined reform is one such concept that supports the individual and organisational shift necessary for whole school change to occur, by replacing persistent deficit discourses with a strengths-based approach that values the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices of the local community.

In Australia, Indigenous self-determination in education policy formation has been consistently undermined and ‘watered down’ by government bodies and structures who claim they have collaborated with

community when in fact they have presented a predeveloped policy that requires no more Indigenous input than a signed endorsement. As Cohen and Uphoff (1980) argue, true self-determination of Indigenous communities to develop their own education policy cannot be limited to participation in meetings that approve a pre-prepared policy. "Self-determination is analysed in terms of inclusivity in all aspects of the formulation of policy from the beginning to the end" (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980, p. 131). This promotes Indigenous participation as a vehicle for progressing self-determination based on improving collaborative partnerships between government departments and Indigenous communities (Oakley & Marsden 1984).

Nugget Coombs (chair of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, 1967–76) stated that self-determined Indigenous education had been stalled by a combination of government inertia and the ill-preparedness of Indigenous Australians at the time to articulate their needs for education (Coombs, 1978). Coombs pointed out back in 1978 that Indigenous opportunity and capacity to speak on policy had not developed evenly across Australia and not every example of Indigenous self-determination is obvious, explicit, or as articulate as the official statements pertaining to it. Over four decades later the situation remains largely the same.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (Education Council, 2015) is the most recent policy to address the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Chair of the Education Council, Kate Jones acknowledged that "despite determined effort much more needs to be done to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education outcomes" (Education Council, 2015, p. 1). The right to self-determination is neglected by the National Strategy (Education Council, 2015) and the underlying premise of the strategy implies that "the educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their potential futures can only be addressed by the intervention of the coloniser" (Hogarth, 2018, p. 362). The opportunity for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a voice in the educational attainment of their children continues to be denied (Foley, 2003). Self-determined education does not typically fit within the Australian government's systemic and quick-fix approach to Aboriginal disadvantage.

Indigenous education policy presents the values of federal and state government in addressing matters pertaining to the educational attainment of students (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In particular, Indigenous education policy articulates governments' desire to reform educational systems and/or approaches to improve the education of Indigenous young people (see Education Council, 2015). Within the Strategy (Education Council, 2015), governmental viewpoints and their discourses of imaginaries for Indigenous young peoples' educational experiences and attainment are given priority. Aboriginal self-determined schooling in contrast, is informed by Aboriginal viewpoints and aspirations.

Aboriginal self-determination in education

The Indigenous view of self-determination as an ambition within the broader project of decolonisation was reflected in the Uluru Statement (2017), the Redfern Statement (2016) and the Barunga Statement (1988) that preceded it. Each statement explicitly demanded Indigenous 'self-determination'. Pat Dodson (1999) claimed that "Aboriginal peoples have the right to self-determination", that is, the right to negotiate our political status and to pursue economic, social and cultural development" (p.29). Indigenous people are accessing the language and definitions of self-determination in international law for their own purposes. An example of this action is the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education first produced in 1996 by the WIPCE [World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education] Council and then later revised in 1999.

Drawing on international human rights charters, the Coolangatta Statement is informed by international human rights and Indigenous rights, and specifically addresses discrimination based on race within an

educational context (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [UNPFII], 2009). The development of the Coolangatta Statement occurred over several years of consultation with numerous Indigenous communities and as such, "represents a collective voice of Indigenous peoples from around the world who support fundamental principles considered vital to achieving reform and transformation of education for Indigenous peoples" (Morgan, et al., 2006, p. 229). Concerns about the pervading deficit approach towards Aboriginal education and the need for greater Aboriginal participation in educational decision making are common themes emerging from Indigenous communities and addressed in the statement.

McConville (2002) highlights that the ideologies presented in the Coolangatta Statement (Morgan, et al., 1999, 2006) seek to transform Indigenous education. He asserts that the Coolangatta Statement does not endorse separative approaches to education, but rather aims to ensure that "mainstream institutions, be they schools, TAFE colleges or universities, incorporate in all areas of their activity Indigenous terms of reference and values as articulated by Indigenous peoples" (McConville, 2002, p. 17). The Coolangatta Statement challenges education policy informed by persistent deficit discourses, and resists government control of Indigenous education, demanding that agency over Indigenous education belongs with Indigenous communities.

The potential for Indigenous people and knowledge to add value and benefit to mainstream education and schooling continues to go largely unrecognised. "When Indigenous people are regarded for all that they bring to a school or education environment, the relationship changes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people" (Fredericks et al, 2013, p. 774-775). This allows a shift away from deficit discourses and introduces the potential for Aboriginal self-determination. Research concerned with self-determined education provides a great many examples of Indigenous success in the current Australian context. Problematically, "little is known about how to measure and emulate these

successes more broadly" (Beresford eds., 2003, p. 242). This limitation can partly be attributed to "a lack of concerted research being founded upon the voices and agency of Indigenous children, youth, and communities" and studies being conducted by non-Indigenous researchers without true collaboration and buy-in from Indigenous people (Craven et al., 2016, p. 37).

In her project 'Artekerre, Mending the Broken Spirit', Debra Maidment (2004) argued that Aboriginal development and delivery of Aboriginal people's own education programs based on their communities' needs and aspirations, was central to achieving genuine self-determination.

Cultural concerns of self-determination

A number of scholars, particularly those from the anthropological field, have discussed the cultural limitations of Indigenous self-determination, drawing on the distinction between traditional Indigenous collectivist values and the contrasting values of autonomy and independence that self-determination is seen to promote. According to Cowlshaw (1998), self-determination presents the governments' "bourgeois ideal of autonomous, self-willed subjects that required Aboriginal communities to learn to value independence, self-management and autonomy" (p. 147), regardless of their own values and aspirations. Anishinaabe scholar Aaron Mills agrees that "self-determination is the language of our settler-colonizer" (2016, p. 160) and claims that self-determination undercuts Indigenous conceptions of selfhood and political community that value interdependence and relationship. The question of who is the 'self' of Indigenous self-determination is likely to remain under debate and discussion.

Other Indigenous scholars understand self-determination as both a personal and community process that ultimately serves to empower the collective. Mills (2016) argues that for Indigenous people, freedom is not about "standing apart" but "standing with" (p. 60). Mick Dodson (1994)

stated that “the right to control one’s own identity is part of the broader right to self-determination; that is, the right of a people to determine its political status and to pursue its own economic, social and cultural development” (p. 5). In this understanding, the dual meaning of ‘one’ (a person, a people) presents a collective identity and shared agenda for Indigenous self-determination. As Cajaz (2015) argues, Indigenous narratives, despite the use of ‘I’ are connected to the cultural contexts and peoples that “jointly experience/are complicit in these stories” (p. 3) through the shared virtues of historical and lived experience as colonised peoples (Beverley, 2008). From this perspective, the application of ‘self’ in Aboriginal self-determination need not be problematic or considered contrary to the collective. Rather the ‘self’ is interconnected with the broader Indigenous values of “interconnectedness, justice-seeking, truth-telling, resistance, and survival in both testimonios and other Indigenous storytelling practices” (Cajaz, 2015, p. 3).

Sovereignty and self-determination

Another challenge that has arisen from discussions around Indigenous self-determination has resulted from increased awareness of and demand for sovereignty. This has led to the two terms being used almost interchangeably. ‘Sovereignty’ has risen to prominence in Indigenous political discourse since it emerged in the 1960s. Sovereignty and self-determination are often used together, presented as two approaches to or conceptualisations of a single struggle. Taiaiake Alfred (2005) described “the two most important strategies” for Indigenous people as “assertion of prior and coexisting sovereignty” and “the assertion of a right of self-determination”, describing these strategies as “woven together” (p. 37). Larissa Behrendt (2013) distinguished self-determination as “Indigenous people being involved in the setting of priorities within their community, the development of policy, the delivery of services, and the implementation of programs” from sovereignty which

is when 'control is given centrally to Aboriginal people without constraint' (p. 171-172).

Academic, Leroy Little Bear, defines sovereignty as "making your own decisions, following your own mind, being self-determining" (2012, p. 7). In Australia, Michael Mansell (2016) explained that 'sovereignty' underpins other Indigenous ambitions, including self-determination. Scholars concerned with Indigenous self-determination must exercise caution to observe the differences between the two and understand how their agendas overlap.

Barriers to Indigenous self-determination

Lateral violence

Sometimes Aboriginal people ourselves can act as barriers to our own self-determination and that of other Aboriginal people. Lateral violence, or intra-racial violence has the capacity to damage Indigenous peoples' identities and their self-determined efforts. This internalised form of violence manifests when an individual or community feels oppressed, displaced, and has no safe frameworks to guide them (Braybrook, 2015; David & Derthick, 2017). In the case of Aboriginal communities and individuals this lateral violence is often a byproduct of the cultural oppression and powerlessness that stems from colonisation and the internalisation of stereotyped notions of Indigenous authenticity and identity (AHRC, 2011b).

Lateral violence has also been referred to as 'lateral oppression' (David & Derthick, 2017), 'horizontal violence' (Freire, 1970), 'internalised colonialism' (AHRC, 2011b; Braybrook, 2015), 'violence turned inwards' and 'intra-cultural violence' (Dudgeon et al., 2000), 'intra-racial racism' (Paradies et al., 2008), and 'intra-racial bullying' (Coffin et al., 2010; Merrell-James, 2006) and these terms denote the phenomenon of marginalised persons internalising and then projecting the structures of colonisation onto their own people and communities. Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009-

2016) developed a model called the Origins of Lateral Violence (AHRC, 2011b) that illustrated how colonisation leads to lateral violence. Factors Gooda identified include colonisation; oppression and control of Indigenous people; identity conflict/internalisation of negative and 'authentic Aboriginal' stereotypes; feelings of powerlessness; and loss of land, traditional roles, structures, and knowledge.

Park (1928) first described a marginal person as an individual 'living in two worlds' where they neither truly belong to either group (as cited in Memmi, 1965). This is a common sentiment echoed by Indigenous Australians. The term, "marginal", in an Australian Indigenous context often refers to a peoples' inability or unwillingness to become accepted members of the dominant social group, coupled with a lack of security and sense of belonging within their own cultural group. According to Lewin (1948) this experience of marginalisation can create an internal struggle with identity which often leads to uncertainty, instability, and self-hate that can be projected onto colleagues, peers, and relatives. Bruce Loo, a respected Noongar Elder from Perth, Western Australia recently contributed an article to the *National Indigenous Times* (May 2022) titled 'Lateral violence is rampant in the Aboriginal community, so what is it?' Loo states that lateral violence is largely understood as a learned pattern that causes major social problems in Indigenous communities. These include;

- Subtle non-verbal innuendo such as raising eyebrows, face-making or making obscene gestures,
- Bullying people for having a lighter or darker skin tone and for not looking Aboriginal,
- Malicious gossip including spreading rumours about a subject's cultural identity,
- Public shaming and back-stabbing,
- Infighting such as bickering, family violence, racially-motivated taunting, and threats,
- Organisational conflict,

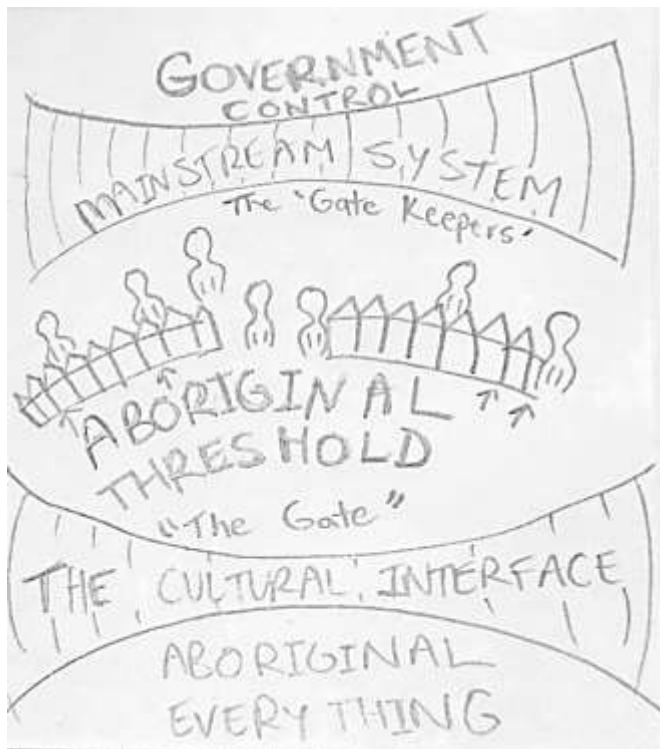
- Social/workplace exclusion.

The most frequent behaviours associated with lateral violence in Indigenous communities as identified by Loo above (2022) are detrimental to individuals and communities as they can severely hinder the ability of Indigenous peoples to be comfortable and unified in their efforts to be self-determining (Loo, 2022).

The gatekeepers

Literature relating to Indigenous research has explored the concept of non-Indigenous 'gatekeepers', or those persons who hold the authority to deny or grant entry and access to others (Heath et al., 2007; Murgatroyd et al., 2015; Shay, 2016). Shay (2016) describes the metaphorical gate in the concept of gatekeeping in Indigenous communities as the "entry way to access, inclusion and equality that Indigenous peoples have fought for since the invasion of Australia" (p. 285). My concept of the 'Aboriginal threshold' introduced in the previous Bilya section is akin to this metaphorical 'gate'. A. Moran (2005) defines gatekeepers as "those who continue to control and rule Indigenous lives, such as white missionaries, government officials and departmental managers" (p. 170). This is not to imply that Indigenous people never act as gatekeepers, but ultimately as Shay (2016) explains "the persons who control the access are simply actors that are serving the interests of the very system that blocks access to equality and Indigenous efforts towards self-determination" (p.285).

Figure 9
The gatekeepers



This diagram represents the tension occurring at the 'cultural interface' where a threshold and its gatekeepers restrict the equal access.

Considering that Australian schools and universities are still largely western institutions representing the interests of the 'mainstream', serious challenges are presented to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and researchers in their attempts to impart change. Shay (2016) explains that in the Australian education context "the gatekeeper will be the school leader (principal, lead teacher, head of campus) or higher up the bureaucracy... and is unlikely to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, given how critically under-represented we are in educator and leadership roles" (p. 282). Ultimately, they are bound by the 'gatekeepers' willingness to "authentically consult and collaborate with Indigenous participants in school sites, as espoused by Indigenous research ethical guidelines and Indigenist theorists" (Shay, 2016, p. 285). Murgatroyd et al. (2015) discussed the multiple aspects of control that gatekeepers have in research including, but not limited to "conditions of

entry, defining the problem of the study, access to data and respondents, funding and scope of analysis” (p. 165).

A number of Indigenous academics have discussed the difficulty in getting non-Indigenous gatekeepers to engage critically with Indigenous education (Aveling, 2002, 2006; Hart et al., 2012). Wanat (2008) explains that gatekeepers in schools will typically avoid topics that are sensitive and avoid embarking on changes that are socially controversial. The topic of Indigenous peoples and affairs is not only sensitive, but fraught with historically situated denial, untruths, and assumptions. The gatekeepers maintain a comfortable status quo and ensure the system remains protected as the first priority.

Self-determination conclusion

This section has provided some contextual background to the concept and policy of self-determination as both an international human right and as an Indigenous political agenda, with particular focus given to Australian education and Aboriginal perspectives. Self-determination will be revisited again later and discussed in terms of its theoretical applications to education and research.

3.6.6 Remote Aboriginal schooling

The unique position of remote Aboriginal schools and their shared characteristics warrant special consideration in discussions of self-determined education and Aboriginal staff. According to research produced by the Australian Education Council (2019) there are aspects typical of remote Aboriginal schools that provide a strong argument for self-determined and community led approaches to education. These include a much higher and frequent turnover of teachers and leaders in remote schools, resulting in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators being the only consistent presence for students and their families. Additionally, as well as supporting their students in the key areas of learning, culture and community, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander educators can authentically fulfil the “complex and interconnected components of the role that support student and community elements of identity, well-being and belonging” (AITSL, 2021, p. 3).

Another contextual feature of remote schools is the interconnected nature of remote community “determinants including housing, health, justice and employment, which need to be explicitly understood and factored into educational policy” (O’Bryan, M. and Fogarty, B., 2020, p. 17). Failing to take contextual considerations and community aspirations into account results in disconnect between the local educational aspirations of remote communities and system-level approaches to schooling.

A number of scholars have discussed this idea and argue that the more geographically remote a school, the less appropriate national policies and mainstream curriculum are likely to be for achieving positive outcomes in Aboriginal student retention and achievement (Campbell, 2000; Fogarty, 2010; Tripcony 2010). This has implications for Aboriginal self-determination in remote schools where local input and staff are integral to providing schooling that is culturally and community appropriate. Fogarty (2010) echoes this sentiment and argues that for “remote settings in Australia, there is ... a need for schooling to connect with the knowledge of the community and to support local development aspirations and needs” (p. 6). Fogarty (2010) also reinforces the importance for “educators to engage with communities regarding local aspirations for children and the community as a whole ...” (p. 47). Without such consultation and collaboration, schools risk delivering an educational program that fails to meet the needs and aspirations of the community; or to produce positive student outcomes.

Typically, culturally relevant practices based on local community context and needs are not embraced in mainstream educational systems (Apple, 1996). In Australian schools, westernised curriculum and values continue to be imposed, measured and reported upon regardless of the

community and context in which they are located, and disadvantage Aboriginal students by excluding Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2008a). This can lead to conforming curriculum in remote schools. A conforming curriculum can be understood as schooling developed and implemented by leaders and teachers who, despite having a broad, general understanding of Aboriginal culture and history, are unable or unwilling to adapt their pedagogical practice or curriculum decision making accordingly (Department of Education, 2015).

Grande et al., (2015) argues that conforming curriculum is highly problematic for an Aboriginal self-determined agenda as it enables the perpetuation of a dominant western knowledge system and dismisses anti-colonial discourses for being too controversial to implement. The cultural epistemologies and pedagogies of Aboriginal students and their communities are marginalised or excluded in a conforming curriculum since they challenge the dominant paradigm and are frequently met with resistance from non-Aboriginal staff (MaRhea, Anderson & Atkinson, 2012).

If schooling is to adequately meet the needs of remote Aboriginal communities and students, then curriculum development needs to shift from broad departmental approaches that are nationally focused to an approach that is locally relevant and informed by the local community context (Nachtigal; 1994). Tripcony (2010) discusses the need for remote schooling to be bi-cultural and provide the skills and knowledge required to participate in mainstream society; while simultaneously nurturing local cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge and the desire to remain on and contribute to Country. This focus on community input and collaboration supports and demands Aboriginal self-determination in schooling.

In their case study, Klump and McNeir (2005) emphasise the importance of local cultural knowledge being embedded into remote schooling and the significance of this for self-determined education. They state that,

the knowledge, norms, values, resources and epistemologies of local communities must be viewed as legitimate and valuable and intimately integrated into schools ... as examples of schooling for self-determination; the engagement of the students in this way also facilitates the learning of their local community knowledge, culture and epistemology (Klump and McNeir, 2005, p. 18).

Collectively, these scholars argue that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will and cannot be effective in remote communities and schools with diverse needs, aspirations and valued knowledge. It is apparent that the majority of remote communities in Australia do not prioritise measuring up to national benchmarks nor share mainstream ideas about the purpose of education (Guenther, Bat & Osborne, 2014). For this reason, Aboriginal self-determined education in remote locations is particularly urgent and significant. Not only does it ensure schooling reflects community aspirations but also assists with the preservation of local Aboriginal culture, language and Country.

Aboriginal staff in remote schools

Self-determination in remote schools is necessary if the education provided is to adequately meet the needs and desires of the students and their families. Traditional languages and cultures are often strong, defining features of remote communities along with an almost entirely Aboriginal student cohort and therefore "it is essential that Indigenous teachers, workers, and students are valued for who they are, what they know and the skills they bring with them into the learning environment" (Hanlen, 2010, p. 9). The risks of not engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in schools are principally those of delivering a biased program, from a white, middle-class perspective, using pedagogies and delivery styles that do not take the needs of students into account or value the richness of Indigenous perspectives (Perso, 2012, p. 18). The best way to avoid this is to support the self-determination of local

Aboriginal people and their capacity to manage the schooling and educational program provided to their young people.

According to Heslop (2003), it is the Aboriginal staff that remain the backbone of remote schools in a system that sees a high and frequent turnover of non-local educators. Elevating the position of current Aboriginal school staff by valuing and utilising their knowledge and skills in the classroom along with increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australian schools are both integral to the development of student engagement and improving educational outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. (Mokak, 2017). The Aboriginal staff remain in community, they are attached to it and invested in it in a way that no temporary staff member is and so it makes sense to invest in and empower these Aboriginal staff and support a process that builds their autonomy and capacity and seeks local community control and self-determination as the ultimate goal for remote Indigenous schools.

Aboriginal self-determination in remote schools

Self-determined approaches present the best opportunity to align remote school values, aspirations, and knowledge with those of the local community they are intended to serve. Increasing the leadership capability of Indigenous school staff is vital for remote schools to become community aligned, self-sufficient and no longer reliant on external school leaders and educators to direct curriculum and pedagogy.

Schools and education programs in remote areas have started to identify and capitalise on the potential of educational programs to link with land and sea management programs that combine western science and local Indigenous knowledge to support the acquisition of key skills and concepts. These 'learning on Country' approaches are grounded in place-based pedagogy (Sobel, 2014), and focus on what is most meaningful to the students and their communities – their Country, culture, language and identity; and have the ability to bring Indigenous

and non-Indigenous knowledges together in the shared goal of conservation and environmental management. Indigenous self-determination to maintain and transmit cultural knowledge and Country is the common driving factor behind many of these initiatives.

3.6.7 Summary

This first part of my literature review provided the context and background to my project in order to justify the rationale and aims of my research. It began with an overview of Aboriginal educational experience both globally and nationally, discussing the historical educational disadvantage, statistical inequality and deficit discourse associated with contemporary challenges in this space. My review then introduced the concept of self-determination as an alternative approach in Aboriginal education and explored Aboriginal experiences and understandings of self-determination to reveal limitations and commonalities. The unique position of remote schools in Australia was also explored with an explanation of the significance of self-determination to these communities and students.

3.7 LITERATURE REVIEW PART 2 – THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.7.1 Introduction

This phase of my literature review focuses on the theoretical underpinnings informing my research framework. I begin with an exploration of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and the connection with Aboriginal education before discussing self-determination and exploring its various international, national, and local applications. Recent literature and studies concerning Indigenous self-determined education both globally and nationally will be drawn upon, leading into an introduction of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its relationships with Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST). Definitions of

Decolonisation Theory (DCT) are then explored and explained in terms of their application in this project. Next, the viability of decolonisation theory as a strategy for self-determination in schools is discussed, with an explanation of the importance of DCT for recognition of IK and the aspirations for Aboriginal self-determined education.

My literature review then discusses the cultural interface and the implications of competing knowledge systems, which are the current reality of most schools. Possibilities for sharing and merging intersecting knowledges at the cultural interface are explored along with the related benefits for IK and Aboriginal self-determination. The final section of this review phase discusses the concept of two-way learning and/or both-way strong, as both an aspiration for and reality of Aboriginal education occurring at the cultural interface of the Australian school system.

3.7.2 Indigenous knowledges

I began this phase of my literature review with Indigenous Knowledges (IK) for two reasons. Firstly, because IK was my personal starting point for this project and ultimately what informed my motivation for and approach to this project. IK and the collective values they embody have both grounded and guided the research process throughout. Secondly, IK are important in discussions about Aboriginal self-determined education because advocacy for Indigenous Knowledges in education is an international endeavour that emerges from a variety of contexts including, but not limited to Australia and The Torres Strait Islands (Nakata, 2002), New Zealand (Smith, 2012), Canada (Battiste, 2002; Kanu, 2011), the Africa/African Diaspora (Dei, 2011; Adefarakan, 2011), and the United States (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

IK, closely related to and informed by Indigenous worldviews, are a set of cultural understandings, beliefs, values, and practices that have been shaped through the relationships between people, nature, and spirituality (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Castagno, 2008). Indigenous

scholars often intentionally use the plural form 'Knowledges', to recognise the diversity between and within Indigenous Knowledges and to capture a "nuanced and holistic consideration of Indigenous Knowledges as entire systems" (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 4). Indigenous Knowledges incorporate elements of change, continuity, and fluidity between various peoples of the world with strong overlaps and great chasms (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Castagno, 2008; Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009).

An Indigenous worldview promotes the belief that knowledge is relational and shared with all creation. In a research context, Aboriginal relationships extend far beyond interpersonal connections with research supervisors and participants in that they demand accountability to the "cosmos" based on a 'relationship with all of creation' [hence] you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research" (Smith, 2001, p. 177). The significance of relationality and the attached accountability to the collective is also discussed by Maggie Kovach (2005), who explains that for Indigenous researchers there is a sense of commitment to their people and community, based on the cultural principles of relationality and reciprocity.

From an Indigenous worldview, knowledge is holistic, cyclical, and dependent upon relationships and connections (Battiste, 2002; Brayboy & Castagno, 2008; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). IK supports the idea that there are many truths, and that all things are alive and equal. The land is viewed as sacred and the relationship between people and the spiritual world is of significant importance in IK. This and other discussions of Indigenous worldviews highlight a strong relational worldview (Graham, 2002) that promotes the production and transmission of knowledge through people and entities coming together to support and strengthen each other.

Despite the great diversity that exists between and across Indigenous communities globally and nationally, several commonalities in Indigenous ways of knowing are revealed (Battiste, 2002; De La Torre,

2004; McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003). McKenzie and Morrissette (2003) explain that Indigenous worldviews have emerged as a result of Indigenous people's close relationship with the environment; this is a recurring theme in discussions involving IK. For example, Mahia Maurial (1999) defined Indigenous knowledge as "the peoples' cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory" (p. 62). Joey De La Torre (2004) defined Indigenous knowledges as the established knowledge of Indigenous nations, their worldviews, and the customs and traditions that direct them. These definitions draw attention to the importance of the natural environment in shaping IK worldviews and demonstrate the close and often overlapping connection between Indigenous knowledges and worldviews.

According to Battiste (2002), IK "encompass the complex, intergenerational, and cumulative experiences, and teachings of Indigenous peoples" (p. 2). In application this means that while IK are informed by overarching similarities in worldviews; change and diversity also exist at the local level. IK are informed by a framework of Indigenous worldviews that favour relational, holistic, and spiritual ways of knowledge gathering and transmission. There is a large body of work arguing the importance of schooling that is in alignment with IK and the cultural beliefs, values and practices held by the local Aboriginal students and their families (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Beresford & Partington eds., 2003; Hanlen, 2010; Sims, 2011). This is because there is no one 'Indigenous knowledge' as each knowledge is a product of a local context. It is for this reason that "including Indigenous knowledges in national and state/territory policy curriculum frameworks can only be done at a generalised level" (Perso, 2012, p. 40). Fogarty (2010) suggests the use of 'place-based' pedagogies informed by local context in conjunction with broader educational goals to capitalise on a merging of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems that effectively serves the needs and aspirations of the community.

Hanlen (2010) cites her own research and uses the analogy that Western ways of knowing are 'square', whereas Indigenous ways of knowing are 'circular' and that this consequently produces difficulties for Aboriginal students when they enter formal school education. Hanlen (2010) further explains that in the Indigenous way, education is viewed as "a lifelong process, not separate from family and other daily routine activities" and all "aspects of life are inter-connected and dynamic and social practices are reciprocal, and for ease of explanation, can be described as circular in nature" (Hanlen, 2010, p. 3). Yunkaporta & McGinty (2009) support this view in their work with Aboriginal communities and state that from an Indigenous worldview, learning pathways are not direct and the process is as important as the outcome.

Indigenous knowledges and decolonisation

Indigenous scholars agree that the project of decolonisation includes valuing Indigenous ways of being and knowing. In an international and Australian context, decolonisation is based on the fundamental understanding that "Indigenous culture is a source of strength and resilience, and that the provision of cultural safety and cultural security are foundational to restoring and maintaining social order in Indigenous communities" (Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Committee [ATSIC] 2011, p. 123–134). The respect for and protection of Indigenous culture must include respect for the formulation and practice of Indigenous knowledge (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). Further, the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges in educational curricula promotes the visibility of Indigenous peoples and helps to raise self-esteem and interest in schooling (Kaewdang, 2000). In this regard, decolonising initiatives are also Indigenous in that they are revitalising and reintroducing Indigenous knowledges. Both the connection and the distinction between Indigenous knowledges and decolonisation have received considerable attention. "Indigenising processes are understood as being grounded in Indigenous worldviews and focusing upon Indigenous perspectives" (Pratt et al.,

2018, p. 23). The term Indigenising “centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action” (Smith, 2012, p. 147–148). Indigenous scholars agree that Indigenising is significant to, but also distinct from decolonisation.

Where decolonisation challenges colonisation and Eurocentrism, “Indigenizing fosters the resurgence and practice of Indigenous Knowledges and principles of self-determination, connecting Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures” (Pratt et al., 2018, p. 23). Indigenous scholars argue that both are essential but distinct components to Indigenous education reform with the work of decolonising schooling necessarily preceding that of Indigenising education. Decolonisation challenges the notion of one universal truth or knowledge system elevated above all others (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000; Battiste, 2013; May & Aikman, 2003; Smith, 2012) and respects Indigenous peoples “educational pluralities, multiplicities, and diversities” (Battiste, 2013, p. 107). This lays the foundations for educational reform that recognises Indigenisation as a positive influence for all learners. This recognition requires “thinking of decolonization as a process that belongs to everyone” (Bouvier, 2013, p. 9). Miqmaq Elder Marshall, (as quoted in Hogue & Bartlett, 2016) promotes the pursuit of a learning space that is “not only inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge traditions but that values them as equals to that of dominant mainstream standards” (p. 20). Marshall is the creator of the concept of ‘Etuaptmumk’ or two-eyed seeing, which blends traditional First Nations knowledge with contemporary science and promotes the respectful and ethical blending of two systems of knowledge. The creation of such ethical spaces is considered a decolonising act that first considers local context before extending into global considerations (Lumby & Coleman, 2007).

The inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges in schooling is part of the decolonisation process as it exposes students to new ways of knowing and being and unsettles the idea that mainstream or western knowledge is the single or superior knowledge system. However, such applications of

decolonisation largely refer to cognitive undertakings and processes of mind, language, and culture. "They examine the impacts of colonisation at the personal and collective levels via physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and intellectual experience" (Pratt et al, 2018, p. 1). While this view of decolonisation as an intellectual process informed by imaginative, creative, optimistic ideology (Smith, 2012) is common among Indigenous scholars, it is not the only perspective.

Indigenous knowledges and schooling

This relationship between IK and the educational engagement and outcomes of Indigenous students has received considerable attention both in Australian and international research. There is a large body of work arguing the importance of schooling that is in alignment with IK and the cultural beliefs, values and practices held by Aboriginal students and their families (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Beresford & Partington eds., 2003; Dei, 2002). Despite recent government policy that includes a greater emphasis on the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives and IK in schooling, the reality of IK within mainstream education remains one of marginalisation where it occupies a fluctuating position at the fringes of school policy and practice.

Indigenous knowledge is produced through dialogue, observation, and experience and transmitted through story, art and interactions with people and the environment. The Indigenous approach to knowledge allows for the humility and humanity of the learning process to be revealed (Staller, 2007). 'Ways of knowing' and traditional approaches to teaching and learning for Indigenous peoples' are spiritual and holistic, cyclical, and relational and are profoundly different to the educational approaches of mainstream schools where spirit is largely absent from teaching and learning; and knowledge is considered objective fact to be transferred into the minds of the children (Neeganagwedgin, 2013).

According to Dei (2002), spiritual education in discussions about Indigenous schooling is vital for the survival of individual cultural identity

and of the collective Indigenous spirit. Research demonstrates that students' cultural identities are significant to their schooling and a disconnect occurs when the education system is characterised by assimilationist processes that marginalise Indigenous Knowledges and spirituality. In western dominated societies education becomes a means to create the 'ideal citizen' through assimilatory properties; to [box] people into a whole and to progress neo-liberal ideologies (Morgan, et al., 2006). Indigenous educators and scholars argue that to alleviate the educational disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal students in schools, schooling approaches need to genuinely value IK and broaden the limited definition and standardised measurement of educational success (Tomlins-Jajnke, 2008).

Indigenous Elders and educators have shared this sentiment. "The problem, they have argued, is not our children or the Indigenous Knowledges they embody, but the [school] policies and practices that ignore and demean them" (Jacob et al., 2015, p. 174). Given Indigenous peoples' longstanding relationships with place as well as their resilience within assimilative education systems (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006) Indigenous Knowledges can provide important direction for culturally sustaining Australian educational reform (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and a paradigm shift that can potentially benefit all students by exposing them to new perceptions and possibilities in education (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). IK are valuable resources that can educate and enrich all students, as well as their communities and society in general (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Cajete, 1994; Kanu, 2011; Ruíz, 2010).

Transformative change in schooling requires that school and staff efforts be maintained over a more extended period than policy-makers and politicians are often prepared to wait. This can result in schools instigating new approaches before previous approaches have even been fully implemented, refined and evaluated (Perso, 2012b). Demmert (2001) found a persistent and significant resistance to the implementation

of Culturally Responsive Schooling by policy-makers (state and federal) in the United States; Klug & Whitfield (2003) also noted that many teachers consider approaches that integrate Indigenous culture are inferior and remedial. The biggest barrier to progress may be the ethnocentric attitude that the 'Western way' is the only true and valid lens for viewing the world. This deprives all staff and students of the opportunity to connect with alternative ways of knowing, being and doing and the "rich variety of world views that are evident in other cultures, especially Indigenous cultures" (Perso, 2012, p. 3). Battiste (2013) and Perso (2012) argue that the ability to learn about and connect with other cultures will be valuable and fruitful for students from all cultural groups.

3.7.3 Self Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a broad theory of human personality and motivation concerned with how the individual interacts with and depends on the social environment. SDT defines intrinsic and several types of extrinsic motivation and outlines how these motivations influence situational responses in different domains, as well as social and cognitive development and personality. SDT is centred on the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and their necessary role in self-determined motivation, well-being, and growth (Corntassel, 2008; Craven et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Finally, SDT describes the critical impact of the social and cultural context in either facilitating or thwarting people's basic psychological needs, perceived sense of self-direction, performance, and well-being.

SDT scholars argue that educational reform needs to occur through a series of "autonomous actions, a blossoming of values and ideas accepted by the Indigenous participants and experienced as congruent with other internalized values" (Craven et al., 2016, p. 46). Self-determination theory asserts the right and ability of Aboriginal people to seek their own solutions to the issues of Aboriginal education and is informed by the belief that the community has the required leadership

and expertise to make the reforms needed in Aboriginal schools. "Aboriginal people need a new role in education development and implementation that respects and harnesses this expertise and recognises the right of Aboriginal people to be involved in decisions being made about their people and have a seat at the table when policies are developed" (Huggins, 2017, p. 2).

SDT defines autonomy as self-governance (rather than independence or separateness) and does not seek to rule out collaborative processes or mandate Aboriginal participation exclusively; essentially "autonomously motivated actions are those that are based in one's own abiding interests and values" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 37). According to Deci, Ryan and Guay (2013), SDT "supports maximal input and choice in all interventions ... the extent that any behaviour or goal is experienced as something imposed upon or externally controlled, the less likely it is to be internalised and sustained over time" (p. 5). My research refers to self-determination as both a right stipulated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) and also as a theoretical approach to Indigenous educational reform and research.

Research guided by self-determination theory (SDT) over the past several decades (Deci & Ryan, 2000) has repeatedly shown that autonomy support provided by one relational partner enhances the autonomous motivation, quality of performance, and psychological health of the other (Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Williams, Grow, Freedman, Ryan, & Deci, 1996). The concept of autonomy within SDT refers not to independence but to volition. An individual is "autonomous to the degree that one experiences choice, willingness, and personal endorsement of one's actions" (Deci et al., p. 313). Many scholars have discussed the importance of supporting Indigenous self-determination (Corntassel, 2008; Kuokkanen, 2012;). SDT champions this concern through an emphasis on supporting the voice, choice and values of all individuals and groups in research (Chirkov, Sheldon, & Ryan,

2011). The opposite of autonomy is heteronomy, which is the experience of being governed or controlled by external forces disconnected from your own community and values. "SDT postulates that when people can behave autonomously, they experience satisfaction in their need for relatedness and competence and will tend to internalise its value and regulation" (Deci et al., p. 337).

3.7.4 Decolonisation theory

Decolonisation theory is concerned with revealing the nature and impacts of colonisation and is rooted in a commitment to human rights, including Indigenous self-determination (Smith, 2012). According to Pratt et al., (2018) colonisation refers to the "physical and ideological domination of peoples in order to separate them from their culture and resources, while creating external and internalised assumptions of the supremacy of the colonizer" (p. 3). The project of decolonisation is a direct response to colonialism and one that challenges the assumptions of cultural superiority that continue to marginalise Indigenous peoples and their knowledges. Decolonising methodologies often seek to interrogate Indigenous-colonialist dynamics and expose the powerful social relationships that marginalise and silence Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2010). Internationally, Indigenous peoples share the experience of struggle in response to histories of colonisation and although these histories and struggles take unique shape in different contexts, conversations about decolonisation are happening within and across global Indigenous communities.

Aboriginal education is largely informed by "policy leaders who direct resources towards 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement levels" (White & Ottmann, 2016, p. 113) and there is growing awareness of how colonising dynamics can prevail in contemporary schooling even when explicitly assimilative systems of formal education have been closed and condemned (Pratt et al., 2018). Hegemonic forces such as Eurocentrism, paired with vestigial colonial

structures and policies, can persist in marginalising Indigenous people and their perspectives, according to Jacob et al. (2015).

Any efforts to decolonise education in a present-day context must consider the ongoing impacts of colonisation. Scholars such as Smith (2012), Cajete, (1999), and Kovach (2010) draw attention to the enduring link between education and colonisation and argue that schooling has been an effective means of normalising and reinforcing the social power structures and cultural hierarchies established by the dominant group. Indigenous scholars such as Smith (2012) argue that decolonisation involves both the revitalisation of the ways of being and knowing prior to colonisation and exposing the way colonisation was achieved and maintained. Several scholars have discussed the substantial differences between Indigenous education and government-provided schooling and argue that Indigenous approaches to knowledge are not only a return to the traditional, but part of the decolonisation process.

Indigenous education and decolonisation

From the United States, Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete explains how “education for Indigenous peoples—both traditionally and as envisioned within decolonising projects—could be described as a lifelong process that consists of an internal and external exploration of ‘coming to know’” (Cajete, 1999, p. 78). This is supported by Jacob et al. (2015), who maintain that “the indigenous [sic] education process is better understood as an eternal, reciprocal, interactive, and symbiotic learning process” (p. 3). There are as many unique approaches to Indigenous education as there are diverse Indigenous nations around the globe—yet a central aim is “holistically nurturing future leaders who will be able to speak and act on behalf of their people” (Pratt et al., 2018, p. 2). Cajete (1999) notes that “there is no word for education, or science, or art in most indigenous languages. ‘Coming to know’ is the best translation for education in most Native traditions ... [and] is a process that happens in many ways” (p. 78). While Indigenous people have been socialised to narrow their

definition of education to classroom learning, many suggest that the denigration of traditional kinship structures of education is further eroded by ethnocentric assumptions (Battiste, 1998). The limiting colonial view of knowledge reinforced by public schooling fails to recognise or embrace educational traditions and methods that fall outside of their own standards and acculturation.

In a national study, Luke, Cazden, and Coopes (2013) found that Australian settler populations have historically denied the importance of traditional education systems, and that through this denial a pervasive deficit model approach to the challenges of Indigenous education has emerged. Decolonising methods resist the language of deficits that perpetuate the stereotype that Indigenous people represent a 'problem' that needs to be fixed (Smith, 2012). The need to decolonise and Indigenise education stems from shared experiences of persistent deficit approaches to Indigenous education across the globe. Colonising forces in contemporary education enact comparable barriers to the engagement and achievement of Indigenous students, therefore the need for Indigenous led education both in Australia and globally "is dire and immediate as the enduring impacts of colonisation undermine Indigenous peoples' well-being and self-determination across the globe" (Pratt et al., 2018, p. 22).

Different views of decolonisation

Discussions around the need to decolonise education for Indigenous students are occurring globally (Grande et al., 2015; Smith, 2012). Indigenous educators and communities are placing the responsibility for 'failed' Indigenous education policy across Australia on the lack of capacity among many educators to work effectively with Indigenous children (Langton, 2015). A transformative opportunity for enabling Indigenous voices to be included in the Australian education system begins with preparing teachers to be willing and able to work in ways that honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Scholars Santoro,

Reid, Crawford and Simpson (2011) suggest that Australian education should provide “opportunities for non-Indigenous teachers and pre-service teachers to listen to and learn from their Indigenous colleagues” (p. 2). This creates a transformative opportunity for Indigenous voices to be included in education policy development and implementation; and for educational leaders to work in ways that value Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing.

Decolonisation scholars such as Tuck and Yang (2012) understand decolonisation as an unsettling and physical process that extends beyond the intellectual and into the literal. Such scholars strongly resist notions of decolonisation that are not commensurable with reacquisition of land and natural resources. Tuck and Yang (2012) state that “decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted. This is precisely why decolonisation is necessarily unsettling, especially across lines of solidarity” (p. 7). Often however, decolonisation discourse does not directly involve physical reacquisition of land and instead focuses its efforts “to include Indigenous perspectives in curriculum, or methodological approaches to research conducted by or with Indigenous peoples” (Vass et al., 2018, p. 13). The methodological and theoretical contribution of “Decolonising Race Theory allows a centring of Indigenous difference and the disruption of the knowledge-power dialectic which perpetuates deficit discourses” (Vass et al., 2018, p. 13). It is this theoretical and methodological perspective of decolonisation that has the potential to disrupt deficit discourses and approaches to Indigenous education challenges.

3.7.5 The Cultural Interface

Torres Strait Islander scholar Martin Nakata coined the term the ‘cultural interface’ to describe the tense entanglement of Indigenous and Western cultural systems. Nakata describes this meeting as:

the intersection of the Western and Indigenous domains ... the place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and, more to the point, the place where we are active agents in our own lives – where we make our decisions – our lifeworld ... It is a place of tension that requires constant negotiation (Nakata, 2002, p. 28).

Therefore, Cultural Interface Theory (CIT) can be considered both a political and deeply personal agenda (Nakata, 2002), as Indigenous Australians live the reality of these cultural contestations on a daily basis. CIT provides an entry point to analysing the competing knowledge systems and social norms operating in people's everyday lives and the crossroads of these in shared services and institutions such as schools.

Martin Nakata (2007b) suggests that CIT has the potential to assist students and educators to reimagine the cross-cultural space, "not as a clash of opposites and differences but as a layered and very complex entanglement of concepts, theories and sets of meanings of a knowledge system" (p. 272). This allows a shift away from deficit discourses that frame Indigenous students as being 'behind' and 'disadvantaged' and reveals that Indigenous student success does not necessarily depend on academic performance, but on the ability to cope at the cultural interface; to reconcile Western concepts into Indigenous frameworks, and to achieve in a way that fulfils individual and community needs (Nakata, 2007b; Nakata and Chin, 2008). The underpinning challenge of CIT in schools involves empowering Indigenous students and educators by developing teaching and learning spaces that nurture their cultural identities and encourage and build on their existing knowledge systems.

CIT is a model that promotes deeper understanding of race struggles "by positing visual spaces (i.e., the spaces where daily life is enacted, e.g. home, school, university, shopping centres) that intersect with theoretical or conceptual spaces (e.g. mind maps, intellectual or emotional ways of understanding)" (McGloin, 2009, p. 39). In this way,

CIT offers an approach to education and schooling that requires a commitment to both decolonising and indigenising processes by all stakeholders. Several scholars warn about the dangers of Indigenous Education initiatives that do not explicitly examine the cultural interface and challenge colonial attitudes (McLaughlin and Whatman, 2008; Howlett, Seini, Mathews, Dillion & Vivian, 2008). Simplistic interpretations and tokenistic approaches undermine an authentic project that recognises and values Indigenous knowledge through a decolonising framework (Nakata, 2007a). Dumbrill and Green (2008) argue that serious and courageous conversations must occur at the cultural interface prior to, and throughout Indigenous education reform to avoid a “watered-down version’ of curriculum that fails to adequately recognise and value Indigenous knowledge and standpoints in Australia and internationally” (Anderson, Bunda & Walter, 2008, p. 10).

Literature supports the idea that CIT is equally relevant and applicable to higher education and research institutions as it is to public schooling systems. According to Anderson, Bunda and Walter (2008) “Indigenous higher education is core university business and not just the responsibility of the Indigenous centres” (p. 4). Decolonising Indigenous knowledge and learning in Western institutions of higher education generates tensions with traditional Western constructions of Indigenous epistemologies and cultures (Ka’ai, 2005; Smith, 1999; Thaman, 2005). Salik (2003) believes that this tension should not deter non-Indigenous university educators or scholars but be viewed as a necessary challenge that involves power-shifting within both personal and professional practice. Milroy (2007) concurs that “recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ cultural identities, experiences and knowledge systems by the academy may allow spaces which will nurture Indigenous students’ determination to succeed” (p. 52). Salik (2003) further suggests that the engagement of non-Indigenous scholars and academics at the cultural interface in universities may challenge colonial approaches to

Indigenous education and create culturally safe learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in higher education and research.

CIT focuses on “maintaining the continuity of one culture and knowledge system while having to harness another and working the interaction in ways that serve Indigenous interests, in ways that can uphold distinctiveness and special status as First Peoples” (Nakata, 2002, p. 29). Within a self-determined education paradigm, cultural interface theory can assist Indigenous educators and researchers to maintain and privilege Indigenous ways of knowing, while developing their capacity to engage in and influence mainstream institutions and approaches to Indigenous education. In this sense, CIT links closely with the concept of being ‘two-way strong’. According to Purdie et al., (2011) Two-way teaching and learning addresses the cultural interface where the two cultures meet: in the classroom, the school, the community, and both state and national education curricula.

3.7.6 Two-Way or Both-Way Strong

The first presence of two-way learning in education to be initiated by the Commonwealth government was in 1973 under then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. The implementation of a bilingual program in the Northern Territory was the first real opportunity for Indigenous Australians to be directly involved in determining the school education they desired for their children. The idea of teaching Indigenous culture and language alongside Western disciplines was further promoted during the 1980s because of ongoing pressure on schools from Indigenous parents and communities (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003; D-Arbon et al., 2009). One of the first ‘both-ways’ approaches was developed and articulated by Indigenous teacher trainees, most significantly Mandawuy Yunupingu and Nalwarri Ngurruwutthun. As explained by Yuniupingu, “to know about the unknown (Western knowledge) you have to go through an educational process, but with the two-way process the emphasis is made on traditional education more than contemporary” (Yunupingu,

1989, p. 5). Since this time, the literature around two-way learning has developed to incorporate, either directly, or indirectly, the theories of decolonisation and Indigenous standpoint.

The concept of two-way or both-way learning in Indigenous education is not a new one and today these terms are used interchangeably and in addition to other similar terms, including but not limited to, two-way strong, two-eyed seeing and both-ways strong (David & Grose, 2008; Harris, 1990; Purdie et al., 2011). These terms collectively refer to the holistic merging of Western and Indigenous knowledge in schools, both in Australia and internationally. Australian research has found support among many Aboriginal communities for the ideals of mainstream education but on the basis that it is welcoming and accepting of Indigenous culture and values ... and embraces the concept of two-way learning (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 255). Harris (1990) defines two-way schooling as "a strategy to help make the matter of choice real in both worlds; to provide opportunity for the primary Aboriginal identity to stay strong, though changing, and thus continue to be the source of inner strength and security necessary for dealing with the Western world" (p. 48). He argues that "Aboriginal people today are increasingly interested both in being empowered in terms of the Western world and in retaining or rebuilding Aboriginal identity as a primary identity" (p. 48).

Two-way learning, according to Purdie et al. (2011) infers "a partnership relationship between First Peoples and Settler cultures in Australia ... a negotiated space ... that, like the cultural literal zone where land and sea meet ... is dynamic and fluid, like that of a coast line" (p. 4). D'Arbon et al. (2009) maintain that when working in two worlds, what becomes important is a strong "intercultural identity" (p. 40) which acknowledges and values knowledge, language, and differences from both Indigenous and Western perspectives and recognises the need for Aboriginal students to be strong in both worlds. Similarly, cultural curriculum elevates the status of Aboriginal educators and school staff by

valuing and including their knowledge, expertise, and aspirations in and beyond the classroom. Ultimately, “two-way learning imagines a mutually respectful and beneficial relationship at the interface, where both world views are equally valued and all students can benefit” (Davis & Grose, 2008, p. 6).

3.7.7 What is a research standpoint?

Research standpoints represent the collective experiences and views of those who are disempowered in a specific conflict (Ardill, 2013; Haraway, 1988; Sprague, 2004). This is because “a standpoint specifies a relationship to power and argues that one way to understand how power works is to learn from the standpoint(s) of the less powerful” (Ardill, 2013, p. 97). Similarly, Haraway explains that standpoints are about shared power and vulnerability. Sprague concurs that “standpoint theory offers us a strategy for constructing knowledge that explicitly takes into account the distortions prompted by social relations of domination and works to ground and reconcile divergences” (2004, p. 98). Standpoint is closely related to the developing field of Indigenous research, which can be defined as research that is “made up of vital, transformative practices that emerge from and for Indigenous peoples” (Coburn et al., 2013, p. 331). Australian scholars insist that Indigenous Standpoint Theory must be “flexible enough to recognise intersecting oppressive structures and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints that exist within our individuals, communities, and contexts” (Ardill, 2013, p. 96).

The predecessors of decolonisation and Indigenous Standpoint Theory

The emergence of post-colonial research agendas concerned with giving voice to oppressed groups can be traced back to the work of early scholars such as French psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, who was a literary scholar, author, psychiatrist, and member of the Front de Libération

National (FLN) during the Algerian revolution. He “became the world’s foremost authority on oppression related to colonization” (Hilton, 2011, p. 45). Fanon’s substantial published works demonstrate genuine empathy and advocacy for oppressed and colonised peoples and his approach, despite being primarily applied to those colonised peoples of North Africa, offers a valuable insight into the psychology of colonialism as a whole and presents the argument that the effects of colonialism can be deconstructed and overturned for the benefit and well-being of the world’s Indigenous populations.

Fanon recognised that “colonization alone can have detrimental effects on the identity and psyche of indigenous people” (Hilton, 2011, p. 57) and also discussed the occurrence of lateral violence among oppressed peoples. Fanon explains that “the colonized subject will first train this aggressiveness sedimented in his muscles against his own people ... this is the period when black turns on black” (1961, p. 15). This explanation is useful in developing an understanding of the high incidence of internal and self-destructive behaviours exhibited by colonised peoples “such substance-related disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, violence, homicide, and suicide” (Hilton, 2011, p. 57). By drawing attention to the psychology of oppression and racism resulting from colonialism Fanon aimed to ensure that “world powers in any sense of the term, become aware of the potential effects their actions have on indigenous people” (Hilton, 2011, p. 58). Fanon believed it was “imperative that the knife of knowledge be held at the throat of colonialism, to the point at which it loosens its hold on oppressed, indigenous populations” (Hilton, 2011, p. 58) and his work was instrumental in setting the scene for the emergence of standpoint theory and decolonisation in education and research (Bachman, 1992).

Also relevant to the development of Indigenous standpoint, post-colonialism argues the close connection between imperialism/colonialism and strategic essentialism. Gayatri Spivak is one theorist who has worked extensively on this relationship and examined both the effectiveness and

limitations attached to essentialism. Gayatri Spivak describes “strategic essentialism as an approach to research that nationalities, cultural groups or marginal groups can use to present themselves and their shared interests, distinguishing themselves from their oppressors” (Spivak, 1999, p. 73). The term ‘essentialism’ in post-colonial contexts has almost become synonymous with questions of cultural, racial, and national identity and is an important point for consideration in Indigenous research.

Spivak identifies the complexities around minority self-representation and the potential risks to those colonised peoples wishing to express themselves, “without knowing that their essential subjectivity had been and still was constrained by the discourses within which they were constructed as subaltern” (Spivak, 1999, p. 74). Ashcroft et al. (2007) argue that it is sometimes beneficial to use essentialism to bring forward group identity in a simplified and collective way to achieve definite goals, or to oppose the levelling impact of global or ‘mainstream’ culture.

While scholars warn against the dangers of essentialism and the tendency to oversimplify a groups’ commonalities by overlooking their diversity, they also advocate for its practical use and effectiveness in representing oppressed groups (Spivak, 1999; Eide, 2010). Eide (2010) argues that minority groups are defining themselves and creating their own discourses through “essentialist practices and modes of representation applied in the promotion of certain minority rights or demands” (p. 4). From this perspective, essentialism has influenced and continues to influence the development of research concerned with decolonisation and IST.

Feminist standpoint origins

Indigenous scholars have worked and continue to work with feminist standpoint theory to develop a distinctly Indigenous standpoint theory (IST). Feminist and Indigenous scholars “share an understanding

that their respective production of knowledge is a site of constant struggle against normative dominant patriarchal conceptual frameworks” (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 331–332). However, unlike feminist standpoint theory, IST specifically centres the standpoint of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges. Indigenous scholars that are concerned with feminist standpoint, such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson, argue that IST alone does not adequately examine the unique position and experiences of Indigenous women. Nakata speaks specifically about feminist standpoint theory as his foundation, and provides an account of his own gender neutral IST development; “Since the early 1990s, I have investigated possibilities with standpoint theory and, in particular, an Indigenous standpoint as a theoretical position that might be useful – something from the everyday and not from some grand narrative” (p. 77) For Nakata, IST is an approach to knowledge production appropriate for First Australians to negotiate the “cultural interface” (p. 78). Therefore, for Indigenous scholars such as Nakata (1998), Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Smith (2012) IST is a research position closely linked with decolonisation that requires academics to critically assess and challenge the production of colonial knowledge. Along with Nakata, (Hennessy, 1992) Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Smith (1999, 2012) have built on the work of feminist standpoint to create Indigenous standpoint theory.

3.7.8 Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST)

Indigenous scholars understand that Indigenous knowledge and research does not begin or end with academia or academic theory, and that Indigenous peoples have “always asked questions that mattered to them and they have always sought to answer them, mobilizing all relevant sources of knowledge” (Coburn et al., 2013, p. 331). Indigenous knowledge and research has always existed and in this sense, “Indigenous standpoint theory can be viewed as part of a larger continuing project by First Nations peoples to actualise Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing both within and outside the academy” (Ardill, 2013, p. 75). IST requires an understanding of the networks of relationships that comprise our Indigenous realities and respect for Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

While some iterations of Indigenous standpoint theory have explicitly drawn from the works of feminist scholars, it is important to recognise that Indigenous standpoint theory has emerged as a means for First Nations peoples to “articulate critical viewpoints founded in the embodied experience of being Indigenous while negotiating the complex intersections of oppression emerging from colonialism” (Ardill, 2013, p. 75). Indigenous standpoint in Indigenous research is forging a distinct agenda that is necessary to change the existing power imbalance of contemporary theory, and in turn the dominance of western rhetoric (Budby, 2001a; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Nakata, 1998; and Rigney, 1999). The Indigenous standpoint will assist our communities to be empowered (Rigney, 1999) and to promote and preserve Indigenous knowledges into the future.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory and decolonisation

Nakata (2002) explains that IST and decolonisation are both political and deeply personal, as those Indigenous researchers who embark on the challenge experience and live these contestations

everyday within the epistemological and cultural interface (Nakata, 2002). Nakata (2002) argues, for example, that Indigenous standpoint “is not a simple reflection of experience and it does not pre-exist in the everyday waiting to be brought to light. It is not any sort of hidden wisdom that Indigenous people possess. It is a distinct form of analysis and is itself both a discursive construction” (p. 3). For many Indigenous Australian scholars, the development and consolidation of Indigenous Knowledges in education and research are inseparably linked to issues of cultural survival and self-determination.

Minniecon et al. (2007) reject how “non-Indigenous researchers have determined what knowledge is legitimate, resulting in Indigenous knowledge being seen as inferior, and instead demand recognition that ‘whiteness’ has been oppressive” (2007, p. 85). As a method of inquiry, IST is a way of theorising knowledge from a position other than the dominant colonial view (Nakata, 2007a, p. 461). IST rejects ethnocentric research methodologies and epistemologically situates the Indigenous perspective as central to research with Indigenous communities. IST also maintains that the results of any research are owned by the Indigenous communities and that the research should directly benefit the participants (Foley, 2003). IST rejects ethnocentric research methodologies and epistemologically situates the Indigenous perspective as central to research with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory and cultural interface

Scholars such as Nakata (2002), Salik (2003) and McLaughlin & Syron (2010), argue that higher education spaces have the potential to be transformative in that “engagement by non-Indigenous scholars and academics with Indigenous knowledge and standpoint may challenge colonial approaches to Indigenous education and create new culturally responsive spaces and approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education” and research (McLaughlin & Syron, 2010, p. 3). Minniecon, Franks and Heffernan (2007) explain that within

the higher education space “non-Indigenous researchers have determined what knowledge is legitimate, resulting in Indigenous knowledge being seen as inferior” (p.24) and promote Indigenous Standpoint Theory and cultural interface to develop an approach that privileges Indigenous voices and prioritises Australian Indigenous epistemologies.

Non-Indigenous researchers come to the interface both as outsiders to Indigenous worlds of experience and embedded in an academic environment with organisational and academic traditions and procedures rooted in the privileging of certain forms of knowledge (Ardill, 2013, p. 88). IST is valuable for educational and research reform as it encourages both Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and researchers to explore their own positions in their interaction with Indigenous Knowledges (Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

An Australian paradigm shift at the cultural interface will only be possible when research about Indigenous Australians starts from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities. This will facilitate Indigenous control over research so that questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems defined differently and Indigenous people can participate on different terms (Pratt et al., 2018). As IST continues to be further developed, promoted and applied, it is important to remember the wisdom of an outstanding Indigenous academic who warns that as Indigenous scholars, whatever our endeavours, we should never forget the wisdom of those that went before us [our elders and ancestors] (Budby, 2001a).

3.7.9 Summary

This phase of my literature review focused on the theoretical underpinnings informing my research framework. I began with an exploration of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and the connection with Aboriginal education before introducing literature and studies concerning Self Determination Theory and its relationships with Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Definitions of

Decolonisation Theory (DCT) were then explored and explained in terms of their application within this project. Next, the viability of decolonisation theory as a strategy for self-determination in schools is discussed, with an explanation of the importance of DCT for recognition of IK and the aspirations for Aboriginal self-determined education. Possibilities for sharing and merging intersecting knowledges at the cultural interface are explored along with the related benefits for IK and Aboriginal self-determination. The final section of this review phase discussed the concept of two-way learning and/or both-way strong, as both an aspiration for and reality of Aboriginal education occurring at the cultural interface of the Australian school system.

CHAPTER 4: WAARDAN (continued)

4.1 METHODOLOGY PART ONE – THE UNDERPINNINGS

This first part of my Methodology section provides context to my research approach and the motivations behind selecting an Indigenous research paradigm that incorporates Indigenous methodologies. This section introduces Indigenous research paradigms and discusses autoethnography and yarning research along with ethical considerations and researcher positionality. This section precludes part 2 which outlines the specific methodology and data collection processes used.

Part one begins with a discussion about research paradigms in a general sense, discussing the key elements of the approach through reference to the work of other Indigenous scholars in Australia and abroad.

4.1.1 Research paradigms

Research paradigms are human constructions that help us make sense of the world as it relates to scientific inquiry (Denzin, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A research paradigm can also be referred to as a “philosophical stance” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7) or “conceptual framework” (Kovach, 2009, p. 39) that informs the researcher’s view of reality and guides research priorities, choices, and actions (Chilisa, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Mertens, 2015; Willis, 2007; Wilson, 2008). The conceptual framework of a research paradigm is determined by the researcher’s worldview and philosophical assumptions regarding ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the nature of knowledge and knowing), axiology (values), and methodology (processes of research) (Chilisa, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2015; Wilson, 2008). These four overlapping elements of epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology inform paradigms and provide a conceptual framework that guides research design. According to Wilson (2008), “it is the uniqueness of these four

elements that in part hold an Indigenous research paradigm apart from other research paradigms" (p. 71).

The emergence of Indigenous research paradigms

Wilson (2008) argues that relationality is the foremost central element of Indigenous worldviews, and therefore also Indigenous research paradigms. In this sense, knowledge is collective rather than individualistic and incorporates the physical and spiritual worlds along with the human researcher and participants. An Indigenous research paradigm requires a "wide picture of what research is from Indigenous perspectives" (Hart, 2010, p. 12). Shawn Wilson's fundamental framework provides an effective guide to developing research that encompasses Indigenous methodologies, methods, and ways of being and doing (Wilson 2008) but it is recognised that even these broad concepts of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology may be acting as a strainer (Hart, 2010) that does not fully encapsulate the holistic and relational nature of Indigenous paradigms and methodology (Smith, 2012; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2006).

The "emergence of an Indigenous research paradigm is a form of resistance to centuries of colonial domination" (Coburn, 2013, p. 52), as historically and globally research has "been used to oppress Indigenous people and de-legitimise Indigenous ontology and epistemology" (Wright, 2011, p. 26). Coburn (2013) argues that for this reason Indigenous research is part of a much "broader political, cultural, and spiritual project of Indigenous resurgence" (p. 52). According to Mihesuah and Wilson (2006), including Indigenous ways of knowing in academia and valuing them as equal to Western approaches is critical to the decolonisation of research paradigms and methodologies that dominate Western academia.

The importance of Indigenous research that privileges and revitalises Indigenous Knowledges is a sentiment echoed by Indigenous scholars (Martin, 2003; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008) who regard the emergence of an Indigenous research paradigm as "the expression and

practice of distinct Indigenous research methodologies to reflect, enact, and revitalize Indigenous knowledge systems” (p. 179). Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing inform a holistic Indigenous research framework within which “a relational ontology, epistemology and methodology are necessary conditions” (Martin & Mirraboopa 2003 p. 214). The growing presence of Indigenous Knowledges and paradigms continue to shape and reshape research practice and raises important questions related to the cultural interface.

4.1.2 Research at the cultural interface

Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars are increasingly experimenting with combining Indigenous and Western methodologies in their interpretive research or in qualitative methods resulting in a growing body of literature discussing the benefits and challenges of research that occurs at the cultural interface of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (e.g., Battiste, 2000; Denzin et al., 2008; Gerlach, 2018; Getty, 2010; Hart et al., 2016; Knudson, 2015; Kovach, 2010; Mertens et al., 2013). Two main lines of thought are presented in the literature concerned with the merging of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and decolonisation research at the interface.

One position argues that the shared assumptions and aspirations of transformative and Indigenous paradigms justifies the practicality of bringing them together for research (e.g., Mertens & Cram, 2016). According to Mirjan (2019) “Indigenous and transformative methodologies share an emancipatory and critical stance and thus are increasingly used in tandem by both Western and Indigenous scholars in an attempt to decolonise methodologies, research, and the academy as a whole” (p. 1). The other line of thought argues that Indigenous paradigms are so distinct from western approaches that they require an Indigenous paradigm and cannot be fully or adequately subsumed under any established Western paradigm (e.g., Chilisa, 2012; Romm, 2015; Wilson, 2008). More recently, a conceptual ‘third space’ has emerged in which

Western and Indigenous scholars understand decolonisation as a mutual endeavour to co-produce knowledge through a multi-pragmatic approach that capitalises on the merging of both knowledge systems at the Interface (Drawson et al., 2017; Mihesuah and Wilson, 2006; Nakata, 2007b). Both lines of thought acknowledge that traditional Western paradigms do not fully encapsulate Indigenous research aspirations and principles.

4.1.3 What is distinct about an Indigenous research paradigm?

A number of studies have discussed the fundamental differences between Western and Indigenous research paradigms and reinforced the need for Indigenous Knowledges and principles to inform the framework of Indigenous research. As noted by Wilson (2001), one important distinction between Indigenous and Western research paradigms is the relational nature of Indigenous research practice in contrast to the individuality and disconnect of Western paradigms. Drawson et al. (2017) also attest to the relational nature of an Indigenous paradigm in which relational accountability and connection require researchers “to determine methods and frameworks that prioritise Indigenous ways of knowing throughout all stages of the project” (p. 15). Another point of difference between Indigenous and Western paradigms refers to the ‘collective’. This collective, as explained by Maggie Kovach (2005), entails a sense of commitment to the people in many Indigenous societies. “Inherent in this commitment to the people is the understanding of the reciprocity of life and accountability to one another” (p. 114). A final point is the emphasis on practicality where “one seeks knowledge because one is prepared to use it” (p. 114). In turn, an Indigenous methodology includes the assumption that knowledge formation should be meaningful and purposeful (Kovach, 2005; Wilson, 2001). Moreton-Robinson and Walter’s (2009) research (see Table 1 below) provides a useful summary and specific examples that highlight the significant differences between Indigenous and Western ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Table 1*Comparison of Indigenous and Western worldview*

Aspect of worldview	Characteristics of Indigenous worldview	Characteristics of Western worldview
<i>Ontology</i>	Realities are predicated on being embodied and connected. Reality is not immutable and there are different layers of reality that are contextual and related to being a knowledge holder	Reality is perceived as immutable and the Western framing of reality is invisible to the perceiver
<i>Epistemology</i>	Legitimacy is based on connectivity, physical, and spiritual nature of life, knowledge, and existence	Legitimacy is based on objectivity of rational knowledge, and other ways of knowing are dismissed
<i>Axiology</i>	Valued knowledge comes from many sources including dreams, the ancestors, stories and experiences, and is embedded in the land	Valued knowledge comes from disembodied theories rationally considered

Source: Moreton-Robinson and Walter, (2009), *Indigenous methodologies in social research*. In M. Walter (Ed.) *Social research methods* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press, Australia and New Zealand. pp. 4-5. Granted permission to use table.

Galtung (1990, p. 313) provides another brief comparison that illustrates some of the fundamental differences between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and being In Table 2 below.

Table 1*Comparing Western and Indigenous ontology and epistemology*

Western ontology and epistemology	Indigenous ontology and epistemology
A unilinear, present-centred conception of time	A circular (or spiral) conception of time
An analytic rather than holistic conception of epistemology	An holistic conception of epistemology
A human-over-human conception of human relations	A less hierarchical conception of human relations
A human-over-nature conception of relations to nature	Humans in relationship of care and responsibility with nature

Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) suggest that Indigenous paradigms need to be informed by four broad research principles and goals. These include:

- Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges, and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival.
- Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn, and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people.
- Emphasis of social, historical, and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures; and
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands (p. 205).

According to Evans et al. (2014) many Indigenous scholars and their communities regard the emergence and purpose of an Indigenous research paradigm as the expression and practice of distinct Indigenous

research methodologies to reflect, enact, and revitalise those Indigenous knowledge systems themselves (p. 179).

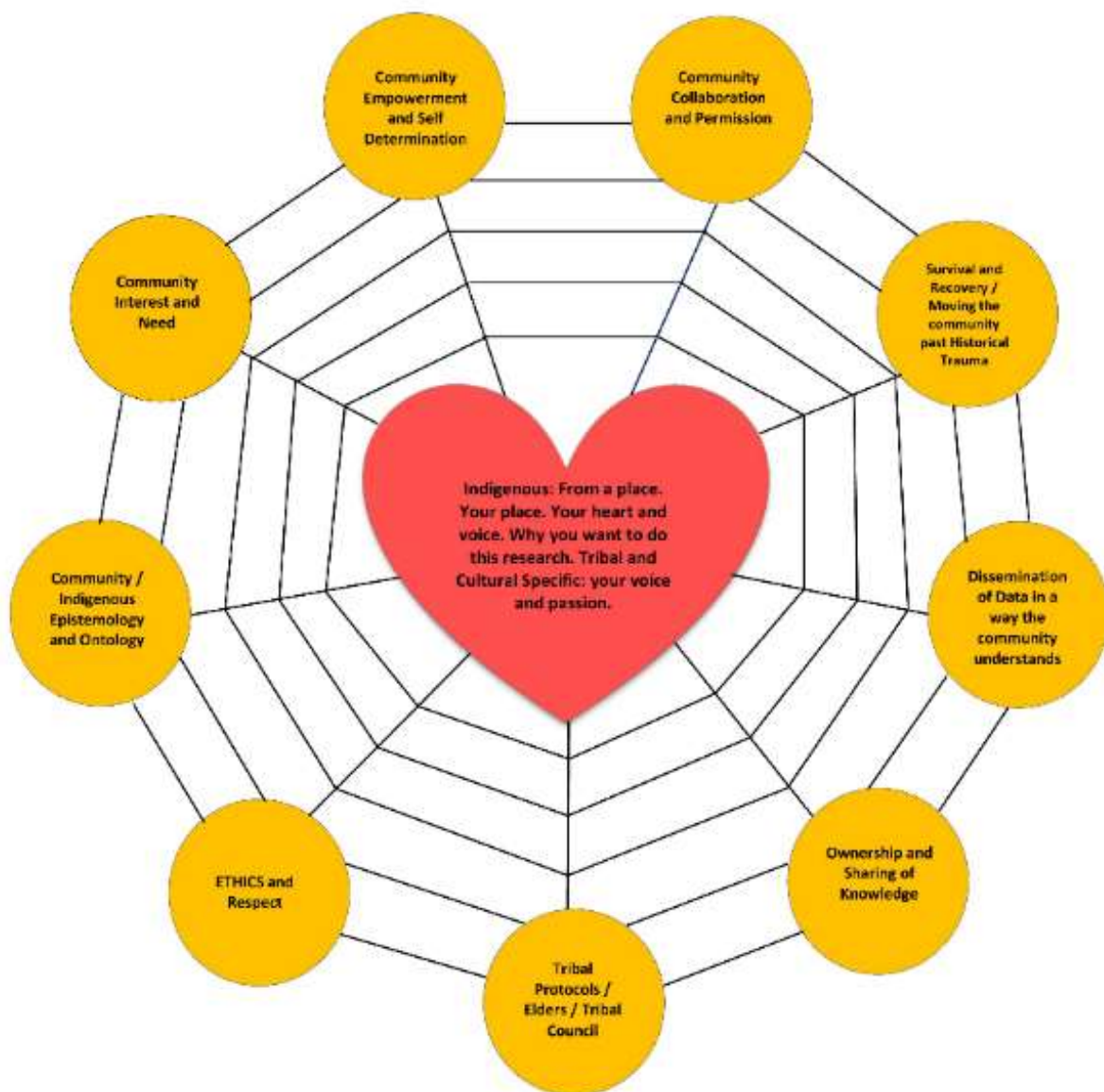
Evans et al. (2014) advocate for research that centres Indigenous Knowledges and empowers Indigenous people to “develop knowledge and speak for and of themselves about any and all elements of the worlds they inhabit” (p. 181). A comprehensive review of Indigenous research methodologies compiled in 2017 emphasised the need for Indigenous research paradigms to be both culturally revitalising and decolonising. Dawson et al. (2017) assert that research purposes and processes are a key point of distinction between Western and Indigenous research paradigms. An Indigenous paradigm aims to ‘reveal knowledge’, ‘decolonise’, ‘rebalance power, and provide healing’. Globally, the Indigenous research space is reflective of a shifting paradigm that extends beyond the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges, towards a decolonising and self-determining research paradigm (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Cochran et al., 2008; Evans et al., 2014; Dawson, 2017).

As Cameron et al. (2014) assert, an Indigenous research paradigm using Indigenous methodology involves the production of new knowledge, community capacity building and healing. This is consistent with Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) who suggests that Indigenous self-determination in research requires “individual and collective processes of mobilisation, healing, decolonisation, and transformation” (p. 116). Latulippe (2015) suggests that Indigenous research that centres Indigenous voices can facilitate distinct ways of knowing and being and offer a viable basis from which to contemplate the historically, geographically, and spiritually embedded nature of Indigenous self-determination, which is central to the study of Indigenous knowledges. An Indigenous research paradigm therefore, must privilege and sustain Indigenous knowledges, principles and voices; and be recognised as an “inherently political activity, influenced by and disrupting historical formations of power and in support of resistance and self-determination” (Miheuah and Wilson, 2004, p. 6).

The *Spider Conceptual Framework* in Figure 10 below, is an example of an Indigenous research paradigm developed by Native American scholar Lori Lambert (2014). The model encapsulates Indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology along with the post-colonial projects of decolonisation, healing, and self-determination.

Figure 10
The Spider conceptual framework

Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model



Lambert, L. (2014) *Research for Indigenous survival and Indigenous research methodologies in the behavioural sciences*. Salish Kootenai College Press.

4.1.4 How does an Indigenous paradigm inform methodology?

An Indigenous research paradigm is founded on the principles of Indigenous ontology, epistemology and axiology which in turn inform all aspects of the research process, from the research question to the selection of methodology and methods applied to gather and disseminate data. Indigenous methodologies as “those that permit and enable Indigenous researchers to be who they are while they are actively engaged as participants in the research processes” (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 21). Shawn Wilson (2001) suggested that an Indigenous methodology must also be informed by relational accountability, meaning that the researcher has cultural responsibilities to “all relations” (p. 177). Steinhauer shares this view and states that the Indigenous research methodology is an alternative approach that emphasises the Indigenous way of life that is interconnected with all living beings in the universe (2002). This research process flows from a sense of place that provides a protocol (a framework) to build respect and relationship with the community that is being researched (Lambert, 2014). A number of scholars have recommended essential components for Indigenous research methodology (Drawson et al., 2017; Kovach, 2010; Porsanger, 2004). An Indigenous research paradigm requires that the researcher is responsive to a connection between the philosophical values of an Indigenous paradigm and the methods being used. According to Kovach (2010) researchers can effectively serve the Aboriginal research participants, “so long as both paradigm and method are front and centre (and congruent)” (p. 47).

Indigenous knowledges comprise a specific way of knowing based on an oral tradition of sharing knowledge. It is akin to what different Indigenous researchers, the world over, identify as storytelling, yarning, talk story, re-storying, remembering (Thomas, 2005; Bishop, 1999; Absolon & Willett, 2004). The method is significant to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on

oral storytelling traditions aligned with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation and transaction that holds a deep purpose of sharing story and using co-produced knowledge meaningfully.

4.1.5 Summary

This first part of Methodology; the underpinnings, has so far focused on the related theory and research that informed, shaped and supported my own research paradigm and standpoint. It began with a discussion about research paradigms in a general sense, before introducing standpoint theory, and more specifically Indigenous Standpoint Theory. This section discussed the key characteristics required of Indigenous paradigms and identified the ways in which they are distinct from other approaches to research. Part one Methodology will now discuss my methodological choices for this research project and explain my researcher positionality. The strengths and limitations of storying methodology are summarised along with researcher positionality. The research methods of autoethnographic writing and research yarning are introduced and described in the context of this project before Part one Methodology concludes with a brief discussion of the cultural and ethical considerations.

4.2 *Indigenous stories*

Everyone has a story (White, 1995; Wingard & Lester, 2001) which shapes who they are and how they came to be. Although storytelling in the non-Indigenous community is often referred to as narratives (White, 1995), Indigenous people prefer to refer to the process as the telling of our story or stories (Wingard & Lester, 2001). Telling stories is part of Indigenous pedagogy (Martin, 2008) and critical to the process of knowledge generation and transmission. Stories and narratives are often associated with the teaching and learning practices in Indigenous communities and numerous studies discuss this important ongoing

connection (Kovach, 2010; Battiste, 2002; Smith, 1999; Absolon & Willet, 2004).

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) argue that the sharing of knowledge through story is a shared Indigenous way of knowing, being and doing. The properties of storytelling allow each voice to be heard and equal in the conversation, and according to Brown and Strega (2005) it is through these shared tenets of story that we find connections and make new and shared meaning from our diverse experiences. Story is significant for revealing the values, beliefs, and knowledge of the collective but and as an approach to teaching, learning and understanding (Brown & Strega, 2005).

4.2.1 Narrative research

Much contemporary research by Indigenous scholars deploys narrative and storytelling as the primary methods of research as this approach supports Indigenous research objectives and community goals at the same time (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). In considering the use of personal stories, Laslett (1999) believes that it is this intersection of the personal and the societal that offers a unique vantage point for research. Story or narrative methodology aligns with qualitative, emergent theory and effectively serves research concerned with gaining rich and intimate information from people's lived experience rather than generalised data. Yarning and autoethnography are two examples of narrative inquiry methodologies congruent with an Indigenous paradigm that values storytelling as an effective and collaborative practice for teaching, learning, and acquiring understanding.

4.2.2 Researcher position

A critical element of narrative or storying research methodology is researcher positionality and "who the researcher is" (Atkinson et al., 2021, p. 192). This demonstrates accountability and relationality which are both central to an Indigenous research paradigm. According to Wilson

(2008) demonstrating accountability requires that the research approach be respectful of the relationships between the researcher, research topic, and research participants. Storying methodology recognises the mutual and transformative influence of the researcher and research process. Patton (2002) argues that by acknowledging this relationship we enhance the credibility of our studies.

Within an Indigenous research paradigm and story methodology, the researcher's self-awareness, transparency, and self-disclosure contribute to the authenticity and validity of the research. Carter, Lapum, Lavalley and Martin (2014), in writing about research storytelling, argue the importance of reflexivity and for researchers "to begin with their own story as they seek to understand the stories of others" (p. 362).

4.2.3 Yarning

According to Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010), Australian Aboriginal people have participated in yarning for tens of thousands of years as a means of lifelong understanding and learning. Yarning and storytelling in Indigenous cultures are interconnected in that yarning essentially involves "a purposeful sharing of stories" (Walker et al., 2014, p. 2) as a way of knowing the social world (Datta, 2018). Worldwide, there is strong movement by Indigenous researchers to apply methods that are central to and informed by Indigenous knowledge and social protocols, yarning is one such method.

In Australia, Aboriginal communities commonly refer to and use yarning in the telling and sharing of stories and information. When an Aboriginal person says "let's have a yarn", what they are saying is, let's have a talk or conversation (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Distinct from discussions, interviews, or conversations in conventional western research, yarning strongly features relationality (Barlo et al., 2021); cultural responsibility (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Walker et al., 2014).

Yarning facilitates in-depth discussions in an informal relaxed and personal manner “providing a source of rich data and thick descriptions on a particular issue” (Byrne, 2001, p. 2) and allows Indigenous research participants to talk freely about their experiences in a manner that more formal research processes may not facilitate. It is the relationality and cultural familiarity encompassed by yarning that cut across the formality of identity as a researcher and demands humility through human-to-human interaction (Spradley, 1979) where both researcher and research participants are mutual knowers and learners in the storytelling process. Yarning as a research methodology is conducive to an Indigenous way of doing things and offers cultural security for Indigenous people participating in research (Datta, 2018; Dean, 2010). By embodying the connected voices, experiences, knowledges, and relationships of Indigenous yarning methodology (Dean, 2010) researchers can promote cultural safety via a process that is familiar to Aboriginal people and likely to improve the depth and authenticity of the data generated (Datta, 2018).

Yarning as a research method

Yarning as a research method is an Aboriginal culturally specified concept and process whereby the researcher and participant/s contribute to the yarn collaboratively. Descriptions of yarning methods, applications and validity are diverse and typically relate to the method being a relatively new and an emerging field requiring more understanding (Shay, 2019). Approaches to the application of methodology in yarning research also varies. Some researchers do not identify a specific method (Jennings et al., 2014; Lukaszuk et al., 2017), while others have described yarning as a methodology (Barlo et al., 2021; Dean, 2010; Mooney et al., 2018; Shay, 2019; Walker et al., 2014).

Most commonly however, “yarning is applied as a method for data collection that relies on collaborative information sharing. The methodology underpinning yarning embodies Indigenous research

axiology, epistemology, ontology, and the researcher's sociocultural position" (Atkinson et al., 2021, p. 195) Overall, yarning as a research method aligns with an Indigenous research paradigm as it privileges Indigenous voices and supports Aboriginal relational ways of knowing, being and doing, as opposed to colonial methods (Atkinson et al., 2021).

Relationality

Highly significant to yarning methodology is relationality, as yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and maintain relationships based on their accountability to the Indigenous participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). While yarning can be an effective and culturally responsive method for the collection of stories, Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) warn that the outcome of the yarn is "dependent on the quality of the relationship between the researcher and participant, the language being used, and the conceptual baggage brought to the interview process" (p. 47).

The shared relational elements existing between the researcher and participants' lived experience and knowledge are important in establishing trust and understanding. The self-introduction each person provides at the beginning of a yarn provides information for Indigenous people to cognitively and spiritually locate where and how they are connected in order for commonality to be identified and for cultural relationality to be established. According to Barlo et al. (2021) this is what underpins and informs the yarn and creates relational accountability as "yarning is reliant upon relationships and thus the integrity of the process requires responsibility and accountability among the researcher, participants, Country, culture, and Knowledges" (p.42). A foundation of relational understanding and accountability between the Indigenous researcher and Indigenous research participants presumably deepens the yarn to reveal thicker data (Geertz, 2003) with the aim of strengthened authenticity rather than validity (Wilson, 2008).

Social and research topic yarning

According to Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010), yarning method contains various types of yarns that occur and intersect at various intervals of the yarn, these include the social yarn, research topic yarn, therapeutic yarn and collaborative yarn (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Some applications of yarning methodology also include a family yarn and cross-cultural yarning (Walker et al., 2014). Social yarning and research topic yarning are the two most widely used by Indigenous scholars. Social yarning is the first stage of the research yarn and is primarily about establishing a connection with research participants through the researcher's direct sharing of their own personal information. Cultural protocol requires that when Indigenous people meet, introductions begin with each person providing their name and their Country and kinship connections. "In identifying who you are in the research process the relationship shifts from expert to person to person, enabling a more real and honest engagement as researcher and participant" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 47).

Through the social yarn certain conventions and rules are established for how the research topic yarn will take place, with boundaries and protocols mutually negotiated through the sharing of personal information (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Social yarns sometimes take place more than once before the research yarn begins and may continue to take place during the research yarn and even after the research yarn has officially ended. Central to the social yarn is the formation and development of the relationship between researcher and participant/s that will provide a foundation for making meaning and exploring the research topic collaboratively (Atkinson, 2021; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Social yarns are commonly used alongside family yarns in establishing relationality to one another based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connections to Country, spirituality and kinship (Walker et al., 2014). The authenticity of the relationship established

during the social yarn will largely determine the quality of the data generated during the research topic yarn that follows (Wilson, 2008).

According to Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010), research topic yarning is a conversation with a purpose, which is to gather information and generate knowledge through the sharing of stories related to the research topic. While the research yarn continues to be relaxed and flexible, it is also purposeful with a defined beginning and end. "Utilising yarning as a research tool means that the researcher needs to allow the participant some flexibility in responding to the questions" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 42) and discussing the topic. Equally, this method requires that researchers put some structures and strategies in place that assist in keeping the research yarn on topic and drawing it to a respectful close.

Challenges of yarning methodology

Applying "story telling or narrative as the process for gathering information means that the story may not always adhere to the plan and may take many different turns before returning to the research question" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 42). This is applicable in yarning methodology which requires that the researcher knows when, and how to interrupt a yarn, without causing tension or offence to the participant.

Another reason could be attributed to the nature of yarning which can be messy (Martin, 2008) in that story does not always follow convention. Yarning has its own convention and style in the telling of a story, which can be messy and challenging. Martin (2008), reflecting on her own use of yarning research methodology, does not make excuses for the messiness of her text and argues that to erase the messiness is to deny the complexities of Indigenous identity. The messiness and divergence of yarning methodology is reflective of the lived reality of Indigenous researchers trying to balance cultural protocols and goals with the conventions and expectations of the academy (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

4.2.4 Autoethnography

Webster and Mertova (2007) suggest that “narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning” (p. 1). Leggo (2012) similarly commented that, “life is abundant, and narrative inquiry is a way of focusing on some particulars of that abundance, in order to recognise some of the possibilities of meaning that lie in the seemingly tangled messiness of lived experience” (p. 13). Narrative research is concerned with how stories present possibilities for understanding the complex experiences that comprise human living and how they can assist us to live with more creative, ethical, and political conviction (Leggo, 2012, p. 18-19).

Autoethnography is both a qualitative research methodology and method that utilizes narrative writing to describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in connection to wider cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). Autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on auto- (self), -ethno- (the sociocultural connection), and -graphy (the application of the research process) (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Applied as both a product and a process, autoethnography might be considered as much of a research philosophy as it is a research method (Wall, 2006), so there exists considerable flexibility in the production of an autoethnographic text (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The form usually features researcher emotion, reflexivity, and introspection within the academic conventions of literary writing (Ellis, 2004). The overall goal of autoethnography however, is to develop a story that conveys “a patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviours that portray a more complete view of ... life” (Wall, 2008, p. 10).

By reconsidering traditional ideas about researcher objectivity, we can see that “every view is a way of seeing, not the way” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 137). According to Adams and Homan Jones (2008) autoethnography supports projects that view research as a political, socially just, and

socially conscious act that challenges more conventional and canonical ways of representing information and others (Spry, 2001). Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as research, writing and methodology that connects the autobiographical and personal, to the cultural, political, and social. Like autobiography, autoethnography applies self-reflection and narrative writing to explore personal experience. Autoethnography however, requires that the story connects and contributes to wider social, cultural, or political understanding. "Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name and interpret personal and cultural experience ... we use our experience to engage ourselves, others, culture(s), politics, and social research" (Adam et al., 2015, p. 1). Although some consider a personal narrative to be the same thing as an autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), others use autoethnography as a means of explicitly linking literature and theory to the narrated personal experience (Holt, 2001; Sparkes, 1996) and support an approach to narrative inquiry that's as rigorous and justifiable as any other (Adam et al., 2015; Whitinui, 2014).

Examples of this method reveal that autoethnography has been used in several ways, including but not limited to, telling a story that invites personal connection along with analysis (Frank, 2000), exploring issues of personal importance within a specific social or cultural context (Holt, 2001; Sparkes, 1996) and/or critiquing the research and literature on a topic of personal significance (Muncey, 2005). Autoethnography enables researchers to construct a personal and theoretically grounded understanding of the self or identity in relation to research, cultural and social contexts which improves researcher awareness of their own understanding and how this influences their interactions with research participants (Wall, 2008).

Autoethnography as a suitable method for Indigenous Research

An Indigenous worldview rejects the notion of knowledge as a commodity, or as being disconnected from ourselves and each other

(Keane et al., 2016). From this perspective of knowledge, it is understood that the “researcher is not removed from the research process, place, context, and co-researchers; rather the researcher is part of, as well as able to learn from, the research community” (Keane et al., 2016, p. 164). Cree scholar Onowa McIvor (2010) argues that “neutrality and objectivity are not appropriate or credible aims for Indigenous research” (p. 139) and cites the work of several Indigenous scholars who have drawn upon autoethnography for their research (Ellis, 1999, 2004; Grande, 2008). As a decolonising method, autoethnographic writing often employs powerful metaphors and creative expression, and has been likened to ceremony by Indigenous researchers (McIvor, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Māori scholar Paul Whitinui promotes autoethnography as a “native method of inquiry” that enables Indigenous researchers to rediscover their own voices as “culturally liberating human-beings” (2014, p. 456).

Researcher participation and transformation is one of several elements identified as being significant to an Indigenous methodology. DeMarrais (1998) presents a useful framework for research informed by Indigenous ways of knowing that summarises these elements. The aspects emphasised in the table below are based on DeMarrais’ framework and acknowledge that researcher stories contribute to shared learning and transformation. The elements of Indigenous ways of knowing included in this summary consist of: narrative knowing through own stories; observational knowing through the participation of the researcher in the community; relational knowing through the transformation of researcher as well as community.

Table 2 *Ways of knowing in IK research*

	Archival knowing	Narrative knowing	Observational knowing	Relational knowing
	People's artefacts	People's stories Own stories	People's behaviours	People's shared learning & understanding
Methodological approach	Historical research	Narrative Autobiography Oral history	Ethnography Participation Action research Listening	Transformation research Intuition/listening Co-creating Participation of researcher and community Sharing 'studying up'
Data source	Letters, newspapers, photographs, tools, objects	In-depth interviews, stories, songs	Participant-observation, field notes, participant assignments	Dialogue, community discussions, ceremonies, meeting notes

Adapted from deMarrais, K.B. (1998), (Ed.) *Inside stories: Qualitative research reflections*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Indigenous autoethnographies are an important emerging and international direction for decolonising methodology that calls for a new way of thinking about autoethnography as a valid research method. Spry (2011a) presents autoethnography as an Indigenous contestation that can "break the colonizing and encrypted code of what counts as knowledge ... and position local knowledge as the heart of epistemology and ontology" (p. 500). Spry argues that performative-I disposition enables the autoethnographic text to "enact disruption, dislocation, fragmentation, and absence as a form of critical agency" (2011a, p. 505). In turn, this empowers Indigenous researchers to interrupt colonial narratives concerned with "personal/political and local/global issues of

loss towards a performative pedagogy of hope and possibility" (2011a, p. 497). Houston (2007) argues that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, autoethnography offers a more "legitimate and respectful means of acquiring and formulating knowledge" (p. 45) because it combines storytelling traditions, including situating the self, with academic practices.

Australian Indigenous autoethnography

A number of scholars have presented autoethnography as a viable methodological option for Australian Indigenous researchers (Darnett and Rhodes, 2021; Dowling, 2017; Gannon, 2017) burdened with the challenge of balancing "academically rigorous research with the desire to practice this research respectfully" (Houston, 2007, p. 45). Indigenous autoethnography offers the opportunity to combine the ancient tradition of storytelling with academic research. According to Australian Aboriginal scholar Carol Dowling (2017, p. 54) "autoethnography as a methodology and method supports Indigenous self-determination" and an increasing number of Aboriginal scholars are incorporating autoethnographic writing into their research practice and sharing their experiences of using this methodology. Autoethnography ethically and culturally aligns well with an Indigenous research paradigm, just as Indigenous people and their cultures are diverse, so too are the ways Australian Indigenous scholars are applying and presenting their use of autoethnographic writing.

Bainbridge (2007) argues the rationale for autoethnography as an Indigenous research method and discusses how Indigenous researchers might work from an "epistemology of 'insiderness' to construct and theorise knowledge" (p. 54). Darnett and Rhodes (2021) applied autoethnography to explore their own Aboriginal heritage and to reveal connections between their lived experience and theory. They explore the complexities of belonging between two cultures – white Australian and

Aboriginal – through personal narrative, reflective journaling, and linking personal phenomena to theory and literature. Predominantly though, Indigenous autoethnography is a decolonising methodology employed by Indigenous scholars as a mode of resistance to academic convention and as “an instrument to defy misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples within historic, social, and political identities” (Dowling, 2017, p. 65).

According to Dowling, “Indigenous autoethnography represents the beginning of a collective journey towards an optimistic future for Aboriginal people” (2017, p. 54). Autoethnography as a methodology and method supports Indigenous self-determination in that it enables Indigenous people to be “active agents in freeing their lives from the domineering forces of objectification” (2017, p. 65). Dowling argues that we (as Indigenous writers) “tell our own stories so that our people can be self-determining and can view their future positively” (2017, p. 65). Several Aboriginal writers such as Brady (2008); Brewster (2005), and Reid-Gilbert (2000) have provided detailed accounts of the importance for them as Aboriginal women to give account of their experiences and stories of oppression through the telling of their own stories, their way.

In every sense, Indigenous autoethnography is a resistance discourse profoundly involved with tackling Indigenous people’s oppression from specific cultural and political standpoints. Such a discourse is meant to motivate our people to be decisive in self-determination to build collective and cultural capacity (Dowling, 2017, p. 68).

Validity

Conventional methods for measuring the reliability and validity of research do not typically align with a qualitative approach. Autoethnographers such as Webster and Mertova (2007) assert that personal narrative research redefines terms like validity, and reliability, “reaffirming that validity means achieving verisimilitude and reliability

means the account is trustworthy rather than replicable" (p. 95). Autoethnography positions researchers as vulnerable subjects, whose emotions, experiences, and humility are written into the narrative with the aim of encouraging compassion and empathy in their readers (Ellis, 1999). The ability of the researcher to be transparent, reflexive, and vulnerable contributes to the reliability of autoethnographic writing. Personal insight into the worldview of the researcher is perhaps a more honest declaration of a 'lens' than the adopted 'theoretical framework' of conventional research requirements (Wall, 2008). Autoethnography requires that researchers disclose their personal perspectives and anticipates these will be at least partially transformed through the participatory research process. Autoethnography anticipates that we will become 'more human' in our interactions with others and more able to be open-minded with what is unknown (Wall, 2008). The goal of autoethnographic writing is to create trustworthy stories that resonate with an audience and draw on supporting theory and data.

Debates continue over the legitimacy granted to autoethnography and the credibility of this method as scholarly literature and valid research (Anderson, 2006; Muncey, 2005; Pitard, 2017). Autoethnographic validity is often referred to in terms of its 'trustworthiness' and 'usefulness' as opposed to its 'accuracy' (Lincoln & Guba; 2007; Pitard 2017; Wall, 2008; Webster & Mertova; 2007). The importance of critically layering the personal within the cultural and providing a theoretical conceptual framework for the autoethnography was a theme addressed by Anne Harris in her presentation at the 2015 Art of Critical Autoethnography Symposium. Harris (2015) called for critical autoethnography which connects theory to the personal story. Ellis (2004) similarly states, "we must not neglect the 'ethno' part of autoethnography" (p. 200). Duncan (2004) cautions against purely emotional writing; a lack of transparency about the motivators behind the research; and neglecting to connect personal experience with relevant theory. Sparkes (2000), reflecting on his personal narrative has also raised issues such as the legitimacy of

story scholarship and the criteria used to judge the validity of narrative research. Likewise, Holt (2003) who published an autoethnography in 2001, discussed questions about validity, motivators, and self as data. Starr (2010) advocates for an autoethnography that has methodological rigour and that informs “more reflective, culturally relevant pedagogy” (p. 6).

Another criticism of autoethnography derives from the flexible and artistic nature of narrative writing that often produces ‘messy’ texts (Leggo, 2012) that raise further questions and avenues of inquiry rather than revealing solid facts. While it is important to have criteria in place to demonstrate academic rigour, Denzin (2014) warns of the potential danger in framing criteria for autoethnography that can place constraints on the writing practice, as opposed to encouraging opportunities to radicalise and decolonise the process and dissemination of research. Denzin (2014) suggests seven criteria that autoethnographers can aspire to meet in their research, these include:

- unsettling or challenging repressed meanings,
- storying representations that invite moral and ethical dialogue,
- providing vision for resistance or utopian alternatives,
- devising work that is caring,
- creating representations of data that show rather than tell,
- reporting with interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy; and committing to the political, functional, and collective (pp. 121-122).

Starr argues that autoethnography entails a process of “systematic sociological introspection” (2010, p. 3) and identifies four essential criteria for authenticity, including fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity (2010, p. 12). Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015) offer four goals for producing an autoethnographic text that represents a synthesised version of a list of thirteen criteria originally developed by Ellis (2000). They suggest that autoethnographic writing must: contribute to current knowledge; be evocative through

writer vulnerability; consist of an overarching narrative that is aesthetically crafted; and demonstrate an ethical representation of self and others.

Data and process

The benefit of gathering varied and multiple artefacts as sources of rich, autoethnographic data has been demonstrated across several studies (Denzin, 2018; Harris, 2014; Lasczik, 2018; Leavy, 2013; Mackinlay, 2019). Leavy (2013) asserts that stories can be informed by traditional social science data collection methods such as interviews or field observations, as well as from a more abstract, "accumulation of research, teaching, and personal experience" (p. 41). Data sources may include field notes, journal entries, narrative writing, photographs, documents, artwork, blogs, online discussions, "and other types of tools that provide evidence of how people experience and make sense of the world" (Kress, 2011, p. 54). Bolton (2010) developed five steps for collecting, analysing, and disseminating autoethnographic data that he coined as the "through-the-mirror-writing" process. Bolton's five steps consist of 1. The further collection of data; 2. Interpreting the data; 3. Beginning to analyse the data; 4. Developing data themes and patterns; and 5. Disseminating writing as reflective research (pp. 47-48).

As autoethnography continues to emerge, define itself, and struggle for acceptance, it is important that Indigenous researchers who apply it in their practice reflect on the use of the method and share their experiences with others on its compatibility with an Indigenous research paradigm.

4.3 Ethical considerations

Consideration of ethical issues associated with any project involving human participants is an important and ongoing part of the research process, both for gaining formal ethics approvals and ensuring "research is guided by general principals of respect, justice and beneficence" (Coghlan & Holian, 2012, p. 409). It is well known that Indigenous people

worldwide have been over-researched (Smith 1999) with little thought given to culturally safe methods of engagement. Research involving Aboriginal people adds an extra and unique layer of complexity as the researcher must consider not only those requirements and standards stipulated by national guidelines and university boards, but the specific Aboriginal community context in which the research takes place. My position as an Aboriginal person living and working on Country requires special ethical consideration and continuous reflexivity also (Coghlan & Holian, 2010; Roth, 2004). The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2018) purports the need for research ethics to go beyond fundamental 'do's' and 'don'ts' and adopt "an ethos that should permeate the way those engaged in human research approach all that they do" (p. 3).

The Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) support the inherent rights of Aboriginal people, including the right to be self-determined, and proposes an approach to research that allows the researcher/s and Aboriginal participants to be equal partners in a research project. The rationale of this document favours a research approach in which Indigenous people are full participants in a research project, share an understanding of the aims and methods of the project and are engaged in a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity with the researcher. Indigenous methodology is based on the fundamental belief that Aboriginal peoples involved in research should retain ownership and control of their own knowledge (Battiste, 2002).

A research agenda informed by an Aboriginal paradigm is strongly influenced by ethical principles that aim to ensure research that respects Indigenous worldviews and the aspirations of the community. "Indigenous worldviews contain of a set of values, morals, and lore, which dictate and guide behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions. Collectively, Indigenous Australians' worldviews are based on the principles of relationships, respect, connectedness, and meaning" (Craven et al., 2016, p. 35). Aboriginal research aims to build community capacity and a relationship

with the Aboriginal community based on respect, trust and cultural understanding that leads to self-determination. Giving voice to Aboriginal people in matters relating to their own education is vital as “the best results in engagement and outcomes arise when learning is linked to local community aspirations and values, respects Indigenous languages and perspectives, and involves local people in its development” (Fogarty, 2013, pp. 12-13). “We don’t want to be consulted; we want to be at the table” (Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation & Women’s Health Goulburn North-East, 2008, p. 8).

4.4 Summary

This chapter discussed my methodological choices for this research project and explained my researcher positionality. It introduced story as a central component of Indigenous culture and educational pedagogy. The benefits and limitations of storying methodology were considered along with their cultural appropriateness and ability to support a project concerned with self-determination. The research methods of autoethnography and research yarning were then introduced and described in the context of this project. The section concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations and strategies attached to the project’s methodology.

4.5 METHODOLOGY PART TWO – THE PROCESS

The following section outlines my approach to the research, discussing my methodological choices and processes for participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. This chapter provides detail of the two main methods applied in my research – autoethnography and yarning; along with a discussion of the ethical considerations and strategies to be applied.

4.5.1 Choice of methodology

The methodology for my project was informed by an Indigenous research paradigm that sought to examine the complexities of Aboriginal self-determination as understood and experienced by Aboriginal educators, including myself, in the public school system. My research process aligned with an emergent and transformative methodology as characterised by Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) eighth moments of qualitative research that supports "a stance that is democratic, reciprocal, and reciprocating rather than objective and objectifying" (p. 1118). This approach supported Aboriginal self-determination by giving direct voice to those Aboriginal participants involved in the research process and acknowledging the potential for research to be emancipatory and informed by a social justice agenda.

This qualitative study used a combination of autoethnography and research yarning methods that merged my personal narratives and perspectives of Aboriginal self-determined education with those of fellow Aboriginal educators who have worked, or currently work, in the Australian public school system.

Further, my research methodology was underpinned by a decolonising approach that highlighted existing Aboriginal deficit frameworks operating within the school system and challenged them by privileging Indigenous knowledge and methods and inviting the community to act as agents of change (Smith, 2012; Rigney, 1999). The data for the research was drawn both from the recorded and transcribed yarns with the Aboriginal participants; and my personal teacher logs, poetry, and diagrams which together created a patchworked auto-ethnographical thesis that ultimately aimed to provide an insight into how self-determination is understood and perceived by Aboriginal educators, including myself. Utilising Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing allowed for flexibility in the implementation of the research and for an emergent process to unfold, revealing new information and meaning.

Geia, Hayes, and Usher (2013) state: “for Indigenous people stories and storytelling is an integral element in people’s lives ... it is the way we make sense of our lived experience” (p. 15). Utilising yarning and storytelling as methods, therefore, provides meaningful insights into Indigenous epistemology that generates and handles research data in culturally sensitive ways.

My ultimate desire to effect positive change and improve the livelihoods of Aboriginal people through self-determined education both informed and formed by the research paradigm (Walter, 2013). The thesis then represents more than a singular autobiography but moreover, an autoethnographic contribution that speaks back to the dominant norms by privileging Indigenous voices and methodology. My methodological approach to this research project was heavily influenced by the use of narratives and Indigenist yarning research methods as outlined by Dowling (2017), Rigney (1999), Smith (2012) and other Indigenous academics. Autoethnography was my starting methodology as it allowed me to be reflexive about my own practice and perspectives and to share my experiences of self-determination both as an Aboriginal educator, and as an Indigenous HDR student (Hogarth, 2018a). As researcher, my methodology required that I be an interactive and transparent participant in the research process. The act of telling my story created the opportunity to be reflexive by splitting between me as narrator, and me as protagonist. “Although the two are the same person, this created the reflexivity which allowed me as the speaker to be moral even when as the protagonist in the narration I may not necessarily have been so” (Dowling, 2017, p. 100).

4.5.2 Autoethnography

Using an autoethnographic method allowed me to clarify my own perspectives of self-determined education in the school system and reflect on my experiences as an Aboriginal educator before engaging in yarns with others. “Readers of autoethnography are asked to feel the truth of

the stories being told and to almost become part of the story, engaging with the emotional, moral, intellectual, and aesthetical nature of the writing” (Jackson-Barrett & Hammond, 2019, p. 36). I chose to start my thesis with personal narrative as I felt it was not only important in establishing initial trust and connection with my readers but also in adhering to Aboriginal protocol which required, I be transparent and upfront about who I am, where I am from and my motivations and aims for this research. Overlapping stories compose our culture and our lives as Aboriginal educators in a western system.

Within each story is the quest to find our own genuine expression which cannot be limited to a single story from someone we do not know or can't really relate to. We must have connection with the storytellers. Autoethnography foregrounds this connection by using our own positionality, experience, and involvement as part of the research. (Jackson-Barrett & Hammond, 2019, p. 61).

Autoethnography application

Gannon, in her review of autoethnography (2017) concluded that “each autoethnographic text must find its own form, its own voice, its own structure. There is no replicable genre or strategy for autoethnographic writing” (p. 4). Rather applying autoethnography as methodology requires the researcher to “take certain expressive liberties associated with the arts” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 28) whilst simultaneously providing academic rigour by converting data into meaningful information that can be used by others. These became the two most essential tenets of my autoethnographic writing, which was not confined solely to one section of the thesis, but rather incorporated via the key elements of autoethnography through the entirety of the thesis. Below I discuss the various ways that autoethnography was applied in this research.

Creative freedom

As previously mentioned and demonstrated, in order to distinguish the academic writing from my first person writing I applied different fonts throughout the thesis and categorised my thesis into three main sections of writing. The bilya focus, consisted of my introductory narrative as well as complete or partial teacher logs, original poems and hand drawn mud maps (visual organisers) which appeared throughout the thesis. Auto-ethnographical research method "enabled me to move forward and backward, outward and inward, blurring the distinction between the personal and cultural" (Jackson-Barrett & Hammond, 2019, p. 69). It further allowed me to write my thesis in a creative way that simultaneously met the expectations, language requirements and protocols of both Aboriginal community and Western academia (waardan). The third writing focus and section consisted of darbal and represented the data and analysis sections developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal research participants, including transcripts of the recorded yarns and summaries of the data collected. These sections symbolise a creative process of merging of Western research and Indigenous methodology and the resulting knowledge produced at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2002).

Positionality

As discussed previously, autoethnography rejects researcher objectivity, instead promoting reflexivity through personal narrative that connects to broader social and cultural realities. Ellis and Bochner's chapter, *Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject* (2000), talks about autoethnography's abandonment of objectivity in design, method, and voice which enables the researcher to be the subject of inquiry as well as its author. The reflexive, and subjective nature of my writing embodies my dual role as research participant and research leader. The common thread throughout it - Aboriginal self-determination - provided the essential link between my

personal narrative and lived experience, and the broader cultural/social phenomenon I aimed to draw attention to.

Vulnerable and heartfelt

Autoethnography distinguishes itself from other forms of narrative writing in its ambition to be heartfelt and vulnerable, as well as personal. Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2014) identified researcher vulnerability among the “core ideals and best practices for autoethnography” (2014, p. 113). Through my use of autoethnography I positioned myself as a vulnerable subject by openly sharing my emotions, perspectives and mistakes. This assisted me to produce writing with the ability ‘to move’ others by encouraging deeper understanding and empathy in readers (Ellis, 1999).

Reveal injustice

As a research method, academic rigour and validity demands more of autoethnography than emotional release (Holman Jones, 2005). According to Chang (2008) an autoethnography should “help not only social scientists but also practitioners . . . gain profound understanding of self and others and function more effectively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds” (p. 13).

My autoethnography did not aim to provide conclusive answers but seeks to show “contradictions, gaps and ambiguities of multiple and conflicting interpretations” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 25). My application of autoethnography as method supported this aim and revealed that our experiences and perspectives of self-determination as Aboriginal educators were connected to and influenced by the discourses of power, race and culture (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). My use of autoethnography reflects a “sensitivity to discursive regimes of power, to the subtleties of context and to a critical orientation to injustice” (Gannon, 2017, p. 7) considered central to this research method.

Decolonising

Indigenous scholars have identified the potential for autoethnography to be a decolonising methodology where metaphors are applied and the delivery of story can be fragmented and varied to interrupt personal/political and local/global issues (Spry, 2011). I have applied the metaphor of fresh water and salt water systems merging to my research to symbolise the intersection of academic and Aboriginal priorities and requirements. My writing consists of varied writing and font styles and is presented in a patch work of fragmented sections, rather than in one uniform design. This resistance to academic conformity is an example of autoethnography as a decolonising method that can “break the colonizing and encrypted code of what counts as knowledge redefining silence as a form of agency and positioning local knowledge as the heart of epistemology and ontology” (Spry, 2011, p. 500). In my project, autoethnography enabled myself and the research participants to rediscover our voices as culturally autonomous human beings (Whitinui, 2014).

Varied data

Heewon Chang’s book, *Autoethnography as Method* (2008), presents autoethnography as a distinct variation of “ethnography with particular affordances including the use of three sets of data collection strategies, each producing different types of data: personal memories, self-observation, and external data” (p.143). My autoethnography has incorporated the use of all three data types; my personal memories are offered via my teacher logs and poems; self-observation is present in my narrative and my research yarning provided comparable, external data. Often, such as in this case, autoethnography is one component of a larger project, so that the researcher’s account and personal data (memories and observations) sit alongside the data of other research participants who share similar characteristics (Change, 2008). This adds validity of the co-constructed findings.

Indigenous political agenda

Houston (2007) argues that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers in Australia, an Indigenous autoethnography is a more “legitimate and respectful means of acquiring and formulating knowledge” because it combines storytelling traditions with academic practices (2007, p. 45). The ability to be able to share and learn through the use of storytelling was a major factor in my application of autoethnography and story has a significant place in this thesis. Houston also makes the point that those Indigenous scholars who are adapting autoethnography for their own purposes “have an overtly political agenda that is unapologetic in its commitment to ethical and communal outcomes” (2007, p. 45). Issues of power and injustice are emphasised as many autoethnographies are “written by people who have suffered in silence for too long” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24). My autoethnography embodies the political agenda of Aboriginal self-determination and is informed throughout by my ethical responsibility and commitment to Aboriginal community.

Achieving autoethnographic validity

Autoethnographic validity is often referred to in terms of its ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘usefulness’ as opposed to its ‘accuracy’ (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). This is because the validity of autoethnographic methodology emphasises not only the impacts on the researcher and research participants, but on the readers as well. Ellis argues that in the case of autoethnographic research, validity is determined by the reader’s experience and whether they find it “life like, believable, and possible” (p. 67). The validity of an autoethnography is also measured by its ability to assist readers to “communicate with others different from themselves and to improve the lives of researchers, participants. and readers” (Ellis, 2004, p. 64). I chose to use an autoethnographic method because of its potential to reach others on a personal level that invites them to invest in the story and follow along with the research journey. The application of a narrative method allowed my research to remain accessible and culturally

relevant to those Aboriginal people it aimed to empower, and this was an influential factor in my choice of method.

4.5.3 Research yarning

My use of autoethnography and yarning methods align with Lincoln & Denzin's (2003) sentiment that writing and research should engage with social justice by supporting and provoking good ongoing conversation about life and society that employs language and dialogue that may be non-traditional, and narrative in structure. Yarning methodology does not position the researcher as independent from the story and instead makes us aware of our place in the world. From this position, 'research yarns' are situated interactions with embedded social, cultural, and political narratives that can be analysed for common understanding and deeper meaning. Recording and transcribing research yarns with the Aboriginal participants enabled them to speak directly and freely on the topic of Aboriginal self-determination in schools and to share their personal experiences and understandings. The yarns also provided me with an opportunity to intimately discuss my experiences and views on self-determination in the school sector with Aboriginal peers; listen deeply to their stories and consider new lines of thought in our exchanges. This collaborative process supported and developed our collective knowledge and perspectives as Aboriginal educators and ultimately produced the rich data needed to compare my initial understandings and applications of self-determination in the school system with those of the Aboriginal research participants.

The deliberate choice of 'yarning' as a method allowed me to let the potential recruits know that we would be talking 'Aboriginal way' as opposed to 'whitefulla way'. This cultural understanding of yarning allowed for fluid movement between social and research dialogue with a shared understanding of what was for the 'record' and what wasn't and when the research component of the yarn 'was done'. The relationships established since the initial connections with the research participants

have continued beyond the recorded yarns and include regular, informal, and social communications via email, text, and social media. This is characteristic of qualitative research and Indigenous methodology that emphasises relationships, connection and ongoing conversation between researcher and participants.

Each yarn session was conducted online via a live, face to face Zoom link and began with a casual introductory yarn, I'd typically say hello and thank them up front for giving their time and support to my research project. Often during this initial social yarn, family and community information was exchanged and connections were established between me and the participants. I found I was able to develop an easy rapport with each participant based on our common affiliations, language, and areas of interest and passion. I then let the participant know that I was about to begin recording and this signalled the official start of the 'research' component of the yarn. I delivered an Acknowledgement of Country, which is standard and polite cultural protocol among most Aboriginal persons and communities, then proceeded to introduce myself, my Aboriginal connections, education background and context for the research. Participants were then invited to introduce themselves, providing as little or as much personal and family background as they felt comfortable with. I had a series of questions that I worked through, but at the participant's pace. I tried to interrupt and redirect the conversations as little as possible and did not place a time limit on yarn sessions, allowing each participant to talk until they felt they had contributed all they wanted to and letting the yarn come to natural close with the mutual understanding that communications regarding the research process would be continued. Participants were also made aware of the fact that they could contact me anytime to submit additional contributions and ask questions. The recorded yarns were all between 60 and 120 minutes in length and most participants also forwarded additional written data to be added to their responses.

4.5.4 Research participants

Table 3

Research participant demographics

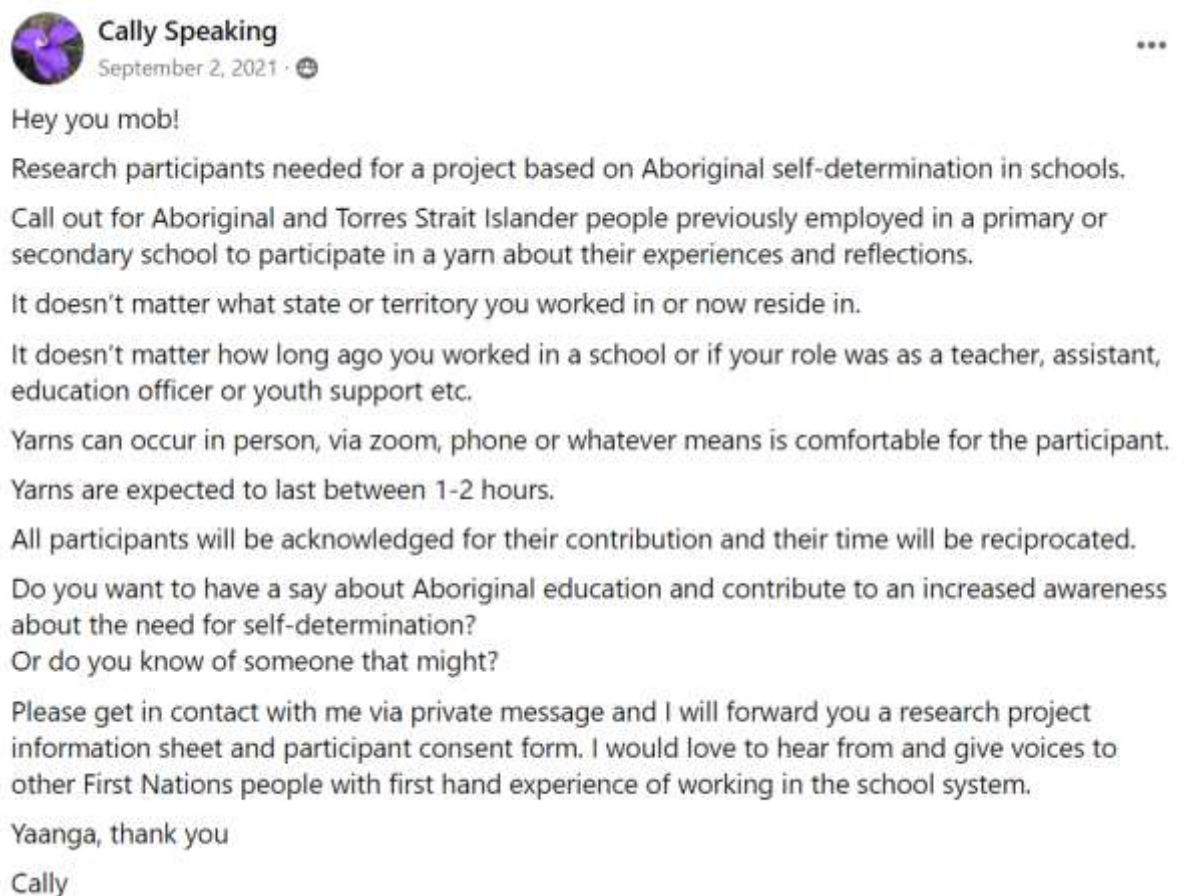
Participant	Gender	Main role held in Schools	Participant Location (time of yarn)
Emily Broderick	Female	Secondary Teacher Aboriginal Program Leader	Perth, WA
Joshua Waters	Male	Youth Worker Secondary Teacher	South-East QLD
William Rutherford	Male	Aboriginal Education Assistant – Primary and music	Toowoomba, QLD
Tonia Chalk	Female	Secondary Teacher	Toowoomba, QLD
Judith Birchall	Female	Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) - Secondary	Perth, WA


Qualitative research often involves a smaller number of participants than quantitative. This can be because the methods used such as in-depth interviews are time and labour intensive but also because many people are not needed for statistical analysis or to generalise. Data are typically collected through facilitated discussions, semi-structured interviews and observation and then analysed for themes drawn from the participants' interactions and experiences. Gaining access to people's views and experiences is the key to qualitative research and the generation of rich data (Porsanger, 2004). It was this line of thought that influenced my decision to recruit a maximum of six research participants. I advertised my need for Aboriginal research participants via the Aboriginal Facebook

page 'Connecting with Country' which I co-administrate and requested that any Aboriginal persons with experience in the school sector and interested in having a yarn about self-determination, contact me for further information. I appreciate that many Aboriginal people have valuable perspectives of self-determination to contribute; and also that not all Aboriginal people involved in education have a clear understanding of or stance on self-determination, and so for the purpose of focusing the research and generating comparative data, I decided it was preferable to recruit Aboriginal people, either currently or previously employed in the school education system who had a perspective and experience of self-determination they wanted to contribute.

Figure 11

Screen shot of research participant recruitment post on LogiCally Speaking.



 **Cally Speaking**
September 2, 2021 · 🌐

Hey you mob!

Research participants needed for a project based on Aboriginal self-determination in schools.

Call out for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people previously employed in a primary or secondary school to participate in a yarn about their experiences and reflections.

It doesn't matter what state or territory you worked in or now reside in.

It doesn't matter how long ago you worked in a school or if your role was as a teacher, assistant, education officer or youth support etc.

Yarns can occur in person, via zoom, phone or whatever means is comfortable for the participant.

Yarns are expected to last between 1-2 hours.

All participants will be acknowledged for their contribution and their time will be reciprocated.

Do you want to have a say about Aboriginal education and contribute to an increased awareness about the need for self-determination?
Or do you know of someone that might?

Please get in contact with me via private message and I will forward you a research project information sheet and participant consent form. I would love to hear from and give voices to other First Nations people with first hand experience of working in the school system.

Yaanga, thank you

Cally

Those five people who responded to my post and opted into the research project were provided with the formal UniSQ research paperwork

including a Research Participant Information Sheet and Research Participant Consent Form. They were also able to note their preferred option for conducting the yarn; in person (if viable), phone, Skype, or Zoom; and select whether they were happy for the yarn to be recorded and transcribed. On receipt of the signed consent form, I contacted each participant directly to thank them for agreeing to contribute my research project and invited them to propose a date and time for the research yarn. Due to extensive travel distances between myself and the participants, all opted for an online Zoom yarn. All participants also agreed for our yarns to be recorded. Several days prior to scheduled yarns I would send the participant a courtesy reminder via email along with the questions we would be talking through during the yarn. This ensured the participants felt confident and comfortable with the nature and content of the upcoming yarn prior to commencing it and prevented the research participants from feeling 'surprised' by anything.

Once the recorded yarn was complete each of the five participants were informed that they would be consulted regarding any decisions and developments relating to their contributions and that no information would be used or disclosed without ample time for their review, consideration, and final approval. At this stage, participants were also asked to start thinking about whether or not they wanted their identity to be disclosed in the research and the level of personal detail they wanted included. My Research Participant Information sheet explicitly stated that participants would retain the authority over their level of disclosure and that this decision would be confirmed closer to submission when the participant transcripts could be read within the entirety of the thesis context. Participants were also aware from the research information and consent paperwork that their involvement in the research was always at their full free and informed consent with the option to withdraw at any stage before final submission. It was also important that I communicated with the Aboriginal participants up front that any data they contributed would be respected as their intellectual and cultural property and treated

as such by being stored securely in the university data system and be accessible only to the individual contributors.

Soon after the research yarn had been conducted with each participant I arranged for an e-gift card through my university research budget to be emailed to each as a symbol of gratitude for their contribution to the research. This is quite standard practice, and I would assume that most participants were aware that the expense of this gesture was covered not by myself, but by my institution. From an Aboriginal perspective, this is not sufficient to be considered adequately reciprocal. To demonstrate my sincere and personal appreciation for the time, support, and wisdom each participant had so generously volunteered, I had to respond with something that required my personal efforts and time also. I made original art or craft pieces for each participant that reflected my home Country and our shared Aboriginal identity and along with a thank you card, each was mailed off to its individual participant. The appreciation I received for these small handmade gifts far exceeded that in response to the \$100 gift card and reinforced to me the importance of honouring our Aboriginal protocols and ethics first and foremost when developing our methodology as Indigenous researchers. In between email updates regarding the progress of the research process, I kept in touch socially with all participants via social media and text messages. These five people are not just participants in my research project, they are now members of my extended Aboriginal community that I share an ongoing affinity and connection with because of our in-depth yarns, personal sharing, and ongoing correspondence.

4.5.5 Data collection and analysis

Yarning data

I began my yarning data collection with an audio recorded self-interview in which I played the roles of both interviewer and responder. I exaggerated the antagonist angle of the interviewer and spoke as

candidly and honestly as I could as interviewee. This exercise allowed me to establish some 'base line' data that offered a point of comparison between my perspectives and those of the research participants in response to the same questions. Once I had recorded and transcribed my own 'yarn' and established a template for how each participant's 'story' would be presented in the thesis I proceeded to transcribe the yarns from audio to text via a secure, university approved program. I then went through each transcript while also listening to the recoded audio to correct any inconsistencies and ensure any Aboriginal language was spelled and interpreted correctly. I decided it was important for each yarn or story to be written up as an individual and distinct section to retain the voices and expression of each participant and their contribution. At the end of each story, I have added my reflections based on my initial analysis of each transcript. This analysis was based on a question framework and required I ask of myself as reflexive researcher: What do I notice in each account? Why do I notice what I notice? How can I interpret/articulate what I noticed? As with previous personal reflections, these are again distinguished by the font.

Once drafted, participants were provided with a copy of their story, which included an introduction/background section; selected parts of their yarn transcript; and a summary at the end reiterating the key points/perspectives regarding Aboriginal self-determined education. Participants then had at least two weeks to review the draft; to request the addition, removal or block out of any information; and to respond to my initial summary/reflections by way of adding to or amending them to better reflect their position. In the case of this study, all participants felt strongly about disclosing their identity and Aboriginal community affiliations and 'standing behind their words'. Draft stories came back with only minor edits and additions, and overall, the back-and-forth process between me and the participants in relation to the data was a smooth and easy one with minimal discrepancies. I feel strongly this is due to the relational nature of this research and the fact that I shared the same lived

experience, social reality, and cultural language with the participants. It contributed to the in-depth dialogue achieved during the research yarns and the rich data collaboratively produced.

Trustworthiness in yarning methodology is determined by the researcher's ability to accurately interpret and present the contributions of research participants and ensure their data 'rings true' so as to be "embraced by them as expressing theory and practice already trialled" (Wadsworth, 2001). This was achieved through the use of collaborative reviewing, drafting and member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) which involved taking transcripts and interpretations back to participants to allow them to "see how their own speech objectified and represented them" (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 223).

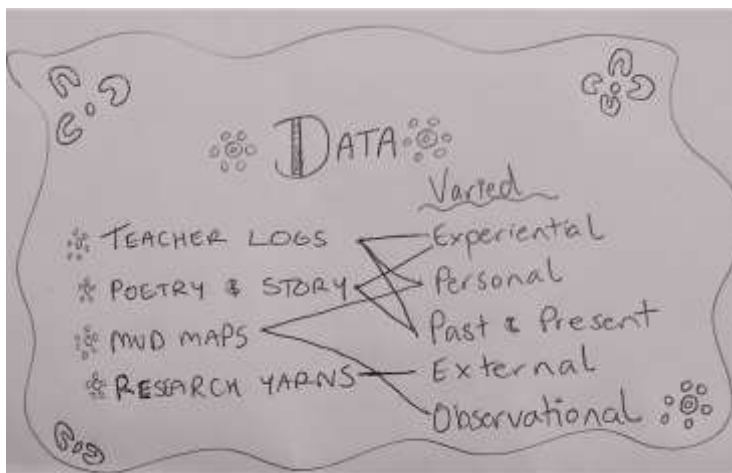
Data analysis

Each participant returned their own transcripts and story drafts with minimal changes along with their permission to allow my supervisors to read them so they could assist me in my analysis and presentation of the data. With the initial drafts and reflections approved by participants and reviewed by supervisors, I moved on to the second phase of my data analysis which consisted of a thematic analysis based on the responses and reflections collated from the research yarn questions. These questions were consistent across all participants and provided a clear point of data comparison. Riessman (1993) suggests that to determine the truth value of the data, a narrative should be situated within the larger social or political structure so that the researcher can search for consistencies and compare against the narratives of others. I analysed how my perspectives aligned or diverged from those of the research participants; and how the perspectives of the participants differed from each other. I identified any new lines of thought or inquiry that I had not previously considered in relation to Aboriginal self-determination in education and linked these to the relevant theory to provide an in-depth analysis of the data collected for each question, along with an explanation of how this comparative and

thematic analysis informed my overall conclusions about the answers posed. As researcher, I needed to consider the overall coherence of my narrative and identify emergent common terminology and themes.

The third and final phase of my data analysis brought the research project full circle by returning to the two overall research questions that informed my project, which I answered to the best of my ability, based on my renewed knowledge and understanding generated through the autoethnographic and yarning methodology and resulting data. I referred to the yarning data and supporting theory when explaining how my understanding of Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector had been reinforced, challenged, and transformed as a result of the research process.

Figure 12
Data types



This diagram lists the data collated for this research on the left, lines connect the data with the data 'types' listed on the right.

Figure 13
Producing and working with data



This diagram represents the two main methods for data collection –autoethnography and yarning- along with the processes of sharing and analysing the data including co-creation and story-telling.

4.5.6 Ethical considerations

Consideration of ethical issues associated with any project involving human participants is an important and ongoing part of the research process, both for gaining formal ethics approvals and for ensuring “research is guided by general principals of respect, justice and beneficence” (Coghlan & Holian, 2012, p. 409). Research involving Aboriginal people adds an extra and unique layer of complexity as the researcher must consider not only those requirements and standards stipulated by national guidelines and university boards, but also the specific Aboriginal community context in which the research takes place. “Indigenous methodologies require scholars to think critically about their research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that indigenous peoples’ interests, experiences, and knowledge must be at the centre of research methodologies and the construction of knowledge concerning Indigenous peoples” as emphasised by Australian scholar from the Narungga nation, L. I. Rigney (1999, p. 119).

My research methodology was informed by the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) which supports the inherent rights of Aboriginal people, including the right to be self-determined and proposes an approach to research that allows the researcher/s and Aboriginal participants to be equal partners in a research project. The rationale of this document favours a research approach in which Indigenous people are participants in the research project, share an understanding of the aims and methods of the project and are engaged in a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity with the researcher. My methodology was based on these same principals and an understanding that the single most important ethical principle of Indigenous research is that Indigenous peoples retain control of their own knowledge” (Battiste, 2002).

In the context of my research project, the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) were relevant to the

document's entirety; however, there were principles that had obvious implications and relevance, and these are set out in Table 5 below, along with strategies for how I addressed them in this research project.

Table 4*Consideration of the Research Ethic Principles*

PRINCIPLE	ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PRINCIPLE
Principle 1 Recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples, as well as of individuals, is essential.	Do not pre-empt or assume all members of the participant group will think, respond, and contribute in the same way. Respect the individuality of all participants and ensure each of their voices is heard and valued.
Principle 2 The rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination must be recognised.	Ensure research aims and methodology support the right of Aboriginal self-determination. Knowledge and findings to be generated in partnership with the research group. Participants have authority over their disclosure; contributions and data.
Principle 5 Indigenous knowledge, practices and innovations must be respected, protected, and maintained.	Ensure any work disseminated and/or published references and credits the Aboriginal participants and community according to their desires and requirements. Formally acknowledge the traditional landowners and custodians at the start of each group discussion and meeting. Allow Aboriginal cultural protocols and expectations of the Aboriginal participant group to inform my practice and processes of data collection and dissemination as a researcher.

PRINCIPLE	ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PRINCIPLE
	Ensure research participants can contribute in ways that are culturally familiar and appropriate to them – i.e., to state responses in their home language.
Principle 6 Consultation, negotiation and free, prior, and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples.	Make my intentions, purpose, and motivations explicit and clear from the outset and in all communications with the Aboriginal research group. Ensure the freedom always remains with Aboriginal participants to withdraw from the research and/or retract personal contributions without question.
Principle 7 Responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.	Provide regular and ongoing updates on the progress of the research to the Aboriginal participants and maintain informal, social contact also to continue nurturing the relationship
Principle 8 Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.	Make my intentions, purpose, and motivations explicit and clear from the outset and in all communications with the Aboriginal research group. Review the research data, summaries, and findings collaboratively to ensure participant contributions are reflected as intended.

PRINCIPLE	ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PRINCIPLE
<p>Principle 11 Indigenous people involved in research, or who may be affected by research, should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.</p>	<p>Ensure research aims and methodology support the right of Aboriginal self-determination.</p> <p>Include research group as co-creators of knowledge in the research project.</p> <p>Ensure that all content intended for dissemination and/or publication is first reviewed and approved by the Aboriginal community to ensure their knowledge is recognised and remains in their control.</p> <p>Enable to participants, based on their heritage, to shape how the research process unfolds.</p> <p>Ensure any work disseminated and/or published references and credits the Aboriginal participants and community according to their desires and requirements.</p> <p>The professional reputation and well-being of research participants will remain priority when reviewing and including data related to past and current workplaces. Any potential risks will be identified and discussed with participants to ensure they are making fully informed and considered choices.</p>

The principles listed above are taken directly from the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies, developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012.

4.5.7 Summary

This second part of my Methodology section outlined my research process and discussed the methodological choices I made regarding the processes of participant recruitment, data collection and analysis; and dissemination. Details of the two main methods applied in this research – autoethnography and yarning – were discussed along with an overview of the ethical considerations and strategies that were applied.

4.6 *End of Waardan*

Please proceed to Darbal.

CHAPTER 5: DARBAL

Figure 14
Darbal diagram



We have now reached the third and final section of this PhD thesis. This section represents the 'darbal' phase of the research project, where new knowledge was produced at the intersection (cultural interface) of Western academia and Indigenous Knowledge (or the saltwater - waardan and freshwater - bilya in this analogy). The knowledge shared in this section is the direct outcome of this merging process and does not fit entirely or neatly into one system or the other. Rather it is a representation of and a testimony to the lived reality of the researcher and participants that necessitates 'walking in both worlds' and navigating between two overlapping, and at times, competing, knowledge systems. This is represented through the merging of both bilya and waardan writing styles in the darbal section.

This section presents the data and provides analysis that draws from my autoethnographic writing. The cultural realities of Aboriginal educators working in schools and their perspectives of self-determination are shared, summarised and analysed against my teacher log data to highlight points of similarity and divergence.

Bolton (2010) developed five steps for collecting, analysing, and disseminating autoethnographic data that he coined as the "through-the-mirror-writing" process. Bolton's five steps consist of: 1. The further collection of data; 2. Interpreting the data; 3. Beginning to analyse the data; 4. Developing data themes and patterns; and 5. Disseminating writing as reflective research (p. 47-48). I have applied this particular process to my own autoethnographic and yarning research data, as outlined below:

1. Further collection of data: was achieved through the yarn research with participants. Initial data was autoethnographic.
2. Interpreting the data: was achieved through the key reflections co-constructed between researcher and participant.
3. Beginning to analyse the data: was achieved through an analysis of the common themes and points of divergence, across the participants (These findings are presented in data tables later in the section).
4. Developing data themes and patterns: was achieved by identifying connections between my autoethnographic teacher logs, and the yarning reflections.
5. Disseminating writing as reflective research: was achieved by providing an analysis of the identified connections and discussing and connecting this back to the research literature, aims and questions.

Darbal begins by sharing the key highlights and co-constructed reflections from the transcribed data of the research yarns followed by a thematic analysis that reveals commonalities and divergences across the

research participant's perspectives of Aboriginal self-determination. This analysis will be supported by autoethnographic teacher log data.

Recommendations are then made in relation to the project aims and specific research questions. Darbal concludes with my closing thoughts on Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector and finally comes back full circle to rest at *bilya*, my starting point.

5.1 Introducing the story data

The 'story summaries' below have been produced from the original recorded 'research yarns' between me and each participant on a one-to-one basis. The transcribed yarns were many pages long and included social, personal and family/cultural yarning along with the research specific yarning material. For the purpose of making these yarns a reasonable length for others to read and engage with, it was necessary to refine the original transcripts to include the participants' voice only (by removing my questions and dialogue altogether) alongside subject matter relating specifically to the topic of self-determination. Once the yarns had been transcribed and edited back, the participants and I co-constructed the highlights and key reflections provided in this section. These key reflections are a summary of the main points and perspectives conveyed in the participant's yarn and then transcribed in the researcher's words which was an important process for measuring the accuracy and reliability of my interpretations of participant's views. I worked in collaboration with each participant to ensure that the key reflections appropriately and efficiently captured what the participant intended to convey. Decisions about final participant representation and the information each would disclose were also carefully reviewed and made at this point.

Before sharing the stories of the participants, I first disclose my own key reflections based on the responses I gave to the questions. I chose to answer my research yarn questions first so that my responses were an authentic representation of my perspectives and experiences of self-

determination prior to my research yarns with the participants, which I anticipated may influence and change my understanding. This provided me with some data that I could use as a starting comparison between my understandings and experiences and those of the research participants.

5.2 The story summaries

Full transcripts of the participant's yarns are available at the end of the section under 'Aboriginal Voices'. Presented here are the story summaries in the participant's first-person voice followed by the co-constructed key reflections from each yarn, summarised by the researcher. The story summaries are then followed by an analysis that connects the participant yarning data with my own teacher log data, revealing patterns and themes.

5.2.1 Cally's story summary

I think being in education has given me much different perspective and made self-determination a much more relevant and important topic in my life and I think this was really I guess increased and developed when I went remote and taught and administered up there for a couple of years.

I realised then and there how important self-determination was and how it was still being hindered in many ways and it was something that I decided I wanted to explore further.

Aboriginal self-determination is always about the Aboriginal community as a whole, as opposed to the self. Yes, it's a personal process also, but there's always that understanding and connection back to the community and it's understood that we only succeed if we all succeed and move forward together.

From an Aboriginal perspective I've never heard anyone say self-determination didn't exist before 1788, it's just had to change and

adapt the same as most elements in Aboriginal culture and society. It's not just about maintaining environment it's also about maintaining culture and identity in a society that makes that a lot more difficult now.

I feel that by going into education I'm able to be two ways strong, I understand the perspectives and arguments of the two different cultural sides and manage to navigate between them and I can empower students and pass on the skills and experience to help them to do the same thing.

5.2.2 Em's story summary

I'm a proud Noongar woman from the South-West of Western Australia. My family connections are to Ballardong and Wardandi Country and peoples.

I think in an Aboriginal context and in education settings, self-determination is just about having a voice and feeling you are being heard by people and them taking it on board. It's being part of the discussions and decision making and contributing an Aboriginal perspective and voice to school and education matters.

We need to stop putting these kids in a box. You know, like if they don't fit, they're just discarded. And they're so intelligent and they've got all these capabilities and they come here and get put down, after put down, after put down. We give them tutoring and more homework and tell them off when they're talking in class and the list goes on and on. But it's like, have we actually changed our approach or are we just punishing them for being who they are? We bring educators in who are not equipped and prepared to teach our students. And then the blame in the failure goes back on our Indigenous kids and their families.

Number one is being able to go and teach a class and have the students in that class view me as a teacher. First and foremost, that's really powerful, usually for Indigenous students.

We need a far more rigorous approach around who we bring in and recruit to remote schools so that the community is put first, not individual career aspirations.

Key reflections

The following reflections were co-constructed between the researcher, Cally and the participant Em. They summarise the key points from this participant's yarn and perspective.

Your own experiences of schooling as a secondary student were very difficult; there were no teachers or staff who understood the family and cultural background you came from. This motivated your decision to become a high school teacher and support Aboriginal students, who like yourself, find themselves struggling in a traditional classroom setting.

Being an Aboriginal teacher, is the best example of your personal self-determination and a powerful way to inspire and encourage other Aboriginal people to become self-empowered.

Aboriginal self-determination is primarily about recognising you have a voice and using it to contribute an Aboriginal perspective. In an education setting, this means contributing to discussions and decisions on school and educational matters.

Barriers to Aboriginal self-determination in education include the education system itself, it still favours a Western model of schooling that doesn't value Aboriginal strengths, values, and priorities. Aboriginal students are forced to 'conform' or be labelled as failures in this system.

Aboriginal scholarship selection often overlooks those students who do not score well on standardised aptitude tests. Schools are focusing on

certain aspects only and overlooking the skills, experiences, and capabilities these students have to offer.

You personally have not experienced much lateral violence but feel that at times having fair skin gives others the perception that you are 'less Aboriginal' or experienced than other Aboriginal people. This can diminish your 'validity' to have a voice.

Being one Aboriginal person among a large school staff can be an isolating experience. Getting your voice and perspective heard as a minority can be an ongoing struggle.

The Education Department needs to mandate that schools increase Aboriginal teacher recruitment so that Aboriginal staff become a visible presence in all schools. Our Aboriginal students can't be what they can't see. Aboriginal teachers and school leaders in education will change the way teaching and learning occurs.

The department also needs to provide more intensive and specific training to pre-service teachers so they can better understand and support diverse students and learn the practical skills needed to develop different pedagogies and implement different knowledges.

An Aboriginal educator network or communication group would be a great source of support for individuals like you working as the only Indigenous staff member in a school. Just being able to offer support and share PD opportunities and advice would be helpful.

Education departments and schools in remote communities need an overhaul of their current recruitment processes and school management. External staff are prioritised over local Aboriginal staff and few Aboriginal assistants are supported to move into teaching or leadership roles. The current set up benefits non-Aboriginal staff and Western values at the detriment of the communities.

5.2.3 Josh's story summary

I am a proud Gamilaroi man from the North-West Slopes and Liverpool Plains areas of New South Wales. I also have cultural ties

to the Euahlayi and Awabakal people. Currently I am a post-graduate research student with a University in QLD, where I specialise in the fields of Indigenous languages, knowledges, histories, epistemologies, ethics, and research methodologies.

Self-determination from my perspective essentially means to live your life on your own terms, as much as is possible within the context of this current society. This means being able to adapt to the current state of the world in ways that don't compromise your identity and/or your landscape.

It means being powerful but not in ways that you are dominating others but uplifting them. It means being in relation to people and Country in ways that uphold and maintain integrity, because you only exist in relation to those things.

I think the two-way approach is the best way to go where you have a school dedicated to teaching in alignment with both-ways.

Key reflections

The following reflections were co-constructed between the researcher Cally and the participant Josh. They summarise the key points from this participant's yarn and perspective.

Your experience of schooling was similar to my own. We both discussed the absence of any Aboriginal content and teaching and how the narratives were colonial and at odds with the teaching and learning happening at home and with community. Your school, like mine, was named after a colonialist who had a detrimental impact on the lives of the local custodians and a motto that featured the word 'truth' which we found to be ironic, and contradictory given the Aboriginal truth was never included. We both had one significant teacher in our high school years that spoke 'our language' and connected with us in a significant way.

Being self-determined in a colonial and western dominated system is very difficult, because as an Aboriginal educator you are working in a system that is fundamentally at odds with your ideology. You are always limited in your ability to operate and educate according to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing and at times can only resist, speak back and advocate for an Aboriginal perspective. To fail to adhere to western expectations, Aboriginal people are risking our careers and opportunities, our economic freedom, and our self-security and sense of dignity that is supposed to come with work.

The school system is based on conformity, competition, individuality, standardised testing, and student ranking. This is western imperial ideology that disadvantages Aboriginal students and their knowledges and skills. This stands in direct opposition to the collaborative, communal and practical approaches of Aboriginal society and fails to acknowledge alternative truths, knowledge systems and capabilities. In this system Aboriginal students are often perceived as 'failures' and subjected to low teacher expectations and career counselling towards employment or vocational training as opposed to further studies.

Beyond an education context, your self-determination comes from feeling self-empowered, having a strong cultural identity and a sense of connection to Country, culture, and community. This is partly inherent but also instilled in you by your mother and your interactions with community as young person. Growing up between two cultures and experiencing intergenerational trauma and its direct impacts gave me a broad understanding and the capacity to think and speak across different situations and contexts.

Being self-determined means being powerful, not by dominating others but uplifting them. Aboriginal self-determination is always in relation to people and Country because you only exist in relation to those things. It means seeing yourself through the eyes of your ancestors and not through imposed measures of value. Self-determination essentially means to live your life on your own terms, as much as is possible within

the context of this current society and being able to adapt to the current state of the world in ways that don't compromise your Aboriginal identity and values. Aboriginal students need opportunities to connect with their spirituality, Country, and kinship responsibilities, especially if this isn't happening at home, this helps students feel a sense of belonging and feel empowered in a changing world.

Major reform is needed at the departmental and school level if we are to progress towards self-determination. Approaches to Aboriginal education are still largely tokenistic, inconsistent, and lacking in genuine understanding, commitment, and community consultation. They are also highly susceptible to being diminished or abandoned when leadership changes. There has been a lot of talk of implementing Aboriginal perspectives, but little actual change or improvement on the ground. Introducing cultural governance structures and prioritising community ownership and input is essential. The most effective way to ensure Aboriginal perspectives, knowledges, pedagogies, values, and languages are embedded in school education is to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers and leaders. This will change the dynamic of the school and approaches to teaching and learning; the way the community interacts with the school and how student success is measured. This may mean exploring alternative pathways for Aboriginal teachers to formally transition from community into education, based on our own ways of knowing and being.

5.2.4 Tonia's story summary

My name is Tonia Chalk, and I am a proud Budjari woman from Southwest Queensland. I was born in Cunnamulla and am descended from the Dunn, Hearn, Allardice, and Roberts families.

Within the Higher Education space as an Aboriginal academic and even in the school system as a secondary teacher, I was and have

never been able to feel sovereign due to a range of factors related to white privilege and systemic racism.

For me the term 'self-determination' has been tainted by government bureaucracy and failed policy. It has become just another empty phrase like 'reconciliation' that gets thrown around and diminished to a white, watered-down version of what Aboriginal people actually want and need. I prefer the terms 'sovereign' or 'determined self' for this reason.

Key reflections

The following reflections were co-constructed between the researcher Cally and the participant Tonya. They summarise the key points from this participant's yarn and perspective.

Being self-determined as an Aboriginal educator, has been an ongoing battle for you to be heard, seen and have your Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing acknowledged and valued.

The term 'self-determination' itself is problematic and 'tainted' for you due to its past misuse by the government. Being 'sovereign' or 'determined in self' are preferable terms to you, but I understand the underlying principles of Aboriginal self-determination.

To be self-determined, means to be able to live, think and operate as an Aboriginal person, without control, interference, and judgement.

An individual's self-determination is always connected to the communal/community. It is never just about the 'I' but empowering others.

Many of the barriers to Aboriginal self-determination are still connected to the white privilege and hierarchies that permeate our institutions, including schools and universities.

Lateral violence is a serious issue. It needs to be called out. We must stand and work together so we can advance together.

It can be very isolating being an Aboriginal minority voice in a predominantly white team and institution speaking up alone on matters most others do not or do not want to understand. It can result in you being excluded, silenced, and exploited.

We can support our own self-determination by embracing our diversity as Aboriginal peoples and working together towards the bigger picture.

We need to put pressure on education departments and universities to undertake reform that increases the number of Indigenous teachers and academics and builds leadership capacity.

Ensuring Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing are embedded and valued in all education settings is crucial to our self-determination and well-being.

5.2.5 Will's story summary

My name is Will and I am a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi. My connection is to Wailwan Country where the Aboriginal settlement of 'Tin Town' is located near the township of Coonamble (or 'Gunambil', local Wailwan meaning 'full of dirt'). This is where I was born and spent the early years of my life.

You know, you sit down with the local people, and you talk to them about, beliefs, stories and all those old things. And so when I go to teach, I speak on the old people's behalf to bring in their teachings, you know, their wisdom. We've got to be teaching our lifestyle; if we start teaching our young children the ways of Indigenous knowing and being, then they know how to progress in our changing society.

Self-determination should not be about being separate but seeing our similarities and coming together to learn each other's ways equally.

My mother always told me we were peaceful people. And she said it didn't matter what race or colour you are; if you came to our Country and you respected it. You'd be welcome.

Key reflections

The following reflections were co-constructed between the researcher Cally and the participant Will. They summarise the key points from this participant's yarn and perspective.

A large motivation for you becoming involved in education was to share Aboriginal culture and help all young people to connect with this.

You understand that parents and grandparents are affected by intergenerational trauma and this has impacted on cultural learning at home and on traditional values that keep Aboriginal people connected and strong.

You understand that parents desire their kids to learn and know their culture and the old people want their knowledge, languages, and beliefs to survive and be passed on.

Your experience working in schools showed that cultural understanding, teaching and learning was not happening and you wanted to be part of the change.

Your self-determination has been largely influenced by your mother's teachings and your studies and research. This has given you the confidence to use your voice for positive change.

Your mother taught you the importance of traditional, cultural values and to listen to your ancestors. Part of your self-determination was trusting the guidance of your ancestors and listening to them in times of uncertainty.

Being self-determined as an Aboriginal teacher means using your voice to educate others, to tell your stories and to teach our way so all students can have a better understanding of Country and feel connected to it.

Aboriginal self-determination and education shouldn't be about being separate. It should aim to bring us together to learn each other's ways.

You have been taught by your mother that all people born on Australian soil are returned souls, each at different stages of connecting with Aboriginal culture and spirituality. You believe everyone is equal in their right and opportunity to connect with Country and traditional values, beliefs, and knowledge.

Lateral violence can be a barrier to self-determination. These behaviours are the result of intergenerational anger. As individuals we need to see the big picture and work together towards it for our kids' future.

Academia is still very 'white' and writing a thesis meant using language that many Aboriginal people would have trouble engaging with. This stops important stories being told and heard which leads to ongoing anger. To be self-determined we need to be able to research and write in our way.

Aboriginal people's experience and connection to Country and culture is very diverse, many students do not know anything but mainstream ways. Schools can be an opportunity for all students to connect or reconnect and to relearn and re-establish Aboriginal knowledge and beliefs and the traditional values.

You must follow cultural protocol wherever you go and teach. Speak to the Elders and introduce yourself first and ask for their acceptance and guidance in what you do.

5.2.6 Judith's story summary

My name is Judith, and I am a Yamatji woman with connections to Shark Bay and Carnarvon, and I was born and bred on Noongar Country.

My personal journey of self-determination has been a journey of learning about myself, who I am, where I'm from, where I feel connected to and letting go of any judgement. Building resilience and the motivation to educate myself so that I can assist others is part of my own self-determination.

When I've been allowed to work reciprocally with my peers or families self – determination has become more natural and accessible.

Self-determination as an Aboriginal person gives permission for others to strive for their own SD.

SD is important for everyone, you can't go through life living for someone else, we need to write our own narrative and fulfil our own dreams. Education assists us with this, it enables us to grow and become more than the product of our parents' generation.

Key reflections

The following reflections were co-constructed between the researcher Cally and the participant Judith. They summarise the key points from this participant's yarn and perspective.

Your self-determination is a continual process and a journey that began before you began in education; it was about self-discovery and coming to accept your identity and place. Education, however, has allowed your self-determination to develop and grow even further.

From your perspective, self-determination is important for all Aboriginal people. It is what moves us forward together and past the intergenerational trauma. We all want to speak and live for ourselves and not under someone else's control.

Self-determination is about developing your own self-awareness, education, and Aboriginal identity so that you can lead by example and empower others to do the same. You feel your self-determination is best supported when you are interacting with families and community. Helping others empowers you also.

While you feel that you have reached a good level of self-determination, you see yourself as a lifelong learner and have further ambitions you are striving for in this regard. Achieving your degree is one of your biggest self-determined achievements to date.

The main barriers to Aboriginal self-determined education are the education system itself, school administration and leadership; and their inability to genuinely support and integrate Aboriginal perspectives, aspirations, and values into school processes.

Administration and leadership often lack cultural experience and understanding, and this makes it harder to gain their patience and support on Aboriginal related matters. Aboriginal education and staff are always at the mercy of the current leadership; if this changes so can the resources and focus given to Aboriginal education and the value placed on staff.

Administration who lack cultural understanding do not value the time an AIEO needs to maintain family and community relationships. This often leads to AIEOs being scheduled into classes with behavioural issues to alleviate school pressures. In this way AIEO's are misused and underutilised. This can also undo a lot of hard work done to establish and build rapport and trust with community, students, and families.

If education departments and schools want to support Aboriginal self-determination, then all teachers and administration staff need to learn the impacts of colonisation and the ongoing impacts this has on

Aboriginal peoples' feelings about education and schools; and the importance of the work AIEOs do between school and community. This needs to remain a priority regardless of leadership changes and the number of Aboriginal enrolments at a school.

The only way schools and non-Aboriginal staff and students can genuinely learn Aboriginal perspectives and values is to interact with community through Aboriginal students, staff, and families.

Schools and their leaders need to support AIEOs to develop the skills and get the training they need to be confident and capable in their roles. The only pre-requisite for the job is to be Aboriginal and this can set people up to fail or feel inadequate if it is not followed through with support and professional development opportunities.

The best approach to lateral violence is to be proactive and create a learning and work environment that promotes respectful and transparent communications under leadership who model these behaviours themselves and provide a supportive and culturally safe workspace.

5.3 Summary

These story summaries, were drawn from yarning data collected under four main headings which included the participants' educational background; their understanding of self-determination; the barriers experienced and recommendations. These consistent discussion points produced comparable data that allowed common themes and topics across participant data to be identified and explored. The next section focuses on 'reading this data' and discussing the commonalities and divergences that emerged as a result of analysis.

CHAPTER 6: DARBAL (continued)

6.1 Reading the data

The following analysis provides a summary of the findings revealed through a topic-based analysis of the participants' yarning data and key reflections. It highlights the points of convergence and divergence in participants' perspectives and experiences of self-determination in a school setting. The information was drawn directly from the topics discussed in the research yarn which included personal understanding of self-determination; barriers to self-determination experienced as an Aboriginal educator; and recommendations for promoting and facilitating Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector.

Table 5 Participant Data Summary

Yarn topic	Em	Will	Josh	Judith	Tonya
Divergences or non-recurring participant perspectives.	Scholarship recruitment processes disadvantage Aboriginal students, especially those from remote backgrounds.	Many Aboriginal youths have also had little or no exposure to cultural learning and Indigenous knowledge. Self-determination comes through educating oneself both ways and is key to moving past trauma.	The trauma associated with Aboriginal families equips students with certain wisdoms and strengths. Accusing Aboriginal people of exclusion, or segregation on account of alternative learning is counter-productive.	Remote schools often disadvantage local community and benefit external, non-Aboriginal staff. SD begins with your own self-awareness and acceptance of identity.	'Self-determination' itself can be a problematic and an externally imposed concept. Being self-determined is about, despite the many adversities and barriers, 'never, ever giving up'. Pushing back and educating others is an unavoidable part of being self-determined.
Common understandings and perspectives of Aboriginal self-determination shared by the participants.	<p>Understandings: Self-determination for Aboriginal people is essential and important. A necessity, rather than a choice.</p> <p>Self-determination is a complex topic, there is no one definition, understanding or meaning, rather, it is varied and contextual, influenced by parents and family upbringing, cultural connection and level of education.</p> <p>Aboriginal self-determination is always attached to communal accountability and collective empowerment. Individual self-determination builds the capacity of families and communities to be self-determining also.</p>				

Aboriginal self-determination has always existed, it is the right and freedom as sovereign peoples to continue living according to our own choices, values, and cultures without interference and judgement.

Self-determination is an assumed right and want of Aboriginal people, but we are all at various stages of self-awareness and our own self-determination journey.

Being 'self-determined' for Aboriginal people is inseparable from Indigenous Knowledge, spirituality, ancestors, Country and culture.

Barriers:

There are many ongoing barriers to Aboriginal self-determination in schools, these include but are not limited to:

A lack of cultural understanding and commitment by school leaders and teachers.

Low academic expectations for Aboriginal students based on deficit views.

A largely 'western' system that continues to exclude Aboriginal strengths, values, and aspirations.

White privilege and fragility; systemic institutional racism.

Unfair staff and student recruitment processes.

Tokenistic consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal stakeholders.

Lateral violence.

Recommendations:

Self-determined education should aim to assist all students to connect with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Major educational reform and improved cultural training for staff are needed to improve departmental and school commitment towards cultural awareness and Aboriginal self-determination.

Self-determined education should aim to make Aboriginal students 'two-way strong' by valuing and maintaining home culture while helping them with acquiring new knowledge and perspectives.

Consulting and working with local community and Elders is an essential part of self-determined educational reform.

Separate schooling is not the desired outcome or long-term goal of self-determined education; but rather an alternative to an exclusively, western education that disadvantages Aboriginal students.

More effort placed into the professional development of Aboriginal staff; leaders need to listen and support their work aspirations, values and priorities.

Trauma needs to be better understood and catered for by schools and staff.

More accountability on education departments and institutions to increase Aboriginal staff recruitment and promotion.

Introduction of alternative pathways that recognize Aboriginal community educators and give them scope to contribute.

6.2 Analysing the yarning data against autoethnographic data

The following analysis consists of yarning and autoethnographic data that highlights common themes and perspectives regarding Aboriginal self-determined education. The data includes a selection of teacher log excerpts that have direct relevance to the participant yarns. The common themes identified through cross analysis are discussed here in connection to relevant theory and presented under the three main topics of understandings, barriers and recommendations.

6.2.1 Understandings of self-determination analysis

Theme: Being self-determined as an educator means being a part of the discussions and decision making around school policy and programs.

Teacher log data

September 02, 2017

Education is developed by society to best serve the needs, desires and values of that society. It makes sense then that just as societies differ in expectations and values, that so too will the schools that serve them.

We need to invite Aboriginal community in to be a part of the important discussions and decisions regarding the education of their young people. We need to elevate the voices of Aboriginal staff and value their expertise in developing policy and programs that impact their communities.

It's only when we understand and accept the end goals of a community or group that we can plan the right schooling steps to help students get there and apply the right tools to measure progress.

Feb 12, 2020

Too often programs and ideas have been implanted into Aboriginal communities and people after the planning and development has excluded them completely. There is no Aboriginal ownership of it then and it is unlikely to be effective and long lasting. I didn't want to make this mistake and develop yet another white-washed policy or program

that diminishes Aboriginal self-determination by only seeking endorsement rather than genuine collaboration. I made the choice to make Aboriginal staff my starting point. I needed to know their thoughts on this; their perspectives, frustrations and aspirations. The extra layer of complication comes from being sandwiched between the reality of a self-determined process and the school management that works to plans and timelines and keeping communication going between the two. It's helping school management understand the cultural reasoning and importance behind self-determined action that can be a challenge.

Yarning data

Em – “Being self-determined means being part of the discussions and decision making and contributing an Aboriginal perspective and voice to school and education matters.”

Tonya – “It is about being able to make everyday decisions based on community strengths and needs, and Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.”

Tonya – “Being self-determined in education requires us as Aboriginal teachers and academics to keep pushing boundaries, being loud, speaking up, taking up space, and never, ever giving up.”

Judith – “Self-determination is important for everyone, you can't go through life living for someone else, we need to write our own narrative and fulfil our own dreams.”

Discussion

My teacher log data relates to my role in Aboriginal education and my observations of the limited Aboriginal staff and community involvement in school policy and decision making. My logs recall experiences that specifically relate to the task of developing an Indigenous Engagement Program; and supporting the education aspirations of local Aboriginal staff and community respectively. My data presents a strong argument for Aboriginal consultation and voice in school related matters and rejects tokenistic collaborations that do not genuinely acknowledge Aboriginal aspirations, values and perspectives.

As Aboriginal educators, the participants identified having a voice in school decision making as being central to their self-determination. It is

worth noting that while the participants identified common barriers to Aboriginal inclusion in school governance, they also reiterated the importance for Aboriginal educators to continue 'using their voices' to 'push boundaries', even in the face of resistance. In this sense, self-determination is a responsibility as well as a right of Aboriginal educators.

As Cohen and Uphoff (1980) argue, true self-determination of Indigenous communities to develop their own education policy cannot be limited to participation in meetings that require approval of a pre-prepared policy. "Self-determination is analysed in terms of inclusivity in all aspects of the formulation of policy from the beginning to the end" (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980, p. 131). The significance of being involved in policy development and school decisions was identified as being crucial to the self-determination of the Aboriginal participants. My data also referenced the importance of promoting Aboriginal self-determination more broadly, through authentic community and school partnerships that value local knowledge, values and priorities. This understanding promotes Indigenous participation as a vehicle for progressing self-determination based on improving collaborative partnerships between government departments and Indigenous communities (Oakley & Marsden 1984).

Theme: The most powerful and authentic way to support and promote Aboriginal self-determination in schools is through increasing the number of Aboriginal school leaders and educators.

Teacher log data

April 11, 2019

Currently non-Aboriginal staff come to this land and school and view the school and its staff from a non-Aboriginal perspective. They judge the Aboriginal staff and students from their own cultural lens rather than the cultural lens of the people whose Country they are living and working on. A lack of commitment to local Aboriginal empowerment has

resulted in the Aboriginal staff remaining in assistant positions for many years while a succession of non-Aboriginal educators and leaders enter and exit at the detriment of the students and community. Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers and supporting their development into positions of leadership would allow a natural transmission of knowledge from older to younger generations and give the students examples of leadership and self-determination to aspire to. Why are we pouring time and money into external teaching staff when the community and students will benefit most from initiatives and approaches that support their own self-determination through local teacher recruitment and development.

February 22, 2020

We have new signage around the school which has sparked the motivation of Aboriginal staff to develop and include more local language in their classrooms. As of next week every assembly and school event or gathering will now begin with a traditional Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country and custodians as well as inclusion of language delivered by an Aboriginal staff member. Relatively simple to implement but so huge in terms of the message it sends to our staff and students.

I have accepted and adapted to a supportive role in the whole process. It is not my endeavour to lead or shape. The Aboriginal staff and wider community have all of the knowledge, motivation and ideas necessary to develop and implement the content and delivery they desire. My role is to listen to the Aboriginal staff, students, their families and the community and do my best to provide education that aligns with their perspectives, values and strengths.

Yarning data

Judith – “The only way schools and non-Aboriginal staff and students can genuinely learn Aboriginal perspectives and values is to interact with community through Aboriginal students, staff, and families.”

Em – “Number one is being able to go and teach a class and have the students in that class view me as a teacher. First and foremost, that's really powerful for Indigenous students.”

Tonya – “There must be a commitment to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional staff and educators in schools. This is the starting point for the collective, the community, and more importantly our visibility and expertise in the education space.”

Discussion

Data analysis revealed the shared perspective that increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers and staff is the best way to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, values and perspectives and promote self-determination.

From the perspective of my teacher logs, the data expresses a frustration with the lack of departmental and school commitment to local Aboriginal self-determination, particularly evident and problematic in remote communities where the reliance on external educators and school leaders diminishes opportunities for Aboriginal school staff to be empowered into these positions. This not only keeps remote schools' dependent on costly external expertise but also sends a damaging message to the students and families, that the best they can hope to aspire to in education is an assistant role.

Of course, the importance of increasing the number of Aboriginal educators and school leaders is applicable to all schools and communities. The research participants reiterated that our students need to see Aboriginal people in positions of leadership in order to ‘aspire to and emulate this success’. For Indigenous students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers provide the opportunity to see “Indignity reflected in positions of leadership, validates and reaffirms their belonging in an often non-Indigenous space and enables them to build trust and rapport with teaching staff more easily” (Mokak, 2017).

Recent research supports the idea of authentically supporting staff and students' exposure to local Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives by increasing the number of Aboriginal educators in the school system (Mokak, 2017). My log data explicitly supports this view and champions the ability of "[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators] to authentically connect schools with local Indigenous communities to promote educational opportunity and respect for cultural ways of knowing, being and doing" (Gruppetta et al. 2018, p. 3).

Additionally, as well as supporting their students in the key areas of learning, culture and community, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators can authentically fulfil the "complex and interconnected components of the role that support student and community elements of identity, well-being and belonging" (AITSL, 2021, p. 3). These skills and the underlying relatability are not readily transferrable to or understood by non-Aboriginal educators. Theme: Self-determination is not a term understood, perceived or actioned uniformly. Different people have different preferences for discussing this right.

Teacher log data

February 02, 2022

While most of my Aboriginal family and connections are not familiar with academic and theoretical terms, I would argue that the phenomenon and theories these terms denote are both experienced and understood by many Aboriginal people at an individual and community level. I also believe that even if it is not said or understood explicitly as 'self-determination', Aboriginal people in general desire greater control over our own affairs and a school system that genuinely understands, respects, and embeds local cultural knowledge values and language through community collaboration.

Yarning data

Tonya – “For me the term ‘self-determination’ has been tainted by government bureaucracy and failed policy. It has become just another empty phrase like ‘reconciliation’ that gets thrown around and diminished to a white, watered-down version of what Aboriginal people actually want and need. I prefer the terms ‘sovereign’ or ‘determined self’ for this reason”.

Tonya – “Self-determination itself can be a problematic and an externally imposed concept.”

Discussion

Both Tonya’s data and my own present self-determination as a complex term that means different things to different people. In Tonya’s experience, the term self-determination has been tainted by government misuse and imposition. From my perspective, an individual’s access to education and politics also significantly influences their perception of and familiarity with the term self-determination. This relates to the participants’ and my shared understanding of self-determination as an ongoing journey shaped by personal context. While we can assume that in our own way we all desire self-determination as Aboriginal people, we also recognize that our communities are at various stages of this journey and that self-determined attitudes and actions are not all progressing uniformly.

While I do not personally share Tonya’s sentiment, I do understand and respect it. Many Aboriginal people feel this way due to the shift in the government’s focus towards ‘reconciliation’ in the 1990s, followed by the current policy of ‘closing the gap’, which only served to further undermine Indigenous claims to self-determination. Davis (2012) argues that a return to more conservative government in 1996 showed greater antipathy to rights-based policy agendas for Indigenous people.

“Indigenous services were instead to be ‘mainstreamed’ and ‘normalised’ within a broader ‘neoliberal’ agenda” (p. 79). Within a mainstream context the deficit discourse that accompanied ‘practical reconciliation’ and the ‘closing the gap’ agenda further discredited self-determination.

Tonya's story also mentioned her preference for the term 'sovereignty' which is reflected in recent research and international discussions centred on Indigenous self-determination. Current discussions about self-determination include an increased awareness of and demand for sovereignty which has led to the two terms being used almost interchangeably. Sovereignty and self-determination are often used together, presented as two approaches to or conceptualisations of a single struggle. Taiaiake Alfred (2005) described "the two most important strategies" for Indigenous people as "assertion of prior and coexisting sovereignty" and "the assertion of a right of self-determination", describing these strategies as "woven together" (p. 37).

Theme: Aboriginal self-determination is always attached to communal accountability and collective empowerment. Individual self-determination builds the capacity of families and communities to be self-determining also.

Teacher log data

February 02, 2022

At times I question my own place and position as an academic. I need to step back and see the bigger picture and remind myself that while my academic goals may seem detached at times from the reality of my family and community, the work I am doing aims to change that and to empower my Aboriginal brothers and sisters and contribute to moving us forward as a collective.

Yarning data

Judith – "Building resilience and the motivation to educate myself so that I can assist others is part of my own self-determination".

Judith – "Self-determination as an Aboriginal person gives permission for others to strive for their own SD".

Josh – "Being self-determined means being powerful but not in ways that you are dominating others but uplifting them."

Tonya – “We need to build a community and take the attitude of ‘I don’t succeed if **we** don’t succeed’. This is the only way it can work, and that collective must be big and grow and grow and grow each moment of each day.”

Tonya – “Aboriginal peoples are diverse peoples, but when it comes to the bigger picture, we must remember that we are part of a collective community.”

Discussion

My teacher log data spoke of the disconnect I sometimes experience between my academic and Aboriginal community realities. Sometimes the trauma, grief and volatility that plagues my life leaves me questioning the point of my academic endeavours and their relevance to those people closest to me. This feeling of disconnect has largely dissipated since commencing this research. The wisdom and perspectives of the research participants’ helped me to better understand and accept how building my own capacity enables me to build the capacity of others with the goal of empowering Aboriginal people and communities. It reminded me of how an individual can be a catalyst for change and uplift and inspire those around them.

The significance of relationality and the attached accountability to the collective is discussed by Maggie Kovach (2005), who explains that for Indigenous researchers there is a sense of commitment to their people and community, based on the cultural principles of relationality and reciprocity. Similarly, Mills (2016) argues that for Indigenous people, freedom is not about “standing apart” but “standing with” (p.60). In this understanding, the dual meaning of ‘one’ (a person, a people) presents a collective identity and shared agenda for Indigenous self-determination. From this perspective, the application of ‘self’ in Aboriginal self-determination need not be problematic or considered contrary to the collective.

Rather the ‘self’ is interconnected with the broader Indigenous values of “interconnectedness, justice-seeking, truth-telling, resistance, and

survival in both testimonios and other Indigenous storytelling practices” (Cajaz, 2015, p.3). The data analysis revealed specific reference to self-determination as a collective ambition.

Theme: Being 'self-determined' for Aboriginal people is inseparable from Indigenous Knowledge, spirituality, ancestors, Country and culture.

Teacher Log Data

July 03, 2020

Local elders and school staff met and worked together to develop a program that covered the cultural knowledge and skills they feel are most significant and important for the students to learn.

It is a big step forward and carries great weight. It is evidence of the Aboriginal staff's empowerment within the school and a commitment to having culture embedded as an integral part of the regular school program and curriculum. It is a step away from culture being relegated to the occasional, token event and movement towards an environment and experience that values, maintains and is informed by cultural values, knowledge and learning strengths.

The students shone brightly, some in art, some in class, some on Country and most throughout the dancing ceremony. They showed such genuine respect to their Elders, who beamed with pride and joy at seeing their young people relish in cultural learning. Watching the students dance their Dreamings with such passion and focus gave me goosebumps. It seemed obvious to me that being connected to and sharing culture allowed these students to be and feel their best. We need to offer far more of it.

Yarn Data

Josh – “Self-determination, it means being in relation to people and Country in ways that uphold and maintain integrity, because you only exist in relation to those things.”

Josh – “Self-determination from my perspective essentially means to live your life on your own terms, as much as is possible within the context of this current society. This means being able to adapt to the current state of the world in ways that don’t compromise your identity and/or your landscape.”

Judith – “SD begins with your own cultural self-awareness and acceptance of identity.”

Will – “When I go to teach, I speak on the old people’s behalf to bring in their teachings, you know, their wisdom.”

Will – “We’ve got to be teaching our lifestyle; if we start teaching our young children the ways of Indigenous knowing and being, then they know how to progress in our changing society.”

Discussion

What was apparent across both the teacher log data and yarning data was that maintaining, honouring and learning Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are inseparable from Aboriginal self-determination and educational aspirations.

The data revealed the shared understanding that incorporating the knowledge, skills, strengths, culture, Country and Elders of Aboriginal students into schooling has positive impacts on the pride, self-esteem, engagement and understanding of Aboriginal students which in turn supports the self-determination of both students and community.

The yarning data placed particular emphasis on the ability of Indigenous knowledges to support Aboriginal students to navigate the everyday challenges they encounter. From this perspective “the provision of cultural safety and cultural security are foundational to restoring and maintaining social order in Indigenous communities” (Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Committee [ATSIC] 2011, pp. 123–134). Analysing this data revealed to me as the researcher that IK and culture are not only

educational rights and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples “but a source of strength and resilience.”

6.2.2 Barriers to self-determination in the school sector

Theme: A largely ‘western’ system that continues to exclude Aboriginal strengths, values, and aspirations in favour of conforming curriculum.

Teacher Log Data

January 12, 2018

Regardless of individual student demographics and the Aboriginal visibility of any one particular school and/or community, incorporating Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum and moving towards culturally responsive teaching practice should be a priority and focus of every Australian school. National initiatives such as Closing the Gap and incorporating local language and knowledge depend on consistency and dedication from school leaders along with a sound understanding of the importance and benefits of APAC for all Australian students. A comprehensive knowledge of traditional Aboriginal society and colonial history are vital to fully understand Australia’s social, cultural and political evolution and the ongoing legacy of this today in terms of Reconciliation and addressing Aboriginal disadvantage.

May 28, 2019

I have decided to try and re-write a NAPLAN test or two but with language, contexts and visuals that align more with our student cohort. The same underlying knowledge and skills will be needed to solve the problems and answer questions correctly but the format and examples won’t be totally unrelated to student’s lives. I want to demonstrate that what is the norm and standard for one cultural, social or other sub -

group may not be so for another and that a one size fits all approach will always fit some better than others.

Standardised testing raises some big questions about knowledge and education in general;

Must we all demonstrate our skills and knowledge in the same way?

Why is some knowledge considered more valid than others?

Can't there be room for diversity and divergence?

June 02, 2019

Comparing the highly academic private school where I completed high school to the small, remote school I now teach at, it is now glaringly obvious that the social and educational expectations I was accustomed to are irrelevant and alien here. The educational goal is not academic excellence and competition; and the life goals are not wealth and prestige. The main educational goal is learning the 'white way' sufficiently to be able to gain employment and walk in both worlds competently. Life goals value family, culture and community over money and status. Most desire to remain on Country and be healthy and good parents, the minority aim to follow career pathways that lead them away from kin and home.

September 3, 2019

New and often young, single teachers are attracted to remote teaching positions often for the financial and career incentives attached. With limited knowledge and exposure to Aboriginal communities and remote living they often struggle both professionally and personally. By the time the teacher has developed some proficiency and is ready to value add to the school and community their tenure is often up and they're ready to move on to something closer to home.

Worst case scenario, the teacher never really finds their feet. The cultural and geographical shift is too great for them to overcome and their limited teaching experience has not adequately equipped them for the academic and behavioural challenges they are constantly challenged

with. They leave, sometimes before the agreed contract has finished, disheartened and with the belief that either they cannot educate well or that the Aboriginal students they tried to teach were not capable of learning. Both very damaging to their overall mindset and perceptions of themselves, others and learning.

As many remote schools also attract or promote teachers looking to take on their initial leadership role, the guidance, resources and knowledgeable expertise needed to guide new teachers is often limited also.

These factors of course have enormous ramifications for the remote school, students and the community it serves.

A lack of leadership experience can impact not only on staff retention and the quality of teaching provided but also on the school's overall financial management and policy development.

The community become disenchanted with the school serving the career progression ambitions and leadership experimentations of outsiders more so than their young people and lose faith in the school and ever-changing staff to have their best interests in mind and at heart.

May 23, 2021

It can be difficult for scholarship students attending elite schools. They are often not coming from the same type of backgrounds and home lives as most other students.

Imagine coming from a remote town where you are treated as an adult; surrounded by your language, culture, country and community everyday and have the freedom to go wherever you please, when you please; to then being treated as a child and having your freedom and space restricted. He is like a square peg being forced into a round hole. If the college wants to offer to education to different students and give scholarships to Aboriginal students from vastly different cultural backgrounds, then they must consider the adaptations needed to effectively support their learning.

Yarn Data

Em – “We need to stop putting these kids in a box. You know, like if they don't fit, they're just discarded. And they're so intelligent and they've got all these capabilities and they come here and get put down, after put down, after put down.”

Em – “Scholarship recruitment processes disadvantage Aboriginal students, especially those from remote backgrounds.”

Em - “I think also, especially in remote settings, schools need better recruitment and application processes that prioritise Indigenous teachers and cultural competency. Too many teachers go to these remote community schools simply for the money, promotion and for the experience, and often they have a patronising, saviour type attitude. As soon as they start to actually understand and get immersed and build relationships, they are ready to move on again and all of that is wasted. And those poor kids get the worst outcomes of anyone.

Josh – “The school system is based on conformity, competition, individuality, standardised testing, and student ranking. This is western imperial ideology that disadvantages Aboriginal students and their knowledges and skills. This stands in direct opposition to the collaborative, communal and practical approaches of Aboriginal society and fails to acknowledge alternative truths, knowledge systems and capabilities.”

Josh – “At the moment, Aboriginal kids are only included and educated on the terms of the dominant culture and values of the people who are in the classrooms teaching it.”

Judith – “Remote schools often disadvantage local community and benefit external, non-Aboriginal staff.”

Tonya – “The school system is still dominated by a white Western curriculum, white staffing, and white conversations with little or no recognition of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.”

Discussion

There were several, strong correlations between the teacher log and yarning data for this theme. Both data sets indicated that it was highly problematic that Western imperial ideology still dominates most Australian schools and marginalises Aboriginal ways of knowing, being

and doing. Both the participants and I make mention of standardised testing and assessment along with achieving statistical equivalency as priorities that represent Western ideals of success (Chin & Nakata, 2008; Salik, 2003). We all advocated strongly against continued approaches to schooling that fail to acknowledge the strengths and knowledge that Aboriginal students possess.

We don't all have the same ideals and aspirations for the future and a mainstream approach to curriculum education will not automatically be the right fit for all. FN aspirations for education prioritises connection with Country, culture, language and kin. As Nakata (2007a) explains "Indigenous knowledge systems and western knowledge systems work off different theories of knowledge that frame who can be a knower, what can be known, what constitutes knowledge" (p. 8).

Conforming curriculum that fails to acknowledge the value of Indigenous Knowledge directly disadvantages Aboriginal students as "recent research has argued that the success of Aboriginal students is largely influenced by the ability of the school to value and nurture their cultural identity." (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020, p. 19).

Our lived experience as Aboriginal educators solidified our view that conforming curriculum remains a major barrier to Aboriginal student engagement and collectively we stressed the importance of schooling to assist Indigenous students to recognise their multitude of strengths and build on the Indigenous knowledge they already possess (Chin & Nakata, 2008; Salik, 2003). Schools that are dominated by Western values, processes and knowledge are failing to acknowledge, value and cater for the diverse knowledges and skills that Aboriginal students bring with them. Unless school leaders and educators involve the Aboriginal community in discussions and decisions, they risk providing more programs and policy that does not align with the culture of the Aboriginal community and which "fails to recognize or focus on strengths and the

provision of opportunities that facilitate growth and thriving” (Craven et al., 2016, p.33).

The participants also identified how conforming curriculum has detrimental impacts on staff recruitment processes in remote schools and for remote Aboriginal scholarship students studying off Country. This same perspective was explicitly shared through the log data. Remote schools delivering conforming curriculum will continue to recruit external educators who uphold this approach, rather than investing in empowering local Aboriginal staff to deliver a more inclusive program. If schooling is to adequately meet the needs of remote Aboriginal communities and students, then curriculum development needs to shift from broad departmental approaches that are nationally focused to an approach that is locally relevant and informed by the local community context (Nachtigal; 1994). This will empower Aboriginal staff and reduce gaps between the home and school cultures of Aboriginal students.

Another point raised through the yarning data was that conforming curriculum extends to Aboriginal scholarship applications and selection with priority given to those Aboriginal students who speak English as a first language and perform best on standardized entry tests. Remote students on scholarships are expected to just ‘fit in and adapt’ in radically unfamiliar learning and living environments often with minimal cultural safety and understanding provided by those charged with their care. The plethora of knowledge, skills and language these students possess goes unrecognized and we continue to judge them against Western, conformist standards.

The analysis of this theme showed a consistent rejection of conforming curriculum that fails to recognize and include the strengths, knowledge and culture of Aboriginal students. Rather, there was a shared understanding of the need for remote schooling to be bi-cultural and

provide the skills and knowledge required to participate in mainstream society; while simultaneously nurturing local cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge and the desire to remain on and contribute to Country (Tripcony, 2010). This shared focus on community input and collaboration supports and demands Aboriginal self-determination in schooling.

Theme: White privilege and fragility; resistance to educational reform and systemic institutional racism.

Teacher Log Data

Jan 5, 2018

My experiences as an Aboriginal educator in the school system has revealed to me an 'Aboriginal Threshold', which I describe as an invisible but enduring boundary within which Aboriginal people, educators and their ability to exert influence and practise autonomy are restricted and controlled by enduring systemic racism and white privilege. During my many years in the school system, I have experienced hope, success, and growth within Aboriginal education, as well as the despair and frustration in the face of the threshold. No one is resistant when the changes are not significant enough to cause any discomfort or personal effort. At a certain point, I have nicknamed 'the threshold' progress slows down however and there is far more uncertainty and animosity about moving forward. (Large scale changes) would cause some people discomfort, forcing them to reconsider their knowledge and opinions. It would require real compromise and unfortunately for many, that is too much and where the invisible line is inevitably drawn- the Aboriginal threshold. Individuals, schools, and society at large are often resistant to such compromise and change, especially if it challenges pre-existing dominant beliefs and attitudes or threatens the status quo.

October 20, 2019

Although on Aboriginal land our school largely operates under a mainstream and western cultural ideology that serves to disadvantage

those Aboriginal staff and students operating under their own culture and the social norms and expectations associated with it. Non-Aboriginal staff will form relationships with and seek advice from those staff who are most accustomed to 'white ways' and use this comparison in a way that can further disadvantage Aboriginal staff who have more traditional ways.

March, 17, 2018

Round Peg, Square Hole – Conformist Schooling

Round peg, square hole

looks like it should fit at a glance

on closer inspection two distinct shapes, with obvious similarities but significant differences

far more square holes than round pegs in general

round pegs forced to fit in, only square holes provided

different strategies used to make the round peg fit –greasing, coaxing, pushing

rarely are round holes readily accessible or a mainstream feature

round holes are an extra accommodation sometimes added on if round pegs are present

the presence of round pegs has little impact on square pegs and their holes

the round pegs are influenced in every way by square pegs and square holes

Square peg leaders don't see the struggle many round pegs go through to fit in or understand why some fall away

the square pegs feel natural and at ease in their familiar square holes

the round pegs can fit in, but usually not without some discomfort and difficulty.

Aboriginal child at school-

Round peg, square hole.

October 18, 2018

Schools are not politically or economically neutral entities separate from the discourses of dominance and oppression. They serve the goals and priorities of the dominant society that design them and inform their practices. They transfer the knowledge and skills they deem important and valuable to the exclusion of others. But who gets to decide what is deemed valuable? Significant? Or even true? How do we all end up coerced into conforming? What are the risks if we don't?

Yarn Data

Tonya – "I've never been able to feel sovereign due to a range of factors related to white privilege and systemic racism."

Tonya – "It can be very isolating being an Aboriginal minority voice in a predominantly white team and institution speaking up alone on matters most others do not or do not want to understand. It can result in you being excluded, silenced, and exploited."

Will – "Academia is still very 'white' and writing a thesis meant using language that many Aboriginal people would have trouble engaging with. This stops important stories being told and heard which leads to ongoing anger. To be self-determined we need to be able to research and write in our way."

Josh – "To fail to adhere to Western epistemology and imperial pedagogy, we risk our careers and opportunities, our economic freedom, and our self-security and sense of dignity that is supposed to come with work."

Discussion

My teacher logs shared my perspective of white privilege and systemic racism as major barriers to Aboriginal self-determined education in general and several participants mentioned them as major barriers to their own self-determination as Aboriginal educators in the school system. The data advocated for an approach to combating white privilege and systemic racism in schools through the dual approach of decolonising and Indigenising. Both the connection and the distinction between Indigenisation and decolonisation have received considerable attention in recent literature.

Indigenous scholars argue that both are essential but distinct components to Indigenous education reform with the work of decolonising schooling necessarily preceding that of Indigenising education. The data may not directly name these concepts, but it does explicitly advocate for what each concept entails and represents. Decolonisation challenges the notion of one universal truth or knowledge system elevated above all others (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000; Battiste, 2013; May & Aikman, 2003; Smith, 2012) and respects Indigenous peoples "educational pluralities, multiplicities, and diversities" (Battiste, 2013, p. 107). This lays the foundations for the educational reform that both the participants and I feel is necessary and recognises Indigenisation as beneficial for all learners, and "decolonization as a process that belongs to everyone" (Bouvier, 2013, p. 9).

Literature relating to Indigenous research has explored the concept of non-Indigenous 'gatekeepers', or those persons who hold the authority to deny or grant entry and access to others (Heath et al., 2007; Murgatroyd et al., 2015; Shay, 2016). Shay (2016) describes the metaphorical gate in the concept of gatekeeping in Indigenous communities as the "entry way to access, inclusion and equality that Indigenous peoples have fought for since the invasion of Australia" (p. 285). Shay (2016) explains that in the Australian education context "the gatekeeper will be the school leader (principal, lead teacher, head of campus) or higher up the bureaucracy... and is unlikely to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, given how critically under-represented we are in educator and leadership roles" (p. 282). The Aboriginal research participants in this study have discussed the difficulty in getting non-Indigenous gatekeepers to engage critically with and support Indigenous education (Aveling, 2002, 2006; Hart et al., 2012). Wanat (2008) explains that gatekeepers in schools will typically avoid topics that are sensitive and avoid embarking on changes that are socially controversial and upset the status quo.

Figure 15

The gatekeepers



The diagram above represents the phenomenon of the metaphorical 'gate' or 'threshold' and its 'gatekeepers' occurring at the cultural interface.

The struggle to be self-determined in our roles within education is constant and complex due to the ingrained resistance and apathy of the powerful system that governs it (Foley & Schubert, 2013; Gooda, 2009; Pholi et al., 2009; Sarra, 2011; Langton, 2013; Nakata, 2007, 2008). The research data confirmed for me that changes in attitudes, understanding and actions that promote Aboriginal self-determination in schools are much needed and desired, but hard won.

Theme: Tokenistic consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal stakeholders.

Teacher Log Data

Feb 12, 2020

Too often programs and ideas have been implanted into Aboriginal communities and people after the planning and development has excluded them completely. There is no Aboriginal ownership of it then and it is unlikely to be effective and long lasting. I didn't want to make this mistake and develop yet another white-washed policy or program that diminishes Aboriginal self-determination by only seeking endorsement rather than genuine collaboration. I made the choice to make Aboriginal staff my starting point. I needed to know their thoughts on this; their perspectives, frustrations and aspirations. The extra layer of complication comes from being sandwiched between the reality of a self-determined process and the school management that works to plans and timelines and keeping communication going between the two. It's helping school management understand the cultural reasoning and importance behind self-determined action that can be a challenge.

Yarn Data

Tonya – "For me the term 'self-determination' has become just another empty phrase like 'reconciliation' that gets thrown around and diminished to a white, watered-down version of what Aboriginal people actually want and need."

Josh – "I have seen many schools who go as far as developing the relationships with community, although the partnership only goes as far as "planning for NAIDOC week" or irregular superficial contact to keep parents engaged, rather than seeking advice on teaching and learning provisions. Schools need to move from mere box-ticking and tokenistic approaches to more authentic, transparent, and culturally appropriate approaches and partnerships with community and First Nations peoples."

Discussion

My teacher log data spoke of instances I'd observed of token Aboriginal consultation and/or exclusion from school related decision making. The

yarning data revealed similar experiences amongst the research participants, several of whom cautioned against token measures that don't genuinely value working in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders. As Cohen and Uphoff (1980) argue, true self-determination of Indigenous communities to develop their own education policy cannot be limited to participation in meetings that approve a pre-prepared policy. "Self-determination is analysed in terms of inclusivity in all aspects of the formulation of policy from the beginning to the end" (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980, p.131). This promotes Indigenous participation as a vehicle for progressing self-determination based on improving collaborative partnerships between government departments and Indigenous communities (Oakley & Marsden 1984).

The data consistently and explicitly stated the need for Aboriginal people to play an active "role in education development and implementation that respects and harnesses community expertise and recognises the right of Aboriginal people to be involved in decisions being made about their people and have a seat at the table when policies are developed" (Huggins, 2017, p. 2). The yarning data explicitly mentioned decision making as being central to their self-determination as an Aboriginal educator in the school system. This creates a transformative opportunity for Indigenous voices to be included in education policy development and implementation; and for educational leaders to work in ways that value Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing, which the data unanimously supports.

Theme: Lateral violence.

Teacher Log Data

June 2018

I'm so furious and heartbroken at the same time. For 13 years I've worked at this school and given my everything and all. The leaders were always talking about the fact that I had this great community connection and rapport with the students and their families. It was understood that the family and community connections I shared with students that enabled me to have the success that I did with these difficult kids. Then after years of this and being used, all it takes is one person, in that case my own family member and aunt in law, to come into this school and tarnish everything. She created all this conflict and now works in partnership with the disgruntled lady who has been out to get me ever since she felt that I had stolen her job. The pair of them planned and plotted and basically poisoned by image and reputation at the school. Then the icing on the cake was the principal calling me into her office to suggest that perhaps it would be good to look for somewhere else to work, another school where I didn't have as many close connections and relationship conflicts, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. So, the same thing I'd been used for shamelessly, for years and years to my detriment and stress, was now being used against me. That's where I am right now, isolated and with everything unravelling fast...and its largely the result of lateral violence and the bullying that comes with it.

Yarn Data

Tonya – “Lateral violence is a serious issue. It needs to be called out. We must stand and work together so we can advance together.”

Will – “Lateral violence can be a barrier to self-determination. These behaviours are the result of intergenerational anger. As individuals we need to see the big picture and work together towards it for our kids’ future.”

Discussion

An analysis of the data relating to this theme revealed the shared perspective that at times Aboriginal people can act as barriers to their own self-determination and that of other Aboriginal people. Lateral

violence was mentioned by several participants as a barrier with the capacity to damage Indigenous peoples' identities and their self-determined efforts. As participant Will suggested, this internalised form of violence manifests when an individual or community feels oppressed, displaced, and has no safe frameworks to guide them (Braybrook, 2015; David & Derthick, 2017). In the case of Aboriginal communities and individuals this lateral violence is often a byproduct of the cultural oppression and powerlessness that stems from colonisation and the internalisation of stereotyped notions of Indigenous authenticity and identity (AHRC, 2011b).

Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009-2016) developed a model called the Origins of Lateral Violence (AHRC, 2011b) that illustrated how colonisation leads to lateral violence. Factors Gooda identified include colonisation; oppression and control of Indigenous people; identity conflict/internalisation of negative and 'authentic Aboriginal' stereotypes; feelings of powerlessness; and loss of land, traditional roles, structures, and knowledge. The impacts of lateral violence can be very damaging to individuals and this sentiment was explicitly expressed through the teacher log data and the yarning data which strongly advocated for Aboriginal inclusivity, unity and solidarity

6.2.3 Recommendations to support self-determination in schools

Theme: Major educational reform and improved cultural training for staff are needed to improve departmental and school commitment towards cultural awareness and Aboriginal self-determination.

Teacher log data

January 12, 2018

Systematic level changes are needed that move beyond tokenism and bring Aboriginal communities and educators into genuine partnership with educational policy-makers and departments. Better cultural safety training and local knowledge at the school level is also needed.

January 25, 2018

How can non-Aboriginal staff with little or no experience interacting with Aboriginal people gain the knowledge they need to understand the complexity of issues facing Aboriginal communities and educational outcomes today? How can they be compelled to want to work towards change with and for Aboriginal people without first having an opportunity to be inspired and enlightened?

Australian educators should be equipped with a bare minimum of knowledge and understanding that is transferrable, applicable and consistent and that adequately informs and prepares individuals to communicate confidently with Aboriginal people and/or about Aboriginal content.

Schools have the ability to reach many, initiate change in thinking and perspective and bring about positive social change and reform. I feel it is the moral obligation and responsibility of every Australian school principal to understand the value and importance of their influence towards the larger long-term goals of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reconciliation and closing the gap in educational disparities and the resulting opportunities.

April 10, 2019

The four walls of the square are crumbling
revealing the uniform square holes
that have oppressed round pegs
and kept them from 'fitting' in
both round and square pegs see the failures of schooling that only
offers square holes
the square space is being deconstructed, exposed, challenged, and
reformed
round and square pegs will need to converse and work together to
ensure both square pegs and round pegs experience and benefit
from schooling that values the round and the square equally
we cannot return to a space that forces round pegs
to the corners of a rigid square,
and where square is understood as the only or superior shape.

Yarning data

Josh – "Genuine consultation and partnership with local Indigenous communities is needed along with willingness to accept the critical advice and feedback to make impactful changes to the structures of teaching, learning and education within the school/department/region/sector."

Josh – “How do we give experienced community educators the opportunity to teach from their own perspective, in their own way and on their own terms? That's something that's not really happening at the moment and students are missing out on Aboriginal people that would make great teachers and are great teachers in community.”

Josh – “Schools need to move from mere box-ticking and tokenistic approaches to more authentic, transparent, and culturally appropriate approaches and partnerships with community and First Nations peoples. This would be beneficial for all children in the school system.”

Josh – “Therefore, schools and teachers have to gain more specific knowledge about the culture that these kids are coming from and what pedagogical models suit their strengths, experiences, and skills.”

Josh – “The trauma associated with Aboriginal families equips students with certain wisdoms and strengths.”

Josh – “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to policy and legislations that have created and compounded trauma, hurt, and pain, and institutions such as schools have been extraordinary perpetrators of this.”

Will – “Self-determination comes through educating oneself both ways and is key to moving past trauma.”

Discussion

The teacher log data and the yarning data revealed the need and desire for systematic level change built on collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal communities and education departments (Brown & Segal, 2005; Rosson, 2016). This will require that many difficult and uncomfortable discussions take place at the cultural interface of schooling and that potentially controversial decisions are made and implemented. According to the data analysis, Aboriginal self-determination in education will continue to resist and challenge until these things occur.

The World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) has determined “a range of concepts applicable to bringing about the extent of change required to improve education for Aboriginal students, including the concept of a ‘whole of school’ approach which centres on major re-thinking of the school culture, teachers’ attitudes and community relationships” (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 273). Self-determined reform is one such concept that supports the individual and organisational shift necessary for whole school change to occur, by replacing persistent deficit discourses with a strengths-based approach

that values the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices of the local community. This approach was explicitly championed by the data.

The development of the Coolangatta Statement occurred over several years of consultation with numerous Indigenous communities and as such, "represents a collective voice of Indigenous peoples from around the world who support fundamental principles considered vital to achieving reform and transformation of education for Indigenous peoples" (Morgan, et al., 2006, p. 229). Concerns about the pervading deficit approach towards Aboriginal education and the need for greater Aboriginal participation in educational decision making are common themes emerging from Indigenous communities and addressed in the statement. Similarly, these concerns were echoed by the participants and myself in the data.

McConville (2002) highlights that the ideologies presented in the Coolangatta Statement (Morgan, et al., 1999, 2006) seek to transform Indigenous education which Aboriginal educators (the participants and I included) strongly support the need for. Cultural Interface Theory offers an approach to educational reform that requires a commitment to both decolonising and indigenising processes by all stakeholders.

Several scholars warn about the dangers of Indigenous education initiatives that do not explicitly examine the cultural interface and challenge colonial attitudes (McLaughlin and Whatman, 2008; Howlett, Seini, Mathews, Dillion & Vivian, 2008). Simplistic interpretations and tokenistic approaches undermine an authentic project that recognises and values Indigenous knowledge through a decolonising framework (Nakata, 2007a). Dumbrill and Green (2008) argue that serious and courageous conversations must occur at the cultural interface prior to, and throughout Indigenous education reform to avoid a 'watered-down' approach that fails to adequately recognise and value Indigenous knowledge and standpoints in Australia and internationally" (Anderson, Bunda & Walter, 2008, p. 10).

Intergenerational trauma and the need for education leaders and teachers to understand it was a sentiment echoed by several participants. Educational reform and staff training must consider the impacts of trauma and as Josh stated “equip educators with the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to policy and legislations that have created and compounded trauma, hurt, and pain, and institutions such as schools have been extraordinary perpetrators of this.” The yarn data also spoke of the importance of educational reform for assisting to students to cope with and overcome trauma through positive connection to their cultural identity at school. Interestingly, where my data presented trauma as a barrier to Aboriginal student success, the yarn data offered an alternative perspective which recognises “the trauma associated with Aboriginal families equips students with certain wisdoms and strengths” (Josh).

Self-determination in a school setting is made more challenging for Aboriginal staff when the school leadership don’t adequately understand or acknowledge the different knowledge, strengths, values and desires of Aboriginal students and their families, and/or lack empathy towards the intergenerational trauma still impacting on them and their communities (Tomlins-Jajnke, 2008; Tripcony, 2010; Sims, 2011).

Theme: Self-determined education should aim to make Aboriginal students ‘two-way strong’ by valuing and maintaining home culture while helping them with acquiring new knowledge and perspectives.

Teacher log data

January 12, 2018

Every Australian should have the opportunity to learn the full and unbiased history of their country; to gain wisdom and empathy from an alternative cultural, social, spiritual and environmental perspective and;

feel a sense of belonging and pride when it comes to the world's oldest living culture and desire to preserve it. Every Aboriginal child should be able to see and hear the wisdom, knowledge and beliefs of their Elders and ancestors reflected in their education. This feeds positive self-concept, pride in cultural identity and develops resilience to cope with the trauma and change that characterises the lives of many Aboriginal students. The ambition is not for separate classrooms, programs or schools; but rather a collaborative approach to teaching and learning that supports cross cultural understanding through a system that genuinely values and embeds both Aboriginal and Western knowledges.

May 28, 2019

How does creating a single hierarchy of success assist the individuals and societies it measures and compares? Why can't a two-way approach be embraced that recognises that learning both knowledge systems and cultures has value for everyone. This would allow Aboriginal students to be empowered through education that recognises their strengths instead of feeling they have to compromise or abandon their cultural identities, values and knowledge to succeed. A two-way or both-way approach to education would support equity, equality, cross-cultural understanding and the self-determination of Aboriginal staff, students and community.

Yarning data

Josh "I think the two-way approach is the best way to go where you have a school dedicated to teaching in alignment with both-ways.

We need to be helping these students from a very young age to connect with Aboriginal spirituality, culture, and identity in case that's not happening consistently or routinely in homes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children."

Josh - "I certainly wouldn't want to give students the illusion that none of this stuff over here exists, like capitalism, racism, and imperialism, but they're going to be subject to it eventually. So, I think the two-way approach is the best way to go where you have a school dedicated to teaching in alignment with both-ways."

Will - "Many Aboriginal youths have also had little or no exposure to cultural learning and Indigenous knowledge."

Will - "Self-determination comes through educating oneself both ways and is key to moving past trauma."

Discussion

The data analysis of this theme across both the teacher logs and participant yarns revealed unanimous support for a two-way schooling model for several reasons. Firstly, it allows Aboriginal students the opportunity to gain all the benefits of Western knowledge without having

to compromise or sacrifice their cultural identity and values (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003).

Secondly, as stated in the yarning data, Aboriginal people's experience and connection to Country and culture is very diverse and many students do not know anything but mainstream ways. Two-way schooling can provide Aboriginal students with cultural learning that may not be happening at home and re-connect them to their cultural identity, knowledge and values.

Thirdly, both data sets acknowledged the opportunity that two-way schooling provides for all students to connect or reconnect with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing (David & Grose, 2008; Harris, 1990; Purdie et al., 2011). Indigenous Knowledges can provide important direction for culturally sustaining Australian educational reform (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014) and a paradigm shift that can potentially benefit all students by exposing them to new perceptions and possibilities in education (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). IK are valuable resources that can educate and enrich all students, as well as their communities and society in general (Battiste, 2002; 2013; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Cajete, 1994; Kanu, 2011; Ruíz, 2010).

The concept of two-way or both-way learning in Indigenous education is not a new one and today these terms are used interchangeably and in addition to other similar terms, including but not limited to, two-way strong, two-eyed seeing and both-ways strong (David & Grose, 2008; Harris, 1990; Purdie et al., 2011). These terms collectively refer to the holistic merging of Western and Indigenous knowledge in schools, both in Australia and internationally. "Australian research has found support among many Aboriginal communities for the ideals of mainstream education but on the basis that it is welcoming and accepting of Indigenous culture and values ... and embraces the concept of two-way

learning” (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003, p. 255). Harris (1990) defines two-way schooling as “a strategy to help make the matter of choice real in both worlds; to provide opportunity for the primary Aboriginal identity to stay strong, though changing, and thus continue to be the source of inner strength and security necessary for dealing with the Western world” (p. 48). This last point was made explicit by several participants who made the connection between strong cultural identity and general resilience.

Theme: Separate schooling is not the desired outcome or long-term goal of self-determined education; but rather an alternative to an exclusively, western education that disadvantages Aboriginal students. Self-determined education should aim to assist all students to connect with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Teacher log data

April 2, 2021 ·

I send out weekly readings to staff at the school where I work that focus on raising awareness of Aboriginal experience and issues. I sent out a self-written article about Aboriginal self-determination this week and one staff member wanted to clarify my perspective and his understanding further. It was an interesting Q and A exchange that made me think. I have clipped a section of it below.

Me: ‘Closing the Gap’ is another example. It is all about making Aboriginal statistics match non-Aboriginal statistics. It’s not based on what Aboriginal people need and desire but on a deficit approach to Aboriginal people and students that asks them to be measured against a system that is not meaningful to them or designed for them in the first place.

Colleague: Fair enough. I never thought about it as a ‘deficit approach’ and how that can be demeaning, demoralising and dehumanising.

Me: Judge a fish by its ability to climb trees-it will always fall short of the mark.

Colleague: It seems like you are a very strong advocate of greater separation. I can understand this.

Me: Not greater separation per say, but greater representation and self-control, however that may look. I am researching this very topic and am yet to have a clear understanding or 'solution' myself for how this works in practice.

November 2017

Round pegs are resilient

despite the dominance of square holes

round pegs bring with them round ways of being and knowing

and fight to maintain their circular shape in a very square space

the round pegs want to retain their round shape

round pegs push, squirm, and shift in their square holes

breaking the boundaries and softening the four hard walls boxing them in

round pegs value and desire round holes

the rigid square holes are not the right fit for all

or the only shape available.

Round does not mean inferior or deficit, just different.

Yarning data

Will – "Self-determination should not be about being separate but seeing our similarities and coming together to learn each other's ways equally."

Josh – "Accusing Aboriginal people of exclusion, or segregation on account of alternative learning is counter-productive."

Josh – "That's not to say such a thing [Aboriginal self-determined] education must be done in a segregated environment."

Discussion

The data expressed the need for Indigenous Knowledges to be incorporated into the education system but did not advocate for a separatist approach. The teacher log data and yarning data advocated for a collaborative approach that acknowledges and values both Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems. This is in line with the Coolangatta Statement which does not endorse separative approaches to education, but rather aims to ensure that "mainstream institutions, be they schools, TAFE colleges or universities, incorporate in all areas of their activity, Indigenous terms of reference and values as articulated by Indigenous peoples" (McConville, 2002, p.17).

Josh made an interesting point about alternative education and specialist Aboriginal programs that I wholeheartedly agree with but had not included in my teacher logs. He explained that Aboriginal education initiatives were not aimed at maintaining segregation or exclusion but developed out of community need and advocacy to provide more culturally appropriate schooling to Aboriginal students that is typically not offered in mainstream schools. Josh mentioned that criticisms of such alternative programs based on misguided assumptions of exclusion and want of segregation are in fact another barrier to Aboriginal self-determination and only serve to undermine self-determined efforts.

Ultimately, as Aboriginal educators navigating between two worlds and cultures everyday, our data offers a perspective of self-determination that involves working and learning together. This is supported by Self-Determination Theory which defines autonomy as self-governance (rather than independence or separateness) and does not seek to rule out collaborative processes or mandate Aboriginal participation exclusively. (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

6.3 Unpacking the research findings

The analysis above provided an overview of the thematic similarities and differences revealed through a cross examination of personal autoethnographic data and yarning topic data. Commonalities and divergences in our perspectives of Aboriginal self-determination in schools were linked to relevant theory to provide broader context to our voices. In the first section, the data was analysed in terms of common understandings of self-determination. The second section analysed those themes that emerged from the data that related to specifically to the barriers to self-determination as experienced by me and the Aboriginal research participants. Thirdly and finally, the data analysis presented our shared recommendations for advancing and supporting the self-determination of Aboriginal educators working in the school system.

The following section discusses the outcomes of this project, beginning with a review of the data in terms of the specific research aims. Finally, the discussion turns full circle and revisits the overall research questions and responds to these, discussing the outcomes, findings and final recommendations before the final discussion and thesis conclusion are reached.

6.4 Recommendations

The following table summarises the recommendations made and shared by the research participants to support and facilitate Aboriginal staff self-determination in schools. The table includes recommendations suggested for implementation at various levels of the schooling system, including an individual level; a teacher and leader level; a school level; and a departmental level. I have included the recommendations separately to make them a key focus of this research and in anticipation

that this page may be copied, shared and understood by educational leaders and teachers, and potentially even referred to in teacher training and development. The participants did not perceive themselves as passive or idol subjects, but as active contributors to their own self-determination and that of others. The opportunity to provide feedback was an empowering experience for the Aboriginal research participants to speak to the gate-keepers and provide personal insight that may provoke further thought and action. For this reason, the recommendations have been highlighted via a comprehensive but digestible table.

Table 6*Summary of research participants' recommendations*

Aboriginal Educators	Teachers/Leaders	Schools	Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue educating yourself with the understanding we are all lifelong learners, and teachers. • Seek professional development and learning opportunities. • Reach out to and collaborate/network with other Aboriginal educators. • Keep a diary/log to record and reflect on your growth and experiences. • Embrace your own diversity and that of other Aboriginal peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular and relevant cultural education/training for staff. • Collaborate ongoing with family, community and Aboriginal staff. • Respect and incorporate IK and pedagogies. • Develop skills, capacity and performance of Aboriginal staff. • Understand and empathise with the trauma experienced by many Aboriginal students and their families. • Establish strategies to address incidences of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent and committed approach to Aboriginal education and staff. • Regular staff cultural education/training. • Trauma informed practise training for staff. • Consult and collaborate with Elders, families and community. • Aboriginal representation within school governance. • Commitment to minimum Aboriginal staff recruitment and student enrolment caps/targets. • Offer culturally safe, diverse and inclusive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory minimum school quotas for Aboriginal scholarships. • Minimum school quotas for Aboriginal employees. • Establish alternative teacher pathways that recognise Aboriginal community educators. • Remote schooling reform of staff recruitment and progression processes. • Abandon deficit approaches and terminology. • Culturally inclusive alternatives for

Aboriginal Educators	Teachers/Leaders	Schools	Departments
<p>without judgement and division.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the empowerment and development of peers. • Model actions and communications that minimise the potential for lateral violence and other bullying behaviours to occur. 	<p>lateral violence and develop culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal staff experiencing duress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid contributing to lateral violence and address it promptly when it occurs. • Develop an understanding of what lateral violence is. This is an important phenomenon for teachers and students alike to be able to understand. 	<p>learning and teaching environments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give all students the opportunity to be exposed to and learn from IK. • Support and promote interschool Aboriginal networking. • Establish strategies to address incidences of lateral violence and develop culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal staff experiencing duress. 	<p>assessment, as opposed to standardised testing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rigorous, consistent broad departmental approach to Aboriginal education with scope and flexibility to be localised in terms of community needs and aspirations. • Develop interschool Aboriginal educator networks/support structures. • Develop training and procedure around lateral violence so that schools can understand, identify and address it.

6.5 Review of the research aims

Below each of the four research aims is a discussion of the related findings and outcomes, connecting to related theory and providing a review of how each aim was addressed and actioned as a result of this research project.

1. Determine whether there are commonalities in how Aboriginal educators define, perceive and experience self-determination in the school system.

As the data demonstrates, this research project enabled me to conclude that there are indeed strong similarities in how Aboriginal educators understand and perceive self-determination within a school context, based on the commonalities between and across the research participants' stories and my own. Self-determination was collectively experienced and understood to be a complex, continual and contextual process centred around self-awareness, knowledge of Aboriginal culture and identity, and the capacity to use one's voice for change. The outcomes of this aim are further elaborated on in the following section.

2. Gain insight into the nature, benefits, and challenges of Aboriginal self-determination within the school sector.

The research yarns provided me with considerable insight into how self-determination is experienced by fellow Aboriginal educators and what quickly became apparent was the commitment of all the participants to their own self-determination and that of other Aboriginal peoples, coupled with an understanding that the barriers are many. It was revealed that most of the participants had at times felt isolated, frustrated, misunderstood and undervalued in their educational roles and/or by their school leaders; but also felt responsible to themselves and the collective for fighting onwards. The outcomes of this aim are further elaborated on in the following section.

3. Document the outcomes of an Indigenous research paradigm that applied a research yarning and autoethnographic approach.

Indigenous scholars have made a habit of documenting and sharing their experiences and challenges of undertaking research within Western knowledge systems and institutions (Martin, 2012; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2007; Rigney, 2001). I too felt compelled to document the frustrations I experienced with academic traditions when applying an Indigenous research paradigm. I had a responsibility as an Aboriginal researcher to share my thoughts and reflections with other Aboriginal researchers, and those researchers considering a project involving Aboriginal persons or communities, in the hope that it may lend some support, guidance and reassurance to the process; and demonstrate the value of alternative and emerging research paradigms (Hogarth, 2010; Porsanger, 2004; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

Knowing that I could research something of direct relevance and importance to myself and the wider Aboriginal community in a way that felt authentic was what initially convinced me to embark on this project. Lincoln & Denzin (2003) stated the need to reshape traditional structures and academic conventions by supporting and provoking rich conversation that is about life and community. This stance was well established in the research and writing of national and global Indigenous academics and educators such as Martin Nakata (2007), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2013), Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Shaun Wilson (2008) whose works both deeply resonated with and inspired me and guided my development of an Indigenous research paradigm that honoured Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

My choice of autoethnographic and yarning methodology enabled me to design, implement and present my research in a way that was culturally familiar, respectful and accessible to the Aboriginal participants and the wider community. These methods allowed for multiple

perspectives and experiences to be shared as individual stories rather than manipulated into a common voice or idea (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). This supported the self-determination of the Aboriginal research participants.

Aboriginal cultural protocols centre around relationships and obligations with community and Country (Dudgeon et al, 2010). As Rosnon (2016) explains, "this is why when introducing oneself to other Indigenous people, it is important for an Indigenous person to be able to say where they are from (their Country) and the people-group to which they belong" (p. 14). This cultural protocol was demonstrated in this research project with all five participants electing to disclose their identity publicly within the research and begin their stories with an introduction of themselves including their full name and Country connections.

The flexibility and relationality that the yarning research embodied resulted in genuine relationships being established between myself as the researcher and the participants and subsequently, rich data was generated based on in-depth sharing of our perspectives and experiences. This was representative of an Indigenous world view that promotes the knowledge of the individual through conversation and interaction with others (Hanlen, 2002, 2007).

Castellano (2000) described the characteristics of Indigenous knowledge as personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed through story. Maurial (1999) identified Indigenous knowledge as being local, holistic and oral. These elements were all incorporated to varying degrees into my research methodology. Autoethnography, like yarning research, honoured the Aboriginal tradition of storytelling as a means of sharing and generating knowledge (Bessarab, 2015; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) in this project and allowed for greater freedom of expression and resistance to academic conventions (Czuy & Hogarth, 2019; Hanlen, 2002, 2007). For instance, I included teacher logs and excerpts in my data analysis. From my perspective it was significant to leave these excerpts where they were as they represented the two modes of

competing knowledge systems I was constantly jumping between. I wanted these personal excerpts to interrupt the academic writing the same way that way family and community trauma frequently interrupted my research and studies.

This was reflective of the nature of Aboriginal research and symbolised my circling the square and prioritising Aboriginal voice in my writing (Czuy & Hogarth, 2019). I also wanted the embedding of past teacher logs to highlight the commonalities between my own lived experiences and perspectives of working in schools, with those of the participants.

I referred to Ellis' five questions for reviewing my autoethnographic validity when evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of its application for Indigenous research project.

a) Does the piece contribute to an understanding of social life?

Autoethnography provided me and the research participants with a direct voice to readers. By sharing our lived experiences and in-depth perspectives we have contributed to our own, and others, understanding of Aboriginal social life –specifically in the areas of self-determination and education.

b) Does the piece succeed aesthetically or is it satisfyingly complex?

An important aim for my research was to present it in a way that was more aesthetically appealing than a conventional thesis and that allowed greater creativity and the flexibility to incorporate story, mud maps, poetry and different styles and fonts of writing. Autoethnography afforded me these liberties and enabled me to produce a satisfyingly complex and varied thesis.

c) Has the author's subjectivity been reflexive as both a producer and a product of this text?

The writing of my personal story; the connecting with past teacher logs; the learning through in-depth yarns; the co-construction of findings and new knowledge all provide examples of my reflexive subjectivity in this project and my dual role as both a producer and product of this thesis. Autoethnography enabled me as researcher to participate in both spaces and provide a reflexive insight into my own thought processes and developing understanding as the project unfolded.

d) Does this piece affect others emotionally and/or intellectually by generating new questions or thought?

The direct and honest voice that autoethnography provided between researcher, participants and readers has the potential to impact many readers both emotionally and intellectually. Emotionally, Aboriginal people will be able to relate to many of the sentiments and experiences shared in this thesis and be moved or inspired by the similarities. Intellectually, educational policy-makers, leaders and teachers can gain important insight into current challenges and how they can support the self-determined aspirations and desires of Aboriginal communities, staff and students.

e) Does this text embody an intimate account of lived experience?

Autoethnography provided me with opportunity to produce a patchwork of interconnecting elements that together provided a holistic and intimate account of the lived experiences of myself and the research participants in the context of schooling. The direct voices, stories and memories shared in this thesis embody our shared and diverse experiences and perspectives as Aboriginal educators in the space of self-determination.

These five questions guided my critique of both the content and constructive validity of my autoethnographic writing by asking me to consider how my thesis would achieve these components and support an Indigenous research paradigm.

Despite developing a research project from an Aboriginal centred foundation, I acknowledge that this thesis is bound within Western practices and institutions cemented in tradition and that promote conformity. As Hogarth suggests (2020) that from the margins we must push back and resist where we can in attempt to 'circle the square' and develop research that is reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Whilst there were some minor challenges and frustrations

experienced, I didn't feel inhibited from conducting and reporting my research in a way that was culturally respectful, community appropriate and supportive of self-determination.

The principles and aims of autoethnography and research yarning can work effectively alongside Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Cram & Mertens, 2015, 2016); promote self-determination and provide a practical example of 'darbal' or the space where the merging of Western academia and IK occurs at the cultural interface of research to produce something new (Nakata, 2002). The decision to use yarning and autoethnography as research methods was also informed by my desire to make my research writing more engaging, relevant and accessible to a broad audience, including the Aboriginal community I hope will read it (Hogarth, 2020).

It was essential that my research remained true to an Indigenous paradigm by supporting the self-determination of the participants both in process and outcomes (Cohen & Uphoff, 1980) and that I applied measures to protect their knowledge and intellectual property. I was guided by Porsanger's (2004) advice for Indigenous research methods and ethics including the need for Indigenous peoples to tell their stories in their own voices; to retain control and ownership of their knowledge; and be active participants in the research process. My research yarning approach ensured that participants retained ownership of their original data and intellectual property. Yarning further allowed the contributions of the research participants to be honoured as individual voices via their presentation as separate and complete stories in the thesis. This allowed each participant to speak directly to readers and without interruption from other voices.

An important observation I made, was that initially all research participants rejected the option to censor any of their transcribed yarns. As researcher I felt a responsibility to assist participants to carefully consider the potential impacts of disclosure, both immediately and long term. With this enhanced understanding, all participants opted to remove

any identifiable workplace details. This reinforced the importance of researcher accountability to ensuring that participants fully understand what they are consenting to.

Another observation I made throughout my research process was that ethical measures in place to protect Aboriginal persons assume that all research and researchers present the same level of risk and that all Aboriginal people and communities are equally vulnerable. At times it felt awkward justifying my research choices and feeling I needed to seek a stranger's permission to communicate with my own people. I understand these extra layers of protection are designed to prevent exploitative and unethical research being conducted (Martin, 2012; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Rigney, 2006), but from an Aboriginal researcher position it can also cause frustration and create further barriers.

"Protectionist discourse (that we need protecting from ourselves and others) must impinge on a gatekeeper's ability to reconcile the social construction of us needing protection with the 'vulnerable' Indigenous person now asking for access to their own group to undertake research" (Shay, 2016, p. 298).

Shay (2016) suggests that "with gatekeepers holding the authority to grant entry or place conditions upon entry, there is very little prospect for Indigenist researchers to define our own research problems and negotiate directly with participants" (p. 287). For example, had I decided to recruit Aboriginal participants via public schools I would have needed to seek ethics approval from each state or territory department that I planned to recruit from and follow a lengthy process of back-and-forth communication with each before finally receiving approval. Even then, the next step would require contacting each school principal to introduce the research project and seek their assistance in sharing it with their Aboriginal staff. Should the principal be busy, apathetic, forgetful or negatively opinionated towards Aboriginal education it is unlikely they would pass on the invitation to Aboriginal staff. Murgatroyd et al. (2015) discussed the multiple aspects of control that gatekeepers have in

research including "conditions of entry, access to data and respondents, funding and scope of analysis" (p. 165). In this context, ethics departments, education departments and school principals all act as gatekeepers in the higher education space by manning the threshold and deciding who can have access, and how much.

Realising the barriers to gaining ethical approval via the education system, I abandoned the idea completely and opted to recruit in a less conventional and informal way via my own community contacts and social networks. This reduced the barriers to recruiting suitable applicants significantly and reduced the complexity of the ethics approval process. My experiences have convinced me of the need for a review of the benefits and limitations of current research ethics processes and highlight the problematic implications of unanimously labelling all Aboriginal research as 'risky'. As Laurie Bamblett argued, "describing and defining Indigenous people only in terms of disadvantage and deficit 'makes it easier to deny Aboriginal communities self-determination on the grounds of incapability'" (2018, p. 81). We need efficient measures that can accurately gauge the level of risk applicable to each individual project taking into consideration community, participant and researcher factors that either reduce or enhance the associated vulnerability of those involved.

4. Promote awareness of and support for a self-determined approach to Aboriginal education in contrast to popular deficit models.

The literature review, my autoethnographic writing and the participant transcripts all advocated for a self-determined approach to Aboriginal education that challenges persistent notions of Aboriginal students as deficit learners and achievers. Deficit language was generally absent from the participants' yarns and instead there was a strong emphasis on embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing that recognise and value local culture, knowledge and aspirations. Participants advocated for a strengths-based approach informed through

community consultation and inclusion of the culture of Aboriginal students and families through self-determination (Person, 2012; Sims, 2011; Tomlins-Jajnke, 2008). This sentiment is echoed by my voice and the voices of countless First Nations academics and educators in the literature. The frustrations experienced as educators in a mainstream school system and the barriers in place to achieving self-determined schooling do not detract from the resolute rejection of deficit attitudes and models.

Deficit language and approaches can become internalised causing harmful self-perceptions of capability and value. Deficit approaches typically value western cultural frameworks and statistical benchmarking that disadvantage Aboriginal students by dismissing the strengths they bring to the classroom (Altman & Fogarty, 2010; Rudolf, 2011). The knowledge, experiences, skills, language, stories and home culture of Aboriginal students need to be recognised and valued if schooling is to address the disparities in Aboriginal student retention and achievement data and address the social injustice present in schools and the education system (Beresford & Partington eds., 2003; Craven et al., 1999).

Several participants argued that a self-determined approach to the challenges of Aboriginal schooling and educational outcomes promotes a two-way strong learning agenda (Fogarty, 2010; Tripcony, 2010; Sims, 2011) that is community informed, culturally inclusive and that values Indigenous and Western knowledge systems equally, providing all students with an opportunity to engage with Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge (Chin & Nakata, 2008; Salik, 2003). A Western dominated education system “blinds us to the rich variety of world views that are evident in other cultures, especially Indigenous cultures” (Rosnon, 2016, p. 84). Two-way learning provides the opportunity for all students to understand other cultures and can only enhance cultural understanding and relationships.

Solutions and approaches to educational challenges need to be developed and lead by the communities/people that need them and will

be directly impacted by them. This requires that Aboriginal parents, families and community are consulted and included in all phases and levels of school governance and decision making (Langton, 2015). Increasing the number of Aboriginal school leaders and educators is an authentic and practical way of supporting and facilitating self-determination by embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Heslop, 2003; Mokak, 2017). It also sends a powerful message to students that they too are capable of achieving leadership and realising their own career aspirations. All of the research participants agreed that increasing the number of Aboriginal leaders and teachers in schools will also provide a more supportive and culturally safe working environment for Aboriginal educators to thrive in by reducing the feelings of isolation and the struggle attached to being a lone Aboriginal voice within a school population.

6.6 Responding to the research questions – final discussion

6.6.1 How is self-determination understood by Aboriginal educators? (Q1)

As mentioned previously, this research project revealed that self-determination was collectively understood to be a complex, continual and contextual process centred around self-awareness, knowledge of Aboriginal culture and identity, and the capacity to use one's voice for change. Whilst there was no singular definition or application of self-determination (Banai, 2015), there were clear commonalities in terms of its value and importance as an Aboriginal right and aspiration. Similarly, self-determination was collectively perceived as the born right of all Aboriginal people and based on freedom, choice and decision-making ability, without judgement, control and interference. As mandated by Article 14 of UNDRIP (UN General Assembly, 2007, p. 7): "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner

appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.” From an Aboriginal perspective, we have always been self-determining, the contemporary political experience however dictates self-determination as an active struggle that requires resistance and push back in order to restore and maintain the freedoms we value as sovereign First Peoples. In a school setting this means challenging ideas and attitudes about what constitutes and is valued as knowledge (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2003).

Common across the data was the finding that Aboriginal self-determination is inseparable from honouring, maintaining and advocating for Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. In this sense, Aboriginal self-determination is also inseparable from ancestors, Country, spirituality, lore and culture, both within an education context and beyond. As Rosnon (2016) explains “self-determination for Indigenous people in education policy includes Indigenous aspirations in terms of their cultural background, language and Indigenous knowledge” (p. 201).

It was collectively agreed that as individuals, we are all on our own personal journeys of self-determination and at different stages of our self-awareness and advocacy based on our background and current context. It was equally evident that although a personal process, Aboriginal self-determination is always connected to the whole, the communal and collective with the broader aim of empowering others and preserving and honouring Aboriginal culture, knowledge and values into the future (Hanlen, 2010; Kovach, 2005).

The research participants’ and I each shared our perceptions of the barriers to self-determination and recalled those we had personally experienced as Aboriginal educators in the school system. It was agreed that major educational reform was needed across all levels of the school system if real and meaningful change was to happen (Foley & Schubert, 2013; Gooda, 2009; Pholi et al., 2009; Sarra, 2011; Langton, 2013).

This project has served to reinforce my position that as Aboriginal educators we have a responsibility to educate and enhance the awareness

of others (Hanlen, 2010; Kovach, 2005); offer culturally safe support to students and families; and use our position and voice to advocate for community, culture and Indigenous Knowledge in schools.

6.6.2 What are the complexities of Aboriginal self-determination in the public school sector (Q2)?

Engaging with the theory and literature of Indigenous academics and educators and having in-depth yarns with the research participants enabled me to further develop my understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector and find commonalities and divergences in how it is understood and experienced; the barriers that inhibit it and what is needed to facilitate its promotion and development (Banai, 2015).

It is apparent that major change is needed and sought at all levels of the education system to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, and to better empower Aboriginal staff, families and communities. Schools and leaders who have sufficient cultural understanding and actively support Aboriginal self-determination ensure Aboriginal staff feel heard, valued, productive and effective as opposed to undervalued, exploited, excluded and invisible. The struggle to be self-determined in our roles within education is constant and complex due to the ingrained resistance and apathy of the powerful system that governs it (Foley & Schubert, 2013; Gooda, 2009; Pholi et al., 2009; Sarra, 2011; Langton, 2013; Nakata, 2007, 2008). The research data confirmed for me that changes in attitudes, understanding and actions that promote Aboriginal self-determination in schools are much needed and desired, but hard won.

Self-determination in a school setting is made more challenging for Aboriginal staff when the school leadership don't adequately understand or acknowledge the different knowledge, strengths, values and desires of Aboriginal students and their families, and/or lack empathy towards the

intergenerational trauma still impacting on them and their communities (Tomlins-Jajnke, 2008; Tripcony, 2010; Sims, 2011).

The concept of the threshold and its gatekeepers (Heath et al., 2007; Murgatroyd et al., 2015; Shay, 2016) was a recurring discussion point when talking about barriers to Aboriginal self-determination. Although participants did not exclusively use these terms, the phenomenon we collectively understood and described was the same and represented the ongoing struggle of being self-determined as an Aboriginal educator in a predominantly Western system that remains resistant to change (Sarra, 2011; Langton, 2013; Nakata, 2007, 2008).

The research participants had as many solutions to offer as they did barriers to share which demonstrated a solution focused, individual responsibility to self and the collective based on self-awareness and the capacity to be self-determining (Hanlen, 2010; Kovach, 2005). It was agreed among participants that Aboriginal self-determination in schools is optimised when the school leadership is genuinely committed to and understanding of the need for educational reform; values IK and Aboriginal staff; actively listens to community, families and Aboriginal employees; and empowers Aboriginal people through investing in their professional development, performance management and career progression.

Remote schools were identified as being particularly problematic sites in terms of Aboriginal self-determination (Campbell, 2000; Fogarty, 2010; Tripcony, 2010) with several participants echoing my own sentiments and perspectives of the barriers experienced by Aboriginal educators in remote schools. Some of the suggested strategies for addressing these barriers included establishing local cultural school governance or representation; reviewing staff recruitment processes; and school and departmental commitment to Aboriginal teacher and leader development and career progression (Heslop, 2003; Mokak, 2017).

The data findings revealed that the goals and process of self-determination in the school sector are ongoing and multi-faceted.

Tokenistic inclusions of culture are not sufficient; nor is it realistic to expect that school leaders and teachers will understand and empathise with the needs, aspirations and values of Aboriginal staff, students and families without targeted learning and first having some knowledge of the local culture, history and language (Klump & McNeir, 2005). This confirmed the importance of educational reform encompassing the processes of both decolonisation and indigenisation (Grande, 2015; Smith, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Where decolonisation challenges colonisation and Eurocentrism, "Indigenizing fosters the resurgence and practice of Indigenous Knowledges and principles of self-determination, connecting Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures" (Pratt et al., 2018, p. 23). They must occur simultaneously for authentic change to happen in regard to residual conformist attitudes, perceptions and approaches towards schooling.

Most of the Aboriginal research participants mentioned the feeling of being isolated as one of, or the only Aboriginal staff member within a school and the associated experiences of being ignored, exploited, undermined or misunderstood in a culturally unsafe environment. In some cases, participants felt compelled to leave a position or school in order to preserve their well-being, self-determination and self-worth. At times this was due to the participants' perceptions that school leadership did not adequately understand or support them as an Aboriginal staff member and community member. In other instances, lateral violence was mentioned as contributing to the participant's lack of cultural safety and feelings of isolation.

It became very apparent through my yarns with the participants that Martin Nakata's concept of the Cultural Interface (2002) is an extremely useful one for describing and making sense of the complex myriad of experiences and emotions shared by the participants and other Aboriginal educators in the struggle for self-determination in the school sector. The cultural interface in schools is fraught with cultural tension, constant negotiation, change and the continual challenge for Aboriginal

educators to convince school leaders and governance of the need for and value of a two-way strong approach to knowledge that embraces and values alternative ways of knowing, being and doing (Purdie et al., 2011). This can only enhance the educational experience, wonder, understanding and wisdom of all students in the Australian school system and progress us towards national and local reconciliation goals.

The yarns also revealed the need and desire for systematic level change built on collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal communities and education departments (Brown & Segal, 2005; Rosnon, 2016). This will require that many difficult and uncomfortable discussions take place at the cultural interface of schooling and that potentially controversial decisions are made and implemented. Aboriginal self-determination in education will continue to resist and challenge until these things occur.

As Aboriginal educators and community members we must continue to apply pressure on education departments and schools externally, for better inclusion, representation, input and awareness of IK and Aboriginal perspectives. We must also challenge the system internally by educating ourselves and working our way into influential positions of leadership and authority (Heslop, 2003; Mokak, 2017) that removes gatekeepers and tears holes in the threshold. It's a difficult journey with many obstacles along the way, but a journey that must be continued if we are to honour the work of our ancestors and elders that went before us and provide optimism and strength to the generations to come after us.

Aboriginal people, families and communities are resilient, determined, connected, proud and committed and this is how and why they have survived a tumultuous past and achieved significant positive change in the face of systematic oppression. Those working in education understand the power of education to transform and empower students, families and communities and appreciate the vital relationship between self-education and self-determination (Maidment, 2003; 2004; Osbourne et al., 2018; Wilson, 2008). My research project and findings have only

strengthened my belief that self-determined education is the only socially just, culturally appropriate and community sustainable approach to addressing the current challenges associated with Aboriginal education. It was reassuring to discover the research participants, my fellow Aboriginal educators, whole-heartedly shared this same perspective.

What came across clearly through the data was the participants' advocacy for a top-down and bottom-up approach to Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector. A top-down approach through government, policy makers, education departments and school leaders is essential in order to provide consistency in staff training and to develop an awareness of gatekeepers and a commitment to removing barriers to Aboriginal self-determination. From the bottom up, Aboriginal people must continue building our own capacity through self-education; uplifting others by working in partnership and unity; listening to community and Elders and moving into positions of leadership and influence.

Self-determination is an extremely complex concept that has been marred by government policy and failed promises. Discussed broadly in terms of its failure as a systematic approach; or as an international Indigenous human right, research concerned with self-determination as a personal aspiration and journey is often overlooked and omitted. Nor are instances of Aboriginal educators offering their lived examples of barriers and proposed recommendations are not common or easily found. Specifically with the Australian school system. This limitation can partly be attributed to "a lack of concerted research being founded upon the voices and agency of Indigenous children, youth, and communities" and studies being conducted by non-Indigenous researchers without true collaboration and buy-in from Indigenous people (Craven et al., 2016, p. 37).

My research project has addressed this limitation by privileging the voices of Aboriginal educators and generating rich, insightful data through collaborative research that reflected the shared lived experiences and aspirations of the researcher and participants.

The experience and influence of Aboriginal organisations in asserting community control over education has received some attention in the literature (Hunt, Smith, Garling & Sanders, 2008), but "there are comparatively few scholars focused on the implications of self-determination" (Vass et al, 2018, p. 13). A deeper understanding of the personal barriers to and implications of Aboriginal self-determination on an individual level will assist school leaders and educators to better support Aboriginal staff and their self-determined aspirations.

Educators and education policy makers (gate-keepers) genuinely dedicated to empowering Aboriginal people will benefit from a better understanding of how self-determined education is understood, valued and practised from an Aboriginal educator's perspective. This research project has aimed to contribute to this understanding and provide a candid and personal insight into Aboriginal self-determination in the school sector.

And so, while my story and those of the participants ends here, our struggle for self-determination continues. We will persevere, keep using our voices, remain true to Country, culture and community, and as quoted by Tonya in her yarn we will 'never, ever give up'.

6.7 Conclusion

This project aimed to tell an important story about Aboriginal self-determination that combined my voice with those of other Aboriginal researchers, academics, and educators. I began my thesis with a section on how to read it, explaining the structure of my writing and the use of the fresh water, saltwater and estuary analogy to convey the concept of Western and Indigenous knowledges coming together for research that has the potential to create new understandings and knowledge.

I then introduced the *bilya* component of my thesis. The *bilya* element consisted of storying and the use of personal narrative to establish my research context, purpose, and positionality. I recounted the important historical experiences and memories that have shaped the

person I am today, and my current perspectives of Aboriginal self-determination.

Bilya also contained excerpts from my teacher logs, mud maps and poems that reflected the experiences and thoughts I had at significant moments throughout my career as an educator. Written in the first person through the use of autoethnography, these excerpts pop up throughout the thesis where more recent writing spurred a connected memory or relevant anecdote from the past, or I where I wanted to interject more personal and direct writing (bilya) into the academic sections (waardan). An alternative font was used for past teacher log sections to distinguish them from the current and structured writing style of waardan.

Bilya was presented as a series of interconnected stories mapping the major milestones of my educational journey from a high school student to an experienced educator. This section also introduced my Aboriginal connections and position towards Aboriginal self-determination.

The next section of the thesis was waardan, which represented formal academia and began by providing the rationale and focuses for the study.

The rationale and focus section of the thesis established the explicit academic aims for the project and introduced the research questions this project ultimately aimed to respond to. The rationale discussed the current context of Aboriginal education and the problematic deficit discourse that dominates government led 'solutions' to the complex challenges presented. The rationale introduced self-determined education as an alternative approach. The focus provided an overview of the research project in terms of what it would entail and include. Finally, the aims component of this section identified the two overall research questions and four additional goals that this project aimed to fulfil.

The thesis then moved on to a two-part literature review, consisting of context and theory. The first section provided the context and background to my project to justify the rationale and aims of my research. It began with an overview of Aboriginal educational experience

and history, both globally and nationally discussing the educational disadvantage, statistical inequality and dominant deficit discourse associated with contemporary challenges in this space. The section then introduced the concept of self-determination as an alternative approach to Aboriginal education and explored Aboriginal experiences and understandings of self-determination to reveal limitations and commonalities. The unique position of remote schools in Australia was also explored with an explanation of the significance of self-determination to these communities and students.

The second phase of my literature review focused on the theoretical underpinnings that informed my research framework. I began with an exploration of Indigenous Knowledges (IK) and the connection with Aboriginal education before introducing self-determination and exploring its various international, national, and local applications. Recent literature and studies concerning Indigenous self-determined education both globally and nationally were discussed, leading into an introduction of Self Determination Theory and its relationships with Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Standpoint Theory. Definitions of Decolonisation Theory (DCT) were then explored and explained in terms of their application within this project. Next, the viability of decolonisation theory as a strategy for Self -Determination in schools was discussed, with an explanation of the importance of DCT for recognition of IK and the aspirations for Aboriginal self-determined education. Possibilities for sharing and merging intersecting knowledges at the cultural interface were explored along with the related benefits for IK and Aboriginal self-determination. The final section of this review phase discussed the concept of two-way learning and/or both-way strong, as both an aspiration for and reality of Aboriginal education occurring at the cultural interface of the Australian school system.

The next phase of *waardan* also consisted of two parts. Part one, 'The Underpinnings' provided context to my selection of research methods and discussed the features of an Indigenous research paradigm. Part one

introduced Indigenous Standpoint Theory and discussed the methods of autoethnography and yarning research along with ethical considerations and researcher positionality. It introduced story as a central component of Indigenous culture and educational pedagogy. The benefits and limitations of storying methodology were considered along with their cultural appropriateness and ability to support a project concerned with self-determination.

Part two of the methodology component, 'The Process' discussed the methodological actions taken regarding the processes of participant recruitment, data collection, analysis and dissemination. Details of the two main methods applied in this research -autoethnography and yarning, were discussed along with an overview of the ethical considerations and strategies that were applied.

My thesis then moved into the Darbal section which presented the data (including the 'yarns' and 'teacher logs') along with a summary of the key reflections and correlations that analysis had revealed between and across them. The yarns conducted with the Aboriginal participants were presented as individual stories that responded to certain topics or questions. Highlights and key reflections for each transcript were added at the end of each story and used to cross examine the perspectives and experiences of the research participants against my own. Following the presentation of the data, a section on reading this data shared the findings produced through the data analysis process and summarised the significant points of similarity and divergence between the participants' yarning data and my autoethnographic writing.

This darbal section represented the estuary or merging phase of the research project, and the new knowledge produced at the intersection (cultural interface) of Western academia and Indigenous Knowledge (or the saltwater and freshwater in this analogy) as a result of this research project. The knowledge shared in this section was the direct outcome of this merging process and therefore did not fit entirely or neatly into one system or the other. The findings were representative of the lived reality

of the researcher and participants that necessitates 'walking in both worlds' and navigating between two overlapping, and at times, competing, knowledge systems. and this is reflected in the dual styles of writing (autoethnographic and academic) included in darbal.

The tabled information in this section provided an overview of the thematic similarities and differences across the yarning topic data and identified those common understandings, barriers and recommendations shared by all participants. Further analysis was conducted to reveal commonalities between my autoethnographic log data and the yarning data, discussing links to relevant theory. The next section reviewed the research outcomes in terms of the specific research aims, before finally coming full circle by revisiting and responding to the overall research questions.

6.7.1 Closing message

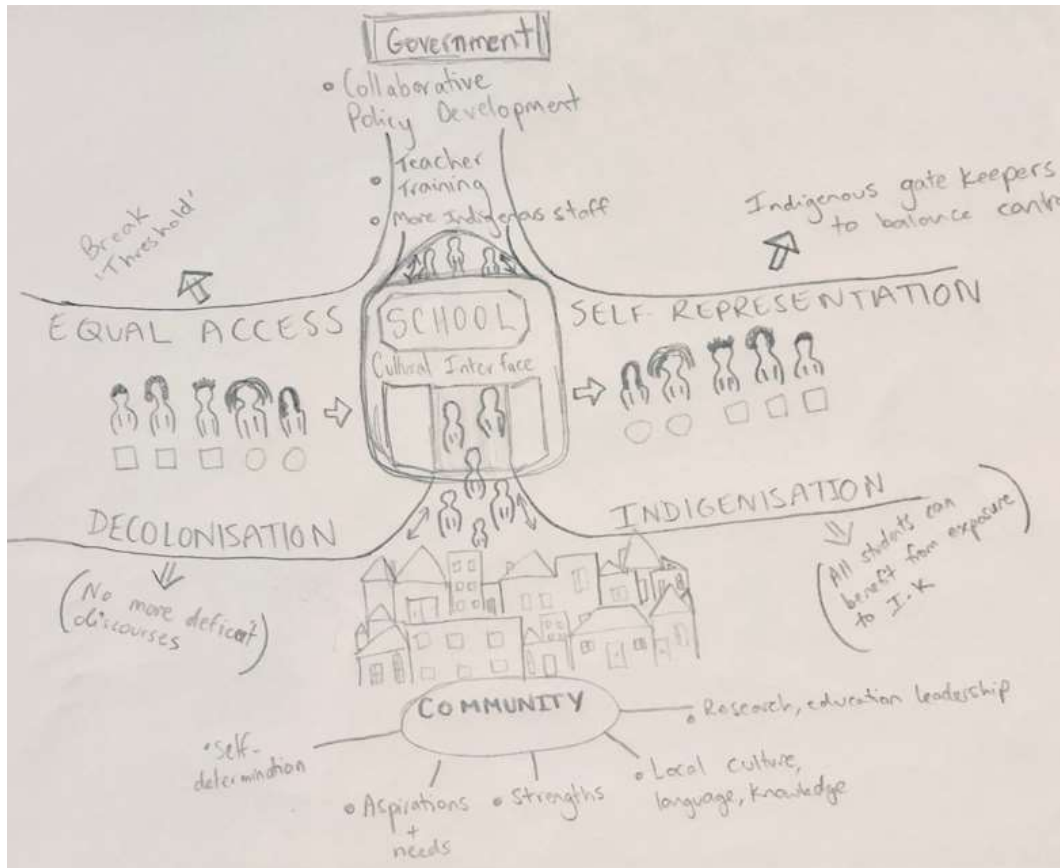
A dear Elder once told me that life is all about balance. She stated that 'When the balance of anything is off, it impacts many other things around it and work must be done to restore it. Aboriginal people are the custodians of these lands and waters and so we have to keep working and fighting to restore balance to our Country, our communities and culture'.

For an estuarine environment to flourish and thrive it needs the right balance of fresh and salt water. If we apply this analogy to a school context it is evident that the salt water (waardan - Western system of knowledge) continues to overpower the fresh water (bilya - Indigenous knowledge system) which has huge implications for the overall balance and harmony of the estuary (darbal – shared space), and the well-being of those Aboriginal students, families and communities at the cultural interface of education.

Aboriginal self-determination in schools injects more fresh water into the system and assists to restore the balance.

Figure 16

How schooling representative of Darbal's balance might look and work.



6.8 End of Darbal

End of this story...

6.9 Collection of Aboriginal voices

This collection of voices consists of the full transcribed stories of the Aboriginal research participants.

6.9.1 Cally's story

Understanding and experience of Aboriginal self-determination

I think possibly seven, even five years ago I wouldn't have been able to talk much about what self-determination is beyond a sort of very general definition of it, you know just being independent and able to make your own decisions. For me it was very much associated with the government policy that followed Gough Whitlam's election to Prime Minister in 1972 and a turning point in Australian politics and relations with Aboriginal peoples.

I think being in education has given me much different perspective and made self-determination a much more relevant and important topic in my life and I think this was really I guess increased and developed when I went remote and taught and administered up there for a couple of years. I realised then and there how important self-determination was and how it was still being hindered in many ways and it was something that I decided I wanted to explore further and so there's some interesting points that I want to make about self-determination and the first one is that even though it has the word 'self' in it, Aboriginal self-determination is always about the Aboriginal community as a whole opposed to the self. Yes, it's a personal process also, but there's always that understanding and connection back to the community and it's understood that we only succeed if we all succeed and move forward together. So, our goals and our own self-determination is not about striving ahead and leaving people behind, it's about empowering others and bringing

them along also and so I think that's really important because Aboriginal cultural values are all about community and the collective. It's about each of us contributing overall Aboriginal empowerment and you know ultimately it is self-determined individuals and families and organisations that assist communities to be self-determined.

So, while it is a personal process and contribution, it is also one that is connected to Aboriginal people and empowerment at large. To me, being self-determined, means that even though I am aware of being a minority in a western dominated education system and the barriers of this, I do and say what I can to resist, challenge, educate and influence positive change for my people, no matter what is happening around me, no matter what system I am in. I feel that I have the knowledge, self-awareness, and the confidence to now speak my view and my perspective in a calm and dignified way and to resist when I feel that something is not culturally appropriate or given and so I think it's about having that self-awareness and that that courage to speak up and speak back and use your voice effectively regardless of the context. But this has only come from a lot of education and a lot of lived experience. Looking back there are many instances when I was not so self-determined and felt unable to speak out and communicate what I was thinking and feeling effectively.

It's an ongoing process or lifelong commitment and it's something that you become more succinct and better at. I think eventually you sort of reach a certain level of self-awareness where you can actually further empower yourself and others and absolutely education I believe helps this. I have heard the question 'what did self-determination mean before colonisation?' and you know I think the perception is that Aboriginal people have always been self-determined, we've always had our own spiritual beliefs, cultural

systems and ways of running our society and economy and that makes us self-determining. But I do believe that it has a different meaning and a double context now post colonisation and that to be self-determined is to continue to try and hold on to those things, to maintain them, protect them and pass them on despite the rapid changes and the oppression, the destruction of Country and all of those things that are working against us and so it's not the same as it was but you know from an Aboriginal perspective I've never heard anyone say self-determination didn't exist before 1788, it's just had to change and adapt the same as most elements in Aboriginal culture and society. It's not just about maintaining environment it's also about maintaining culture and identity in a society that makes that a lot more difficult now.

I think you do reach a certain point where you feel you are self-determined and you have the awareness, knowledge, confidence and lived experience to be able to speak on matters regardless of the context and the opposition. It's an awareness that though the system at large still oppresses Aboriginal people, we can resist and challenge. And education is absolutely key in helping to achieve that. I feel that by going into education I'm able to be two ways strong, I understand the perspectives and arguments of the two different cultural sides and manage to navigate between them and I can empower students and pass on the skills and experience to help them to do the same thing. Education has allowed me to 'hold my own' and to move up in a system that has long oppressed Aboriginal people and make change from within. Education gives us the opportunities and the skills and the articulation that we need to be able to move into that space so that we can really advocate for our peoples, our communities, and our ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Barriers/challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

I think one of the biggest barriers to self-determination at times has been myself. Doubting myself, lacking the confidence and the articulation to be able to express what I was thinking and feeling in situations of pressure, especially with leaders/authority. There are many situations that I look back on now with frustration and regret wishing I had have acted and spoken differently and that's a big part of self-determination I believe, to reach a certain level of self-awareness and experience before you can really take control of what is happening and make positive steps to be self-determining and to empower others to do the same. That's difficult when you look at our community, how diverse it is; many people are struggling with poverty, with overcrowding, with health issues, realistically self-determination and political empowerment may not be a high priority or something that's even discussed or thought about in some households and Aboriginal communities and so that's I think different community barriers and various levels of intergenerational trauma can make it difficult. It really is about keeping that connection and making sure that positive work is connected to and ultimately filters back to community and that it inspires, uplifts, and encourages others to be self-determined also.

Another big barrier, especially in schools, is leadership or management. Oftentimes leaders in schools can get away with doing very little and depending on how much they prioritise, and value Aboriginal education can completely determine what Aboriginal resources, staffing, and programs are allowed to continue and which ones are shut down. Often a lot of the work that's done previously and the connections made with community and the trust that's been established can be badly damaged when the leadership just come in with their own agenda and so I think until the department can take a more consistent approach across schools

that takes into account the Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal staff and their perspectives I think that will continue happening and Aboriginal teachers, students, programs and education, all of that will always be at the whim of the gatekeepers.

Rather than putting money into these short-term closing the gap solutions the money would be much better spent on recruiting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and investing in their training. Finding alternative ways to recognise prior and cultural learning and alternative pathways into education for Indigenous people who are already educators and recognised Elders in their communities and who could be valuable in local schools. Until the money starts going into upskilling Aboriginal people so that they can take on the leadership positions themselves and be at these decision-making tables then I think we'll continue to see schools that largely ignore and limit Aboriginal self-determination.

I think lateral violence is another big issue it's sometimes hard to name and understand what it is you're experiencing and you know I think education around it is really important, it's important that as original and minority educators in a largely Western system that we understand that sometimes barriers can come from our own and you know that often that is a result of intergenerational trauma and anger and sort of residual distrust that's just sort of being misplaced. I guess as a light skinned person you have that feeling of needing to validate yourself and your identity, your knowledge and your experience. Some of it comes from self-doubt and feeling not black enough and at other times you know it's sort of a feeling or a treatment that you get from others. It's a tricky thing lateral violence and ultimately it just it divides us further when we're already divided a lot already and subject to so many stereotypes and generalisations and myths about our identity. I think it's important that we don't do that to each other and that we embrace

our diversity and work together as a collective. Yes, we can always pay homage to our home country and our, you know, kinship and Country and cultural connections but I think ultimately, it's important that we see ourselves as a collective First Nations group and that we work together for a better future for all our children.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in education

I guess in terms of self-determination the biggest and simplest recommendation I can make is that schools, school leaders in the department be brave. That they stop continuing to find Western solutions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational challenges and that they listen to community. It may be a more long winded, expensive, and drawn-out process but it's the one that needs to happen. Our communities and needs of our children are diverse, they don't all think and learn the same and shouldn't all be measured the same against the same aspirations and so I think it really needs to start with major educational reform at all levels from primary right up to university where there's some cultural governance that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at the very top levels to ensure that Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing are respected and valued as an alternative and equal system to Western knowledge and science.

We need much higher numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators coming into the system and then those educators moving into positions of leadership and even more positions of influence in decision making at the higher levels. It's about sort of coming in and influencing the system from the inside out.

I believe that self-determination is the right of all Indigenous peoples, as human beings it is our right to be self-determined and

to choose how we want to identify, to live, the culture and the spiritual beliefs we want to practise and follow, the languages we want to speak, the way we want to learn and teach. But this is difficult when your minority group has been sort of absorbed and might depend on a mainstream government and so it's about how we negotiate that two- way modality; how do we live and prosper and participate but at the same time protect, maintain and carry forward that that what is most important to us.

The other recommendation would be collaborative Aboriginal networking across schools. There are a lot of Aboriginal educators working in isolation where they may be one or a very small minority of Aboriginal staff within a school and that can be very daunting, it can allow people to be pushed over, to doubt themselves and having some sort of network of support where people can listen to each other and offer advice would be hugely beneficial.

I strongly believe that you know Aboriginal education officers, Indigenous Australian officers, whatever they are called within that school or state, but basically Aboriginal education assistance officers need to be properly utilised, upskilled, and respected because a lot of the time they are employed and then they receive no training, no support, upskilling or professional development. There are no conversations around the skills and the knowledge they have or how they would like to contribute and it's often just to tick a box and there are a really underutilised and wasted resource and everybody misses out on the opportunity to authentically learn from this person and the Aboriginal person also misses out on the opportunity to be properly managed and to be able to maximise their potential and their contribution.

So, on a personal level I would recommend continue to educate yourself any opportunity to listen, learn and watch and I would say

Aboriginal people and culture has always valued waiting time or quiet time where you sit, and you listen, and you ponder before you speak and act and I really wish I had taken this on board in past situations.

6.9.2 Em's story

I'm a proud Noongar woman from the South-West of Western Australia. My family connections are to Ballardong and Wardandi Country and peoples.

Education and teaching background

I had a really tough time at school, it was really the disconnected from my home culture and I found it really hard. I was given scholarships to two different private schools in high school, and neither really worked for me. There was a fair bit going on at home and in the background, and I didn't get the support and understanding from the school that I needed to stick at it. I think there is more support available today, but my experience definitely affected how I viewed education in general. And it took me a long time to sort of overcome that.

I started off wanting to be a doctor and it was a mentor that said to me that I'd be an excellent teacher. So yeah, from there I applied for teaching and discovered I loved it. I started off in senior high school and after a while I had the opportunity to start the Indigenous program at a college. I enjoyed doing that for about five years. And in the last two years, I've been at a private boys' high school looking after the boys, the Indigenous students on scholarships, here.

I had a good primary school experience, but my secondary experience was just a bad time. So, I thought the main space

needing change and better support for Indigenous kids would be in secondary education. So that is why I went straight into secondary teaching.

Understanding and experience of Aboriginal self-determination

Self-determination is an interesting and important topic for me. I think in an Aboriginal context and in education settings, self-determination is just about having a voice and feeling you are being heard by people and them taking it on board. It's being part of the discussions and decision making and contributing an Aboriginal perspective and voice to school and education matters.

Barriers/challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

I feel like a lot of the time, you know, I'm one person in a school of 230-something staff and I'm the only Indigenous person here. And you can put your point forward as many times as you want, but sometimes it doesn't get heard because it is one single voice and not a priority to others. We're still in that system and you're still the minority voice. So, it was always me speaking up about something other people didn't really have an understanding of.

It's the system, so at the moment, they put these Indigenous boys into classrooms where they have to sit there and they have to be quiet and they have to listen to their teacher and write down notes and then regurgitate the information, and that's how they get looked at. And that's how they get judged. And we all know that that's not really an indicator of how smart a kid is or how well they're going to do in life, is just an indicator of how well they can be quiet and regurgitate information.

Then there is the big barrier of getting teachers to understand that, yeah, this is maybe how you teach, but it doesn't mean it's what's best for the boy or the kid, and it doesn't mean that that's going to determine where they go in life, you know? They're going to come across all of these kids that are going to operate in a different way. And they've already got this notion about who they think the kid is before they've even met him, you know? We need to be able to support them and have it on an individual basis. This is this kid from this community, and this is how his community works. And this is why he's at school. And you know, this is what he wants to do for his people because they all want to go back home and implement. Right? Yep. So how can we support them instead of just getting them to follow the same protocol as every other student because they are not the same?

We need to stop putting these kids in a box. You know, like if they don't fit, they're just discarded. And they're so intelligent and they've got all these capabilities and they come here and get put down, after put down, after put down. We give them tutoring and more homework and tell them off when they're talking in class and the list goes on and on. But it's like, have we actually changed our approach or are we just punishing them for being who they are? We bring educators in who are not equipped and prepared to teach our students. And then the blame in the failure goes back on our Indigenous kids and their families.

It's such an isolating feeling when you've got something going on with a student and you're trying from your cultural perspective to support them as best you know how. But then you've got the other side of the system coming in from a different approach and there's no one there to back you up. So yes, it doesn't go your way. So, there's all these little things that happen on a regular basis where

you just have to take it on the chin and keep moving forward without anyone to actually talk to or any sort of sounding board.

The application process is really rigorous, so potential scholarship students have to test. We go out when we're travelling around wherever it is, you know, West East Kimberley and Pilbara and the students have to do a reading and writing test and spelling tests as part of their interview process. And I don't have any say on which Indigenous students gets picked. So, I go there as a silent partner and sit there and smile and nod. I just try and get a few words in and make them feel a bit of more comfortable. The school selects the students that have tested the best. And then there's these other kids where you see that spark in their eye and you think, oh, there's something there, you know, these kids want this, and their families really want them to go and get a new experience and come back to community able to help. But they're the ones that get overlooked because they don't test as well.

Generally, lateral violence hasn't been a barrier for me personally. I've been really lucky in terms of connecting with local Elders in the education space that have really supported me.

You know, I'm, you know, I've got light skin, but I've always viewed it as a privilege. Not as a bad thing, because my dad has dark skin and I acknowledge that his journey has been so much harder than mine. But sometimes people can automatically assume, that because I'm a teacher and I've got light skin that somehow means that I haven't gone through some of the trauma and things other Aboriginal people have. I think I've actually probably had it more from Aboriginal people around my age that have worked in different education settings that have thought that my experience and therefore voice wasn't as valid as theirs and diminish my voice a bit.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in education

Yeah, I guess firstly, we can't be what we can't see. So, it's important for the boys to be able to see me as a teacher. So that's number one, being able to go and teach a class and have the students in that class view me as a teacher. First and foremost, that's really powerful, usually for Indigenous students. And then, I guess, sharing and educating in my way, being able to just tell my stories, you know, and implement little things that boost the Indigenous students' identity and self-esteem. It's just those little things that you can try and integrate into your day that are powerful for Indigenous students and make a big difference to how they feel about school and themselves.

We need much better training around pre-service teacher Indigenous education and how that works and looks in reality and maybe some specific teaching around self-determination and how that can look and be exercised in the education system. Something practical where teachers can actually, as part of their journey, go and spend one or two days on Country somewhere and just look and listen and see how it's different. And then hopefully they get some kind of understanding about where their Indigenous students are coming from. This will also help teachers to implement new pedagogical strategies that are more culturally appropriate and effective than the standard detention system; being seated at the front of the class or making them do extra homework. None of these things are ever going to work.

The establishment of an Indigenous educators' network or something similar where we can get together, just to be able to hear each other and gain support and advice from others experiencing similar situations. As I said, I'm the only Aboriginal

person here, so an external network of fellow Indigenous teachers would be a great source of support.

I think also, especially in remote settings, schools need better recruitment and application processes that prioritise Indigenous teachers and cultural competency. Too many teachers go to these remote community schools simply for the money, promotion and for the experience, and often they have a patronising, saviour type attitude. As soon as they start to actually understand and get immersed and build relationships, they are ready to move on again and all of that is wasted. And those poor kids get the worst outcomes of anyone. Yeah, we need a far more rigorous approach around that and who we bring in and recruit to remote schools so that the community is put first, not individual career aspirations.

6.9.3 Josh's story

Yaama nginda gaba? Gayrr ngay Galigalgaa. K/Gamilaroi dhawun-dhi dhurra-y.

Giir yilaadhu warraldanha ngaya nhalay dhawun-dhi.

Ngaya winangalawaa ngaandi dhaay yananhi gamilu ngay.

Marabaa yana-y

"Are you well today? My name is Waters.

Truly, now I am standing on this Country.

I will remember who came here before me.

Go well."

I am a proud Gamilaroi man from the North-West Slopes and Liverpool Plains areas of New South Wales. I also have cultural ties to the Euahlayi and Awabakal people. Currently I am a post-graduate research student with a University in QLD, where I specialise in the fields of Indigenous languages, knowledges, histories, epistemologies, ethics, and research methodologies.

Education and teaching background

My family come from various parts of north-west New South Wales and southern Queensland. And so, I guess in a context of sharing today, that's where I'm coming from. Most of my experiences will be informed by that part of my ontology and I'll be speaking through that, but also as a representative of that.

I lived in a suburb first of all called Oxley Vale, and the local primary school in that suburb was called Oxley Vale Primary School. Oxley was one of the first European invaders who came up through the southeast or the area to the southeast, which is now generally referred to as the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales. And basically, from there, as per with most invasion and the nuances around invasion of Australian and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelands. That was basically the kicking off or the commencement of European colonisation and the invasion of Kamilaroi peoples' homelands, and their ancestral connections to place and time and resources, waterways, right down to the smallest grains of sand and soil across the country. But we were never told that. It was this narrative that was kind of put in place to cover up the massive blemishes of history and culture that I was connected to through my ancestral lineage. The school motto was 'trust and obey'. And so, when you look at that through the context of education, it's basically saying trust and obey our narrative.

There was no mention of Kamilaroi people. There was no unpacking of the history. There was nothing. It was basically non-existent within the school context. The main high school that's related to Oxford Vale Primary School, is Oxley High School. The logo, which is the anchor, was representative of solidifying the presence of John Oxley on Country. So that's where I grew up. From that point on, when I was in year seven, we moved out to a property about maybe 10kms out of town, and it's literally about 800 metres away from this relic of an anchor that commemorates where Oxley crossed the river. And I can't remember what it says on the anchor, but there's no mention of criminal atrocities, no mention of the pain and suffering that was caused by his imposition into those territories. So again, throughout my high school time, there was no mention of Aboriginal people, or our local Kamilaroi peoples' history, it was all about European history and language. We learned French and English. We wrote about things that didn't necessarily exist, like the imaginative storytelling.

I had one amazing Aboriginal teacher who would bring in his guitar and sing us songs and tell stories. And so, this fellow was the first educator I had who was like a reinforcement of those really great things that I saw happening at home. He was visibly black and was very forthcoming about his blackness, and he would tell us these yarns in a way that I was familiar with. And they were funny and engaging and they were different, and they were, what's the word I'm looking for? They were like, captivating. Yes, like, you were just hanging on every word. I could recite his stories years later just because of the way that he told them. And I think to some degree, he incorporated elements of Aboriginal storytelling tradition into his pedagogy. But at the same time, he was also a lone black man swimming in an ocean of whiteness, and he could only do so much. And I'm sure, looking back, he would have struggled a lot in that

space. I don't know if he was as forthcoming about his identity outside, as he was in the classroom.

Understanding and experience of self-determination

Self-determination from my perspective essentially means to live your life on your own terms, as much as is possible within the context of this current society. This means being able to adapt to the current state of the world in ways that don't compromise your identity and/or your landscape. Being able to speak your language without fear of judgement, to practice your culture in ways that are important to you, your family and community, to connect to your place/s in your own unique and culturally significant ways, and to honour the teachings of your elders and ancestors in spaces that they were not always (if at all) permitted to enter.

It means being powerful but not in ways that you are dominating others but uplifting them. It means being in relation to people and Country in ways that uphold and maintain integrity, because you only exist in relation to those things. It means seeing yourself through the eyes of your ancestors, rather than measuring yourself by the tape of those who look on in pity and contempt.

Finally, it is to obtain the means to support the development of a world that is more inclusive of cultural authenticity, so that the generations that come after you have more access to self-determining, self-governing power and importantly, they know how to use it.

I believe it is very difficult to be self-determining as a First Nations person in this current society. As a K/Gamilaroi man, while I like to think that I am self-determining, the reality is that so much of my identity, my connection to Country, my ability and desire to speak my traditional language, the clothes I wear each day, the ways that

I raise and educate my kids, the ways that I teach, the pedagogical approaches I use, etc. I teach in a classroom, using English through Western pedagogical approaches and theory, this is all largely not determined by me, but rather by what the market demands of me if I want to survive and support my students in building a life of opportunity and obtain some sense of freedom.

This also informs the sociology of teaching and education spaces; whether primary, secondary, or higher education. It places little value on First Nations peoples, cultures, histories, and identities, and so the consequences of even announcing yourself as First Nations or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander means to potentially assume some exotic cultural persona which stems from a culture and people that lay frozen deep within a distant past, and therefore have no authentic or meaningful relation or connection to current contexts. To fail to adhere to Western epistemology and imperial pedagogy, we risk our careers and opportunities, our economic freedom, and our self-security and sense of dignity that is supposed to come with work.

So perhaps a question is, "How self-determined can you really be as an Aboriginal teacher/educator if you are positioned within an ideological system which thrives off the destruction of all of the things that inform your true cultural identity?"

I think my self-determination and my feelings about self-determination were kind of instilled, but in an unspoken way when I was a kid. So even though I went to that primary and high school where my people were non-existent, my mum always knew and made sure that we knew culture and language. And so, she would use lingo around the house and there was always that presence of culture in the house. I developed a lot of my self-awareness and understanding in relation to everything around me, just from being

on Country and being raised in that sort of way. I think mum instilled the tools in us as well. It was partly due to mum's influence, but also it was inherent, too.

And I think the other part of that growing up was a lot of alcoholism and violence. But there were those people that would come around and they were just mad storytellers. They would sit around, and then other people would come along and bring their drum kits around and didgeridoos, guitars and they would just jam. They'd just sing these powerful songs like Uncle Bob Randall's 'Brown Skin Baby', [[my brown skin baby they take him away - YouTube](#)] and that helped me develop like a conceptual base of thinking. I could translate metaphors and connect my experience to the land and culture.

My self-determination is my ability to think and distribute my thinking across different situations and settings. And I think that comes back to the key point about us needing to educate our kids, on our own terms. So, what was happening in my house, even though part of it was dysfunctional, I learned from that and gained skills from that as well. But schools don't value or recognise these skills. The freedom in my thinking to think like an Aboriginal person allows me to make sense of very complex situations and develop my responses accordingly. But if you're not educated in that way, then you don't see yourself like that. You don't see yourself in relation to the things around you. Just see yourself as an isolated node, which goes about society, goes and finds work, and makes decisions that don't have any kind of consideration for the community and the system, the knowledge and upbringing.

Barriers/challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

Self-determination needs to happen in schools, and this is not currently happening. We need to educate our own kids on our own terms. So where is the storytelling component within English?

Where is the metaphoricalisation of things that are happening on Country through different mediums, through science, through history, through language, those sorts of things? What's happening in schools at the moment is that you've got this very heavy, dense, relentless imposition of western colonial, imperialistic thought, which doesn't suit our kids now.

The current school system is still based on competition and ranking, and the motto is 'you can just grow as much as you want'. And there is no regard for anything else. So that's an introduced concept and it is very colonial concept, very individualistic. Why can't students value working as a community to find a solution?

Cultural concepts that exist that aren't exclusive or disconnected from what's being taught within the curriculum. But the teachers need to understand the life experience of the student and the cultural worldview of them, essentially over time, because that's the starting base, we're still quite far behind in terms of what is achievable in terms of self-determination. But from a long-term perspective, I would hope that enough students can develop the skills and the passion to want to become educators themselves. Because, in fact many are already educated in our way. So how do you formalise that experience? And give them the opportunity to teach from their own perspective, in their own way and on their own terms? And that's something that's not really happening at the moment and students are missing out on Aboriginal people that would make great teachers and are great teachers in community.

I think community control is also vital in progressing self-determined education and that's something that I've really tried to push. But schools have a long history of being structurally, and systematically, as well as culturally and emotionally violent towards Indigenous communities. And so, you have a lot of communities

that are reeling from that violence and still distrustful of the school system along with how and what it teaches.

Another major barrier to our Aboriginal self-determination in schools is that change can happen so quickly, depending on who comes in as a leader within a school that has established cultural programs. You can develop something solid and prove its success for years but all it would take is one principal to come in and say, "Sorry. We're not going to do this anymore. We're going to do this new literacy program instead", or just subject it to less and less priority and time until its diminished and gone.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in education

I believe, that at this point in time, we as First Nations educators must find ways to further the "transition" into culturally relevant ways of teaching. This isn't to suggest that school officers and assistants don't contribute in meaningful and productive ways, but in terms of curriculum delivery and pedagogical approaches, there is a major lack of representation in the current workforce, of Indigenous teachers compared to non-Indigenous teachers. The lack of Indigenous teachers in Australia, in some ways, ensures the continuity of the same pattern that we have seen since the 1940's-1960's when Indigenous children were first granted entry into mainstream schools.

Therefore, it would be worth exploring the possibility of having more Indigenous teachers who know how to reconnect back to First Nations ways of teaching and learning, and having more First Nations people involved in genuine, meaningful, and critical engagement with education and learning/developmental theories and practices. This idea reaches back to an initial and recurring point that I have made over the course of my time as a teacher, to

educate ourselves and our children on our own terms and in our own ways that we know have always been effective. Although some of our knowledge can be difficult to capture through standardised testing and so it often goes neglected and unrecognised by the system. So, when I talk about educating and teaching on our own terms and developing human capacity, I refer to all kids, not just Aboriginal kids. We need to teach them and educate them and converse with them and give them the dignity and integrity of teaching them through a lens that is inclusive of different modalities that are more in alignment with the human experience and Australian sociocultural environments.

As Aboriginal teachers we should be supporting our own development to deliver quality education on our own terms, in our own ways, in our own languages (where possible). This means pushing back against assimilative approaches and continually advocating and educating others. It would be wonderful to see more communities/institutions committed to the recruitment and development of current and future First Nations teachers across Australia and individual states and regions. This would create an organic flow-on effect to pedagogy and curriculum reform.

Genuine consultation and partnership with local Indigenous communities is needed along with willingness to accept the critical advice and feedback to make impactful changes to the structures of teaching, learning and education within the school/department/region/sector. I have seen many schools who go as far as developing the relationships with community, although the partnership only goes as far as “planning for NAIDOC week” or irregular superficial contact to keep parents engaged, rather than seeking advice on teaching and learning provisions. Schools need to move from mere box-ticking and tokenistic approaches to more authentic, transparent, and culturally appropriate approaches and

partnerships with community and First Nations peoples. This would be beneficial for all children in the school system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to policy and legislations that have created and compounded trauma, hurt, and pain, and institutions such as schools have been extraordinary perpetrators of this. The effects of these events are still felt in First Nations communities today and are still very much the source of the complex barriers to our self-determination. Some of the key behaviours that serve as impediments, which I have seen first-hand in schools, I believe are very much grounded in a western ontology. Specifically, the idea that there can only be one source of truth in how we go about formulating ideas and approaches to school and teacher development and evaluating student learning. This is why consideration of cultural governance is important for schools to recognise and include, as this can provide more suitable frameworks for productive dialogue to take place around what needs to happen in schools to better recognise First Nations' contributions and capabilities.

It's important that as kids, that spiritual awareness and that respect for Country and environment is ingrained. Basically, it's part of their identity along with understanding kinship relations. You know what I mean? In Aboriginal homes and communities, there's a real emphasis on how you're connected to the people and places around you, and many parents spend their time helping children to understand their connections to other people, and how they work that out as they grow, interact and meet different people is fundamental. And so what happens then for these young people who are living in homes and communities where that storytelling and that reiteration of culture, cultural values and ethics and things are not being reiterated? Is there a responsibility of schools to pick that up? Is that where, you know, we need to be helping these

students from a very young age as they come in to connect with Aboriginal spirituality, culture, and identity? Do we need to offer that in case that's not happening consistently or routinely in homes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children?

And so, it comes back to cultural safety and again, educating on our own terms. That's not to say such a thing must be done in a segregated environment. I certainly wouldn't want to give students the illusion that none of this stuff over here exists, like capitalism, racism, and imperialism, but they're going to be subject to it eventually. So, I think the two-way approach is the best way to go where you have a school dedicated to teaching in alignment with both-ways. At the moment, Aboriginal kids are only included and educated on the terms of the dominant culture and values of the people who are in the classrooms teaching it. Therefore, schools and teachers have to gain more specific knowledge about the culture that these kids are coming from and what pedagogical models suit their strengths, experiences, and skills.

This creates that equality between the relational dynamic of teachers and students which affords students the same dignity and respect that they expect as teachers and that views everyone as lifelong learners. And that means not seeing empty cups in front of you but seeing little people who have the ability to contribute to and enhance shared understandings of many things. And that's a powerful statement. I always found that when you go to an Indigenous child and you say, "You're already doing science. You are a scientist", it's just that this is being framed in a certain way but the impact on that child's life might be incomprehensible.

6.9.4 Tonia's story

My name is Tonia Chalk, and I am a proud Budjari woman from Southwest Queensland. I was born in Cunnamulla and am descended from the Dunn, Hearn, Allardice, and Roberts families.

I completed my Bachelor of Arts (Theatre), BA (Hons), B.Ed. (Secondary) and worked in schools for 9 years as a secondary teacher of English, Drama, and Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This was in a large Toowoomba State high school.

Currently, I am a confirmed Griffith University PhD candidate in the School of Humanities, Languages, and Social Science, and for the past 10 years I have been a Lecturer in the School of Education, teaching First Nations Education, at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba.

Education and teaching background

Within the Higher Education space as an Aboriginal academic and even in the school system as a secondary teacher, I was and have never been able to feel sovereign due to a range of factors related to white privilege and systemic racism. The school system is still dominated by a white Western curriculum, white staffing, and white conversations with little or no recognition of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. There was minimal understanding of and support for the Aboriginal knowledge and expertise practised in my everyday teaching life.

Personal understanding and perspective of Aboriginal self-determination

For me the term 'self-determination' has been tainted by government bureaucracy and failed policy. It has become just another empty phrase like 'reconciliation' that gets thrown around

and diminished to a white, watered-down version of what Aboriginal people actually want and need. I prefer the terms 'sovereign' or 'determined self' for this reason. From a collective Aboriginal perspective though I do support the principles of self-determination, which means being able to determine the future, without obstacles and barriers. It is about being able to make everyday decisions based on community strengths and needs, and Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Self-determination for Aboriginal people is about being sovereign and feeling free to live, breathe, and exist on our terms, our time, our strengths, needs, and expertise, without the burden of white privilege and fragility and the hierarchies they impose.

Perhaps the strongest example I've seen of how self-determination can exist in an educational space was an Indigenous governance structure in an Australian university that informed everything from decision making, curriculum, funding, research, boards, staffing, working conditions, and is delivered through an everyday norm of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing, and expertise. Until this is the only university model and is commonplace, we can only ever disrupt higher education structures from within. Being self-determined in education requires us as Aboriginal teachers and academics to keep pushing boundaries, being loud, speaking up, taking up space, and never, ever giving up.

Barriers/challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

To be honest the barriers to my self-determination as an Aboriginal educator are many and ongoing and I have never felt truly self-determined in this space. There are a whole number of practical and cultural barriers that make self-determination more challenging. The main ones I can think of include:

The never-ending cultural workload as an Aboriginal educator and academic. Staff expect to be able to call on me for cultural advice and input on all types of matters. While I want to help, it is time consuming and can end up becoming an expected unpaid 'service to the profession'.

Being the only Aboriginal teacher (I was only one of two Aboriginal Secondary teachers out of 102 staff) and lecturer in your workspace can be incredibly isolating when you feel you are the only voice speaking about and for certain things.

Sometimes it feels like I'm being exploited as that 'black' academic friend that white academics can call on when there's an Aboriginal 'issue' in their course, or they need Indigenous resources or content.

The 'cultural workload' also means I am expected to represent First Nations academics on various boards and university committees, including chairing committees, to meet Terms of Reference requirements. This role means I'm working alongside Associate Professors and Professors when I'm currently employed as a Level B academic. Non-Indigenous academics never have to consider this in their career as they have choice and are not required to be 'cultural or minority' representatives.

Lateral violence is one of the greatest barriers to self-determination and is manifested through jealousy, gossip, judgement, surveillance, constant criticism, ostracising, silencing, no support for career progression, exclusion from the collective, cliques, being avoided and ignored. Being made to feel 'less Aboriginal' or that you need to validate your identity to others is also part of it and it's really damaging – psychologically, emotionally, and socially.

I could continue listing the barriers that surround me as an Aboriginal educator and academic. They come from colleagues, other staff, students, administration, and sometimes even from other Aboriginal academics. Just another day in the colony.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in schools

If we are going to progress towards self-determination as a people, then it must be collective. We need to build a community and take the attitude of 'I don't succeed if **we** don't succeed'. This is the only way it can work, and that collective must be big and grow and grow and grow each moment of each day. Aboriginal peoples are diverse peoples, but when it comes to the bigger picture, we must remember that we are part of a collective community, and we are sovereign.

Lateral violence can be minimised through staff being honest and open with one another, strong leadership from the top that flows down and across, a collective consciousness, and to disengage from negative and overtly critical comments and conversations used to denigrate other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators.

Quite simply, higher education institutions need to meet their 3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets in their EBAs with no excuses! This must be a commitment to meeting the 3% full-time continuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academic staff and increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional staff. This is the starting point for the collective, the community, and more importantly our visibility and expertise in the higher education space. By supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and students to become educators, the higher education space can have a positive flow-on

effect to state and independent schools across all sectors – early childhood/foundation, primary, and secondary.

6.9.5 Will's story

My name is Will and I am a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi. My connection is to Wailwan Country where the Aboriginal settlement of 'Tin Town' is located near the township of Coonamble (or 'Gunambil', local Wailwan meaning 'full of dirt'). This is where I was born and spent the early years of my life. In 2012 I moved to Toowoomba and began my university journey, successfully completing a Master of Arts specialising in Humanities and Communications at University in 2019 before embarking on tutoring with the College for First Nations.

Education and teaching background

It would have been around the year 2000 when I started my journey into education and teaching. I was working with a lot with different communities and in different jobs before then. But you know, the first school job I had was working in the primary schools. I had to go and accompany the music teacher one day and she was swearing at the kids. It was chaotic and the kids were swearing back at her, you know, and she was complaining later about all the kids and stuff like that. I asked her 'what made you become a teacher?' And she replied that the only reason she had remained in teaching for 16 years was for the holidays and the money. I went to schools and experienced Scripture Day and the Indigenous children, the students that had their own beliefs and songs, but were singing Christian songs and learning German. No cultural teaching and learning was happening at all. I've met a lot of Indigenous parents back then that that would have loved having their children, you know, taught their culture. But it's never happened properly, you know, yet they've got scripture. To me there's an opportunity that

we can teach all students in Indigenous culture our belief system, you know, and tell our stories, but there was none of that, none of that in the schools I worked in. And I knew we needed to start somewhere and start at the very beginning.

I had a conversation with somebody over coffee. And so that's where I started to get involved with the Indigenous community. You know, you sit down with the local people, and you talk to them about, beliefs, stories and all those old things. And so, when I go to teach, I speak on the old people's behalf to bring in their teachings, you know, their wisdom. We've got to be teaching our lifestyle; if we start teaching our young children the ways of Indigenous knowing and being, then they know how to progress in our changing society. It's not that the parents don't care but there's a lot of problems, you know, because we still have alcohol and drug problems going on. And they're the generations that have come from missions and shanty towns like where I had lived in Tin Town with all that sort of trauma to deal with. But the parents would like their kids to learn their culture and ways at school.

Personal understanding and perspective of Aboriginal self-determination

My journey of self-determination started when I just let everything go and I just drove and travelled around. I remember sitting in the car and didn't know where I was going, and I just stopped and had a conversation with my ancestors at that moment. And I said, I'm just calling on the help and I'm here for whatever reason and don't know what to do, have you got a direction for me. Yeah, I'll go slow, and I left it at that. They must have heard this old, black soul because the message that came back was to go onwards, but slowly and aware of the signs.

My self-determination has grown from my own education and research and what I've written about my thesis coming from that dispossessed lifestyle and the struggles and all that. You know, and it comes from within. And I think what always helped me was that little bit of knowledge that my mother shared with me about life and our people, you know, and which I share in my teaching. You know that knowledge? And it's almost like a presence of a grandparent, and the voices within were so gentle they'd be like a hand on your shoulder saying 'You've got to do this. You know, it's very important.' That's how I would hear it. And so, I would go do what I was asked to do, you know? And so those little but important lessons for Indigenous people come from listening to the voice. That's what got me through, even though I lost a lot of my culture being taught to hear that voice and those other things that my mother instilled in me, helped me find my way. But I see those things lacking within students, within schools.

I think being self-determined is also having that sense of belonging and meaning. And that's what I found on those travels and eventually going to university. It opened my world up, you know, to what I was learning and what really happened and understanding why my mother couldn't teach us culture. And there was a time in my life I used to think of myself as being cursed with my blue eyes, but you know, the older I got, I realised employment, especially with government departments and stuff was easier because of the way I spoke and the way I looked. But really, I was telling myself, look underneath, what is this organisation doing for our people? I started to see things from a bigger picture and from both sides. You know, if anybody's going to do anything, to help my people then why not me? Someone's got to do it. And I thought to myself, well, I've got a voice. I'm really quite an introvert. But when I've got to get out and talk on my culture and share these important things, I

don't feel shame. You can use your voice so you can do something positive.

Self-determination should not be about being separate but seeing our similarities and coming together to learn each other's ways equally. My mother always told me we were peaceful people. And she said it didn't matter what race or colour you are; if you came to our Country and you respected it. You'd be welcome. My mother said, if you had a child here on Country, then that child was just as significant as an Indigenous child being born, because it was born on Country. Yes. And the old people would look at it as a soul returned. So, if we look at Australians this way, we are all the same but just at different stages of our development and connection. We need to teach what development is from an Indigenous perspective? And that's what I say to them. You know, my students, I believe it doesn't matter if you're not Indigenous, you know, if you can identify with your nation where you're born you can connect with the culture and beliefs there.

Barriers/challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

You know, I longed for the day when I was writing my thesis, when I could write it less academically so my family could understand what I've written, but not only my family, but the people and their descendants I've mentioned from Tin Town. That's what excited people about my mission research, it's where we can rediscover our culture, especially for the men. You know, that's why many turn to drinking and violence and things, they feel the pain and anger of not having their stories known and told by their people. We need to be able to be academics and do study but in an Aboriginal way that our families and communities can access and feel part of when they read it.

Look, you know, one of the things my mother taught me is the importance about teaching my story and culture despite that fear of, 'Oh, look, he's a white fellow' because I am fair skinned. What am I doing teaching Indigenous stuff? But we are diverse and that's what I tell my students. Self-determination is accepting yourself and feeling confident to have a voice, but this can be really hard with the judgement from others. I think sometimes we can be our own worst enemy, individuals threaten the whole, you know, but I think this stems from that period of anger and distrust that those generations carry, you know. There's a lot of lateral violence. And yet, we've got to look past that and see the big picture and what we have to do here together. You know, it's about the future of our kids and retaining this knowledge, you know, and that's what we need to do together, no matter what we look like or where we live or come from as Aboriginal people.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in schools

Well, I just think, you know, because of the world the way it is now, everything changed and there's a lot of Indigenous people that have never grown up on Country or with family or experienced that culture and the mainstream way is all they know. So, to be self-determined as Aboriginal people often it's more about educating ourselves on how our culture was, you know, embracing those traditional values, beliefs, stories and the language so you and your students can feel connected. It's about tolerance and respect. It's about renewing and re-establishing our traditional values; it doesn't matter whether you're on Country or off, you can learn about it, the lore and expectations. Indigenous knowledge will give all students a better understanding of Country and culture.

If you go to work off-Country, you've got to be accepted by the old people and talk to them, telling them who you are, where you're from and what you're there for and how you can help. And that's what I've always done, you know, and it's amazing how, I've always been welcomed. The old people want their culture and knowledge to survive and live on.

6.9.6 Judith's story

My name is Judith, and I am a Yamatji woman with connections to Shark Bay and Carnarvon, and I was born and bred on Noongar Country. I was adopted at birth and have been raised with non-Aboriginal parents. My birth mum died maybe six or seven years ago. And prior to that, I had a seven-year relationship with her and getting to know her. So, you know, when we're talking about the whole self-determination journey, I think that's a huge part of that for me as well.

Education and teaching background

I was working in Community Services for many years and then I landed a job at the National Park, so I started getting more into the cultural side of things and learning from the people that were working there. A few guys that have worked there over the years taught me a lot. Then when one of the girls that was working there left and started working in the district high school, she basically she dropped my name and contact number to the principal, who then sought me out for the Aboriginal education assistant role. I ended up changing over into education and very fortunately, have been there ever since. I think it was 2011 that I started at the local District High School.

I was working in three schools at one stage to get full-time hours. The schools and leaders all say that they value the position, but no

one wants to pay the position full time. My schools and hours at each changed each year depending on Aboriginal student numbers, because I wasn't permanent.

At the high school, under the admin there I felt I couldn't make the changes I needed to. The primary school principal was willing to listen and offer me five days. But even then, you know, I'd be trying to teach a class of 30 kids that already had children with behavioural issues. And other teachers would send Aboriginal kids to me if they played up. How can I help this kid when I've got 30 other children in the room? You're just putting him in here because he is Aboriginal, that was frustrating. So, I put the feelers out to principals in my area and just said, 'this is the deal I'm looking for. I don't want to go back to the high school or be working across schools'. A local primary school picked me up. And I remember the first time I was walking around with my mobile in my hand because it was like my walkie talkie at the other primary school. It was almost like PTSD waiting for that phone to call. And then deputy said to me, 'it's not your problem alone, it's all our problem. As a school we all look after all the kids, the Aboriginal kids are not your responsibility alone'. And I thought, to myself, yes, I can work with that.

Understanding and experience of self-determination

Well, I think if you had asked me what self-determination was 10 years ago when I kind of started in education, I wouldn't have known, I wouldn't have known how to answer. I think it has been that personal development, that personal growth in myself through experiences at school that have now led me to understand. I can reflect and think, this is what has got me this far and enabled me to become self-determined as someone working in education. Its

largely about knowing who I am and where I'm from. I think that whole road of self-discovery of my identity was a huge part of that.

I've always known I was adopted and, you know, in my 20s and I started making connections and trying to find out who my family was. So, I guess my whole life has been a journey of self-discovery and, you know, meeting different family members, but maybe not the usual way. A cousin here and an uncle there, a nanny there, you know, that will just pop up over the years.

My personal journey of self-determination has been a journey of learning about myself, who I am, where I'm from, where I feel connected to and letting go of any judgement, I feel has been perceived about me by my peers and my Aboriginal community as a Yamatji woman living and working on Noongar Country. Realising that I am good enough, my intentions are for the benefit of my students and community. Building resilience and the motivation to educate myself so that I can assist others is part of my own self-determination.

Self-determination hasn't been about just working in a role within education. Although my role in education has certainly developed my understanding of self-determination. I have been supported by people in various ways and I feel I have returned this support to those around me. In many ways we have helped each other to grow. When I've been allowed to work reciprocally with my peers or families Self-determination has become more natural and accessible.

I could say my best personal achievement was graduating university at 49 with a degree in Indigenous studies. It's helped me learn our history and see things in greater perspective from both black and white community perspectives. But it's never been about me, it's always been about the kids and helping parents to make

better choices for themselves which in the long term impacts their children's lives. Knowing that I have impacted a child or family is self-empowering to me. Equality drives me, building the bridge between two worlds and helping teachers, students, and parents to communicate and understand one another is what gives me joy. Breaking down those little barriers and understanding we have more similarities than differences.

Leading by example has become very important to me. I have learned that sometimes I can't change people or assist them to change if they are not ready. By becoming the best version of myself I hope to create a path for others to follow, in many cases walk with me. Modelling my expected behaviour without showing prejudice to other peoples' behaviour has helped me to gain trust. Allowing others see me fail and to have another go has also helped me win people over. Self-determination as an Aboriginal person gives permission for others to strive for their own SD.

I think we are all striving for our own personal goals which assist towards our SD. I feel Aboriginal people in education value education in general and understand that knowledge is power and to make positive changes for ourselves there needs to be a level of education for us to get out of poverty, become engaged with community and assist our children to break cycles.

Personally, I believe self-determination is continual and communal. Although I feel I have reached a good level of self-determination for myself, I still have aspirations of my role in education, sustainability and opportunities as I get older. The more successful I am the more opportunities open; these sometimes allow me to help someone else into my old role as I move forward. So, it continues ...

SD is important for everyone, you can't go through life living for someone else, we need to write our own narrative and fulfil our own

dreams. Education assists us with this, it enables us to grow and become more than the product of our parents' generation. We can make positive changes for ourselves and our community, it starts in education.

Barriers/Challenges to Aboriginal self-determination in education

I think one barrier is leadership change, it's the story of our life, you get to a certain level and then you just get knocked down and the control is just pulled out from underneath you, it doesn't even matter what industry. Then there's the issue of funding, the government decides, 'we're going to push this right now', and then something happens. Families start becoming successful or being able to help themselves, and then it's pulled out from underneath them because a change of government or change of admin, yeah, it's just this endless cycle. When leadership or admin changes roles in a school, they don't often look at what is working, they have their own perception of what needs to be done and they make drastic changes which undo years of community trust and relationship building.

Administrations have either helped me or hindered me. In some ways I'm lucky that admin hasn't always known what to do with me, so when I've been trusted to 'do my thing' I've had success. Passing on information to admin through home visits, checking in on absent students, having a coffee with mum and finding the underlying issue. In some cases, schools have supported me to support families which has helped them to be more self-determined and resulted in kids getting to school. This requires patience, this process is slow and can take years to gain trust. Often admin don't understand this, and, in some situations, I have been used as a general classroom assistant and placed in classrooms every half an hour to cover general behavioural issues in the classroom. It means

I can't connect with families which creates a sense of guilt for me. I know what's going on in their home life, but I can't help them now because I'm stuck in class with a child that doesn't need my help. It comes down to the ability of admin to really listen. It's not easy to say, 'you know what? I actually don't think this is the best use of my time and expertise'. You know, you don't feel comfortable saying that. And they'll tell you that you don't have the right to say that. And so how do you move then out of that sort of position? And sometimes it really takes walking and finding another place and another team or another employer who's willing to listen and let you do things your way a little bit more.

For AIEO's (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers) there are lots of barriers. The only prerequisite is to be Aboriginal; this is great to get into a school, but it can set you up to fail if no training and support is provided. I've never had an open discussion about what my skill set is and how I can best help the school. AIEO's are often employed just to tick a box and the school doesn't put time or energy into developing these people and finding out their skills.

I hear about training through other AIEO's usually after it has happened. Although PD is often sent through to admin it doesn't always filter down. Our development does not appear to be a priority and we are often overlooked. This is also true for professional development processes. Mine has never been completed so any aspirations are always on hold.

We used to have a North Metro AIEO consultant group, we had PD once a year (sometimes) each year we would talk about what we needed and then we went back to school, and nothing changed. Now I think there is one consultant, the others have all been redeployed or made redundant. There has NEVER been anyone looking after us, following up on how we are going, offering support.

It's all expected to come from each school which don't even follow a professional development process.

I have worked in three schools across Catholic education and state education to be employed full-time. In over 10 years, last year was the first time I worked in full-time in just one school, however I still did two jobs.

I also think self-determination in remote communities can be even harder. Non-Aboriginal people get all these wonderful entitlements because they're working in remote community, but those living in their own community and contributing to the school year after year don't get any entitlement at all. The money spent on constantly recruiting interstate teachers could be better spent to support remote schools to be self-determined. The end goal should be Aboriginal-managed and led schools, with local teachers and community involved.

Recommendations/thoughts for Aboriginal self-determination in education

School leaders need to follow through on performance management (over 10 years not once have I finished a process). Seek out relevant opportunities for staff and encourage them to participate in professional learning. The department also needs to introduce some purposeful and specific training for AIEO's, there is very little, in over 10 years I could count the AIEO PD opportunities I've had on one hand. The system makes it easy for us to believe that we are set up to fail.

I feel every school should employ an Aboriginal person, whether it is in languages, as an AIEO or an education officer to assist with implementing the cross-curriculum priorities in school. However, there is never enough money, or they believe they don't need one

because they 'don't have very many Aboriginal children'. Even more reason I say, how can they meet the Aboriginal cultural standards framework if they don't engage with community and don't interact with any Aboriginal staff and students?

I believe that school admin and academic staff need to be educated and fully understand the effects of colonisation. They also need to understand the unspoken expectation of "doing" for family which can take you away from your own family or goals of self-determination. Building strong connections with the community/families and offering opportunities (paid or voluntary). Making sure families understand school protocols and offering assistance if they come into the school to assist with events/educational programs etc. Kids will respond well seeing their parents become active members of their school community, parents can role model expected school behaviour and they can work together as a family to get as much as they can through education. I don't think administrators and teachers understand the damage that has occurred because our elders were not allowed to attend school. They don't understand the negativity surrounding educational institutions and schools and the need to change that perception, by offering something positive to families. Every school should have an Elder in residence. This could look very different depending on the school, but we should be giving back in some way.

As Aboriginal teachers we need to lead by example, ask the hard questions, teach those around us, build relationships/partnerships with community. I think if schools can create a safe space where Aboriginal people can be heard and given roles suited to their expertise, people given training and advice when needed. A lot of the behaviours associated with lateral violence can be avoided. Once a safe space is created we can then start to chip away at

things that are holding us back and maybe assist people to help themselves with the bigger issues.

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