Speaking up and speaking back to high school and post-school transition experiences:

An Indigenised narratology
exploring education for the life success
of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
living on Darumbal Country

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Abstract

This thesis tells a story of the lands belonging to the Darumbal people located in the coastal region of Central Queensland, Australia, through the lives of a select number of young people connected to the Country as either Traditional Custodians or as members of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups who have relocated to this area. In particular, the research examines how ten young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced school and how they leveraged those experiences to transition into family and community roles as young adults.

An Indigenist framework, as developed by Martin and Mirraboopa in 2003, is used in this study to explore the experiences of this very specific group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as students of secondary and tertiary educational institutions and as staff of workplaces in the local area. This research sought to understand what is happening to, for and amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high schools and how these experiences impact firstly, their transition out of formal schooling into further study and employment and secondly, the roles they assume within their families and community as young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals. A highly selective literature review focused on relevant published studies concerning a “strengths-based” approach informed the methods used to understand the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school environment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, General Managers and Chief Executive Officers of local organisations recommended the ten young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working on Darumbal country, who in turn participated in two semi-structured face-

to-face interviews. Four of the ten participants were involved in a series of two focus groups, referred to as Yarning Circles in this study.

The transcribed data was analysed through a process of coding and categorising in order to identify themes based on similarities, likeness and homogeneity, identifying six major themes: students acting as cultural ambassadors; simultaneously creating and being created as cultural ambassadors for the future; creating intricate webs of relationships; creating and acquiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capital; exercising their autonomy and interdependence; and navigating cultural obligations with school expectations. Profiles of each participant were developed to identify each personal narrative.

The thesis concludes that participants actively pursued a process of 'belonging and becoming'. School spaces were appropriated to facilitate their desire for 'belongingness' and skills, abilities and aspirations were developed consistent with the goal of 'becoming' the future of their families and communities. Their recent experiences of completing Year 12, working and studying on Darumbal country informed post-school pathways that are simultaneously professional and cultural by necessity. The findings illustrate the environment which young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people studying and working on Darumbal country have identified as valuable in their pursuit of belonging and becoming at the core of their identities. Whilst this research examines a very specific group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a particular location the learnings from this study could offer an insight into other groups of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on other Aboriginal and Torres Strait lands; and potentially extended to other First Nations' people elsewhere.

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Declaration of Authorship and Originality

I, the undersigned author, declare that all of the research and discussion presented in this thesis is original work performed by the author. No content of this thesis has been submitted or considered either in whole or in part, at any tertiary institute or university for a degree or any other category of award. I also declare that any material presented in this thesis performed by another person or institute has been referenced and listed in the reference section.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Coming to the Research Ceremony

1.1.1 Overview

This thesis is one story of many about a place that is very dear to me. It is my family's home and has been so for more than 2,500 generations. This place is 'Darumbal nunthi'. I, we, are Darumbal people and this land, sky and water is Darumbal just as we are. 'Nunthi' means land and the translation of our word to English describes land as a living entity. I will refer to nunthi as 'Country' from hereon in. My research was imagined and completed as I lived, loved and worked on my Country. It is birthed from my passion and belief in young people, especially the thousands of young people who have come to live on my Country from across the world.

For as long as I can remember, an issue that has positively and negatively impacted my family in equally significant ways has been our varied experiences within the education system. Education has been a source of both pain and promise, hurt and hope. The colonisation of Darumbal Country is told in the chronology of our experiences with education. The very recent history of my Country and its 'Australianising' is evident in the three generations surrounding me within my own family and how we experienced, and are experiencing, education.

It is on this issue of schooling experiences that I have chosen to invest my time, effort, emotion and thinking for the past six years. The question I explored in this research is 'what can be learned from the experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12?' This research question was inspired when I learned of my father's experiences having completed his schooling at Year 4. I learned so much from

his experiences as I listened to him share his stories with us as young children and as adult children.

I entered this research as a professional working in the education sector (early childhood through to university), as a student and as an active member of my community. My experiences have been enlightened from my learnings through the analysis of the personal narratives that I collected. The findings are now being discussed for use in informing education and wellbeing programs in schools, community and university. I am excited about the way in which our children are engaging in secondary school and my confidence has been roused in their abilities to navigate their way beyond secondary school and into employment, training and higher education. The impact this study has had on me personally has led to my decision to move my own children from an independent school to a school featured in this thesis that honours and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The community members and participants who have been involved in small or large ways with this research are valued partners. They are my co-collaborators and the owners of the research outcomes. As stated in the opening sentences, this thesis tells a story of Darumbal Country. I have attempted to weave a narrative of resilience and wellbeing through this story.

1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

1.2.1 Setting the Scene

My research examines the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students. I offer careful consideration of the non-academic factors that impact and influence the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students throughout high school and through the transition into further study and the workforce. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently graduated Year 12 offer valuable insights to their

lived experiences. I draw on my Indigenist ontology and epistemology and utilise narratology to delve into the experiences and insights of the participants to privilege Indigenous voices, as pioneered by Rigney (1999) and Martin and Mirraboopa (2003).

My use of Indigenised narratology allows many narratives to be included and drawn upon in this research. Narratology insists that the meaning assigned to stories, the purpose of the narratives and the behaviours and actions of the storytellers are all equally important elements (Hays and Wood, 2011). Narratology offers a way to organise all of these elements for individuals and collectives. Furthermore, a narratology that is 'Indigenised' is strengthened by an ontology and epistemology founded in Indigenous worldviews. A more detailed explanation of my approach is provided in Chapter 4, which focuses on my methodology.

Firstly, I present the context of the research through a political chronology, illustrating the nature of the relationship between Governments (State and Federal) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents for more than a century. Darumbal Country is situated in the state of Queensland, Australia. This section relates to events that unfolded across Australia and Queensland that were also experienced by Darumbal people and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who relocated to Darumbal country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent-child relationships have been influenced by Federal and State laws for the preceding five generations in the Rockhampton region, since it was formally proclaimed in 1858. This chapter provides an overview of the issues and tensions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Australia's education system in order to clarify the research problem. The following sections include the research aim and question before providing an explanation of the significance of the study.

Prior to British colonisation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population consisted of hundreds of diverse groups participating in complex social and political structures (Broome, 1994; Townsend-Cross, 2004). Universal values of relatedness, connectedness and balance underlie the differences within and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups (Donovan, 2002; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Townsend-Cross, 2004). These values assured the continuation of lore (particular sets of knowledge and traditions) (Donovan, 2002) and the preservation of timeless relationships (connection to ancestors through place, animals, celestial bodies) (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Parenting practices were critical for the provision and protection of children and the continuation of cultures (Borg & Paul, 2004; Donovan, 2002). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are situated within complex, contradictory and overlapping contexts since European settlement (Walter, Martin, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2017). Today, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are endeavouring to continue ancient cultures whilst simultaneously contributing to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and a rapidly changing wider society and economy (Hudson, 2010; Walter et al., 2017). The consequence of managing cultural identity in contemporary Australian society is cause for stress for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Brough et al., 2006; Fredericks, 2013; Hudson, 2010).

1.3 Traversing the Federal and State Policy Landscape

1.3.1 1869 –1901 Pre-Federation

Where a recognisably distinct people have managed to live for 2,500 generations or so in relative isolation, child-rearing practices were invaluable to such extensive continuity of culture (Donovan, 2002). However, in an effort to control the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander populations the pre-Federated colonies introduced legislation, which had immediate and lasting effects (McMillan & McRae, 2015; National Archives of Australia, 2011).

In 1869 the first laws to control Aboriginal people in Australia were introduced in Victoria. Known as the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869 (Vic): An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria*, the Act gave expansive powers to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Control extended to the regulation of movement, marriage, association and employment of Aboriginal people (National Archives of Australia, 2011). Several decades later, Queensland's *Aboriginal Protection and the Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (Qld) 1897* provided for the State's first specific laws for the regulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland. The Queensland Board for the Protection of Aborigines established similar powers to its Victorian counterpart, but with additional control over wages; the care, custody and education of Aboriginal children; the restriction of customary practices; the establishment of reserves; exemptions for 'half-caste' Aborigines; and the restriction of opium sales, especially to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Kidd, 1997; National Archives of Australia, 2011). The Queensland Act was amended in 1899, 1901, 1928, 1934, 1939 and 1946 to strengthen the provisions contained in the original Act (Kidd, 1997; National Archives of Australia, 2011). Other Australian States and Territories adopted the restrictive laws of Queensland: *Western Australia Aborigines Act 1905, the NSW Aborigines Protection Act 1909, the South Australian Aborigines Act 1911 and the Northern Territory Aboriginal Ordinances 1911* (National Archives of Australia, 2011).

1.3.2 1901–1965 Federation and Regulation

Overarching all State-based legislation between 1901–1965 was the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, more commonly known as 'The White Australia Policy'. The *Immigration Restriction*

Act 1901 and the *Pacific Islander Labourers Act 1901* were simultaneously passed as the first Acts of the newly-federated Nation of Australia. Both Acts had one purpose, which was to initiate the creation of a white, British nation (Barton, 2011; Foley, 2011; Tavan, 2004). The White Australia Policy permitted immigration of citizens only from 'white' nations whilst the *Pacific Islander Labourers Act 1901* set about the deportation of south Pacific Islanders who had been brought to Queensland in the late 1800s to work "as slaves and indentured labour to create the Queensland sugar industry" (Foley, 2011, p. 609). Barton (2011) explained the transformation of Australia from a cluster of British Empire colonies to a federated nation that "embedded Australian whiteness as above all a defensive project. After all, a nation based on an act of theft of land from its Indigenous people must continue to defend what has been taken" (p. 18). Foley contended that both Acts, whilst relating to non-Europeans, did not specifically target Aboriginal people because "at that point in history it was believed we were all going to die out" (2011, p. 609).

In the 1960s the position of Queensland Director of Native Welfare was disestablished and replaced by the Director of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act (1965)* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014). Provisions were made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people especially, but not limited to, those living on reserves as an 'assisted Aborigine' or as an 'assisted Islander' to be issued with documentation on which their personal information and permissions were recorded (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014). This Act also introduced laws specific to education, training and employment (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014). The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services Act 1965* introduced further regulation with specified

powers for the Director of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs to instate guardianship of any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children requiring 'protective supervision' (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014).

In addition to the aforementioned Government policies, other regulatory controls existed throughout pre- and post-Federation eras specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. These policies penalised traditional parenting practices such as traditional adoption and extended family roles and responsibilities in child-rearing as evidenced by the *Guardianship and Custody Infants Act 1891* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014). This piece of legislation granted judicial powers to remove Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were not living with a biological parent. Customary practices such as rites of passage were outlawed by the *Children's Protection Act 1896*, which enabled courts to remove children if there was evidence or suspicion of physical harm (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014). Most notable is the persistence of laws between 1865 and 1965, which stipulated powers of the Court to remove children immediately and without consultation with parents (Swain, 2016). The *Industrial and Reformatory School Act 1865* gave powers to Courts to forcefully remove Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to Industrial or Reformatory schools (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2014).

Child removal policies persisted into the 1960s and 1970s and resulted in a legacy known as the 'Stolen Generations' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). The control over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children evidenced the force and extent of Australia's assimilationist policies. Swain (2016) stated that:

> … legislators cite personal experience to prove that Aboriginal mothers did not have the same maternal feelings as Europeans. Even where the existence of maternal feelings was admitted, such feelings were given lower importance than the need to 'rescue' children with 'white blood' from the degradation of the native camps (p. 205).

The assimilation policy enforced removals of 'half-caste' children. An excerpt from the policy is below.

> The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Thus, any special measures taken for aborigines and part-aborigines are regarded as temporary measures not based on colour but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance to protect them from any ill effects of sudden change and to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favourable to their future social, economic and political advancement [*sic*]. (Hasluck, 1961, p. 1)

1.3.3 1965–2010 Shifting to the Left

In Queensland during the 1970s, the *Aborigines Act 1971* and the separate *Torres Strait Islanders Act 1971* continued with the goal of assimilation but discontinued the 'assisted' status. Strict regulations continued to control the movement of all peoples into Aboriginal reserves. Aboriginal Councils were established on reserves with provisions to regulate the entry of non-residents. These changes were followed by the dismantling of the White

Australia Policy. Tavan (2004) contends that the clandestine way in which the Policy was undone has proven to be problematic. The lack of public debate and democratic process in its undoing has allowed elements of the Policy (i.e. anti-Asian immigration) to flourish decades later, wherein "the nature of the abolition of White Australia which removed racial discrimination from the statutes, but not from the hearts and mind of everyday people" (Tavan, 2004, p. 111).

The creation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1974 localised the worldwide change in race relations. The decades that followed transformed the political and social landscapes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many of these changes were brought about by progressive political parties who were keen to recognise land rights and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in policy making (Broome, 1994; Clark, 2009). The introduction of welfare and the establishment of organisations such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) supported the self-determination agenda. Under the Howard coalition Government of 1996–2007, plans for reconciliation shifted from symbolic to integrationist; Native Title laws regressed; reforms to restrict welfare payments were introduced; the dismantling of ATSIC took place; and the use of constitutional measures to suspend the Racial Discrimination Act 1974 were exercised (Clark, 2009).

1.3.4 2010–2018 'Closing the Gap'

A phase of policies and strategies aimed at providing direction for education was experienced between 2005 and 2010 starting with the Review of Australian Directions in Indigenous Education (Buckskin, 2009). The Review focused on five key areas: pre-school education; collaborative relationships between schools and communities; strategic directions; teacher training and ongoing development; post-school options and pathways. The Review

recommended more time was required for policies to impact the key areas and for the effects of policies to be measured effectively. The resulting policy was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 (Ministerial Council for Education, 2010).

A shift in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy landscape was again experienced when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was made in the Australian Parliament at 9.09am on Wednesday, February 13, 2008 (Reconciliation Australia, 2017). What followed the Apology was the political overhaul of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies through the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), originally a social awareness campaign called 'Close the Gap'. The campaign focussed specifically on drawing attention to the shorter life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Pholi, Black, & Richards, 2009). The NIRA was the largest national platform of policy reforms covering education, housing, health and labour participation up to that point in time (COAG, 2009; Sullivan, 2011). The framework overlapped to provide a coordinated approach across all National Agreements (COAG, 2009). The NIRA identified seven specific 'building blocks' to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. These were early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities, governance and leadership. The building blocks were interdependent, requiring improvements in every area to affect change in an individual area (COAG, 2009; Harris-Hart, 2010). The Closing the Gap based policies has led to the constant visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues made possible by the annual reports to Parliament (Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017).

Rudd's Labor Government introduced a three-tiered approach to reforming education. Firstly, the introduction of standardised national curriculum, assessment and reporting with the

establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority in 2008 (Harris-Hart, 2010). Secondly, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) attempts to stimulate demand for higher education from under-represented groups (Trinidad, 2016). Thirdly, reforms to the VET sector are intended to streamline progression between schools and universities (Productivity Commission, 2007). All three reforms are aimed at increasing Australia's productivity and economic engagement and participation with provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Federal and State Government policies have made the links between school outcomes and economic growth explicit (Productivity Commission, 2007).

The Commonwealth Government planned to improve the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Federal strategy aimed to improve literacy and numeracy, Year 12 completion rates; and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010).

The Queensland Government's earlier Closing the Gap Education Strategy committed to three targets to halve the gap in Year 3 reading and numeracy by 2012 and to 'close the gap' in student attendance by 2013 and Year 12 retention by 2013. Queensland identified 204 State schools, 18 Catholic schools and 7 independent schools as focus schools. By 2013, more than 16,000 of the 49,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Queensland attended focus schools (Queensland Government, 2013).

The last decade has seen educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Queensland improve significantly (Bodkin-Andrews, O'Rouke, & Craven, 2010; Ford, 2012; Queensland Government, 2013). More recently, a statement from Deputy

Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships in February 2018 featured significant improvements in education outcomes in Queensland.

- Between 2006 and 2016 the proportion of Indigenous 20–24 year-olds in Queensland with Year 12 or equivalent attainment increased from 56.2% to 71.2%;
- From 2012 to 2017, the retention rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high school in Queensland improved by 11.7 percentage points to be 73.%, well ahead of the national average retention rate of 62.%.
- Improvements made in pre-school enrolment with 87.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in 2016. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, 2018)

The 2018 performance report of the progress to meet the 'Closing the Gap' targets show that after a decade of work only two of the four education targets had been achieved. The Turnbull Government called for a Closing the Gap policy 'refresh' to reconsider the definition of the targets. These targets include improvements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy, employment, reading and writing and school attendance (Higgins, Clarke, & Conifer, 2018).

1.4 The Research Problem, Aims and Question

1.4.1 Research Problem

Colonial State and Federal governments have used far-reaching legislated regulation to control Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities. These were significant in number and many of which were designed specifically to regulate the interactions and movements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Various race-based government policies were used as strategic interventions by State and Federal

Governments to interfere in the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents and families. The breakdown of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity, access to language and customary practices ensued.

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced education systems that have been designed to facilitate forced removals from their families and advocated their assimilation into white society (Atkinson, 2007; Beresford & Omaji, 1998; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). The complexities in the relationship between Western education and the cultural contexts of students has remained a constant dilemma throughout European settlement in Australia. Despite the trauma and devastation which Governments have visited upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the vehicle of Western education, Indigenous families have and continue to willingly participate in the schooling system (Borg & Paul, 2004; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2011). The pressures to achieve and fulfil educational expectations under the continued impacts of historical policies can be problematic for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This issue is fraught with trauma of family histories and experiences with forced removals and the White Australia policy, the maintenance and revival of cultural practices and values, and the imperative to succeed academically and participate in the self-determination of communities. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are living in ever-changing educational and political environments and their lives overlap with multiple cultures, ideologies and influences.

This research acknowledges the impact of policies since European settlement in Australia, which have affected the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities at all levels of the Australian education system. These historical and

contemporary factors contribute to the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. An extensive amount of research has been conducted in this field over decades (Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017; Hudson, 2010; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Rigney, 2010).

The methodology of this research brings together the researcher and the 'researched' where the research process produces knowledge, and most importantly, relationship (Rigney, 1999). This Indigenist epistemology and methodological approach informs the research question that steers away from discourse that is focused on problematising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and pathologising research of our schooling experiences.

1.4.2 Research Aims

My research has two major aims. Firstly, to create space for the voices of young people in my community and secondly, to emphasise the strengths of my community. Chilisa (2012) argues that postcolonial theories utilise methodologies to recognise and emphasise the voices of oppressed and marginalised people. The goal of such methodologies is to produce knowledge that distinguishes the epistemologies, lived experiences, culture and collective societies of colonised groups (Chilisa, 2012). Furthermore, research that intentionally frames the subject or subjects in a positive manner protects research participants from further exploitation. One of the guiding principles of Indigenist research theories is "the re-positioning of Indigenous peoples within the construction of research" (Henry et al., 2002, p. 4). Ludema, Cooperrider, and Barrett (2001) argues that research which focuses on problems creates further problems. Thus, if the intention of the research is for the benefit and advancement of marginalised communities than the topic of the research and its subsequent aims,

questions and methodologies must focus on the positives and strengths of those communities.

I create a space through my research for the voices of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their experiences of school. I recognise that much of the research and reporting attention concerned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students focuses on learning and teaching (Bennett et al., 2013; Harrison, 2007). My goal in this research was to concentrate on the 'student experience', thus allowing these experiences to create a fuller understanding of the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and how this cohort participates in school environments. This research required me to shift my interest away from quantitative research and reporting and further still from qualitative research focused on teaching practices, curriculum development and behaviour management. I have concerned myself with student experience through the narratives of recent Year 12 graduates and thereby allow their voices to be heard.

My second aim requires me as an Aboriginal researcher conducting research on Darumbal Country to responsibly challenge the dominant, and almost always negative, discourses that are applied to my community. I have considered how I have portrayed my community at every stage of my research. My research draws on the success of former students. The rationale for selection of this particular group recognises their ability to provide considered reflection on their experiences of school and their transition into post-school pathways. More specifically, these young people are recognised by Elders and other community representatives as having achieved some level of success at high school. By starting my research from a point of 'success', I aimed to continue that trajectory throughout my research to ultimately articulate all of the elements that define 'success'. It is important that education research is informed by quantitative and qualitative research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are

making improvements in many areas of education. Thus, their successes are a valuable source of data for the latter type of inquiry.

1.4.3 Research Question

My research uses an Indigenist design and directly relates to those who live on the lands of the Darumbal people. It is for the benefit and advancement of the local community of Rockhampton and surrounding region. As such, I have refrained from multiple outward-facing research questions. This approach allowed the process of collating and analysing data to direct the scope of my study through a "dialogical learning approach" as recommended by Native American scholar Grande (2010, p. 237). Harrison (2007) draws on the philosophical positionings of Foucault (1979), Derrida (1978) and Felman (1987) to elucidate the limitations of standard Eurocentric training to improve non-Indigenous teachers' and researchers' understandings of the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous people. He argues that researchers revert to their own research approaches and methodologies based on what they know as opposed to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into their methodologies. Harrison (2007) encourages researchers to look beyond common, overused research questions (i.e., Indigenous student success and failures) because the answers to these questions are already known and have been known for decades. Therefore, different people need to ask different questions if any knowledge is to be created.

The primary question on which I premised my research was:

> **What can be learned from the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12?**

Furthermore, Indigenist research requires alternative questions to position the study. Chilisa (2012) contends that researchers engaging Indigenous people and communities must "clearly define the research agenda and the role of the researched in the framing of the research agenda" (p. 298).

- **Why am I doing this research?**
- **What are my motivations and what has lead me to this study?**
- **Who will be impacted and how will I ensure the impact is positive and enriching?**
- **What are my worldviews and how do these effect how I see the researched?**
- **Who owns this research?**

This study gives voice to the school experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Central Queensland coastal region of Rockhampton by allowing lived experiences to inform a deeper understanding of the issues which influence the decision-making process of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at school. It is against the broad backdrop of injustice and the complexity of circumstance that this research focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' contributing factors to educational success.

1.4.4 Significance of Study

This study is particularly concerned with the impact of cultural drivers and self-contributing factors on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's school and post-school success. The drivers that will be considered include perception and validity of race as stressed by Hattie (2009), inclusion of cultural factors as discussed by Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience (ways of being and learning) as suggested by Dowson and McInerney (2005) and elaborated by Rigney (1999), Martin and Mirraboopa (2003), and Kitson and Bowes (2010). This approach offers scope to explore post-school

success from the individual level. It also allows for the lived 'stories' of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be expressed as valuable narratives that are quite distinct from the kinds of education research reports, strategies and frameworks, works that are often valuable but always prosaic and seldom personal. This approach is supported as an appropriate method to engage the oral histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In summary, this section set out a brief overview of the universal elements of over 250 original nations for 65,000 years and the impacts on intricate family, social, political, environmental and spiritual structures that have come as a result of British colonisation over the past 230 years. The use of education systems by Governments to enforce child removal policies without consent of parents until the 1960s has understandably created tensions in relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and schools. This research is an interrogation of how traumatic and devastating impacts play out in the high school experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a localised context.

The framework of this research consists of eight chapters, including the conclusion. In Chapter One the aim and scope of the research and layout of the thesis have been explained. The historical, political and social implications of the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are used to inform the premise of the study. In Chapter Two, I present a selection of literature that focuses on recent studies concerning the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with a focus on a 'strengths-based' approach. The literature informed the methods used to understand the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school environment. The third chapter defends the approach of the study and justifies the epistemology and ontology appropriate for this particular

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research. Following the discussion of the methodological approach (Chapter 4), I set out the findings of the research (Chapter 5 and 6), highlighting the major themes coming from the data analysis. Chapter Seven, I return to the research question in a discussion about the findings of my research. The final chapter concludes the research with a summary of the thesis.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Approach

2.1 Badi Athu Namu Darumbal

My research is informed and led by an Indigenist theoretical framework and in particular, by the work of Martin and Mirraboopa (2003). My journey to commit wholly to an Indigenist theory has waxed and waned as I have allowed the PhD process to change, challenge and ultimately transform me. Subsequently, I have used the subtitle 'Badi Athu Namu Darumbal' to frame this chapter. This Darumbal phrase essentially means that I have grown to know what is required of me to be 'Darumbal'.

'Badi Athu' is also the name of the program that I created and delivered as a university school outreach officer working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 10, 11 and 12 school students on Darumbal Country between 2011-2014. 'Badi Athu' promoted educational and career aspirations using culturally relevant messages and methods. The program recognised that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students had adult responsibilities and roles and were navigating complex relationships with family, communities and their schools. The inclusion of 'Badi Athu Namu Darumbal' as a name for my theoretical approach reflects that, similarly to the students whom I have worked with, I too am navigating my own journey to realise my educational and career aspirations and my relatedness to my family, community and my Country are fundamental to why and how I have conducted this research.

At the beginning of the PhD process I considered applying an Indigenist framework to the study. However, due to my lack of academic confidence I decided against this idea. As I delved further into the research process, I evolved as an Aboriginal researcher, an Aboriginal woman and as an Aboriginal mother, I acknowledge that the research has been a vehicle for growth and empowerment personally, professionally and academically, processes recognised by

McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin and Williams (2011) as well as by Windchief (2018). As my research progressed, it became clear that I needed and wanted an Indigenist framework and that it was essential to how the research was developing organically.

I acknowledge here that my supervision team consists entirely of non-Indigenous people. Dennis Foley (2000) recommended that supervision teams for Indigenous researchers utilising Indigenous Standpoint Theory need also to be Indigenous in order to uphold the emancipatory purpose of the research and to ensure the theory is not at risk of becoming "blanket clones of existing discourses" (p. 40). I am confident as an Aboriginal woman and researcher that I have used an Indigenous research framework appropriately and correctly. I have built into my study, checkpoints with representatives of my Elders and encouraged critique as part of the feedback they have given me, to which I have responded and modified my Ethics approval to slightly vary my original plans. I have accessed Indigenous student support services and created an informal network of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students at my institution to ensure I am connected with others for support, as per Barney (2013). My non-Indigenous supervisors have been open to my use of a community-based reference group and to the requests the group have proposed, which have led to changes to the direction of my research. I choose to refer to the members of this group as my community-based Cultural Guides. My cultural guides consisted of two Aboriginal women and one Aboriginal man. All three were representative of their various groups within the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country. I was able to communicate with this group at various junctures throughout the research and in person, via phone and email. Their input and guidance refined and directed my work and ensured that

I was communicating, what Loppie (2007, p. 277), refers to as “discoveries” for the purpose of sharing information with the community as co-researchers.

My supervisors’ openness acknowledges that they are aware that my community has expectations of me as someone who ‘belongs’ to them and is ‘doing’ research with them. As an Aboriginal researcher, I am required “to meet both cultural and academic obligations and standards” (McKinley, Grant, Middleton, Irwin, & Williams, 2011, p. 127). At the same time, I benefited from the guidance and knowledge of non-Indigenous academics to rethink and refine my opinions and views, as Nakata (2004) suggested. I have also made a deep conscious effort to remain truthful to my ontology at every stage of the research process. This has involved checking my intentions and activities against my values and beliefs as a Darumbal person, in accord with (Henry et al., 2002; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Despite having experienced personal setbacks which were very challenging, I remained committed to completing this research under extreme pressures because of the obligation bestowed on me from the Elders who approved the research be conducted in the first place as part of the Ethics approval process.

2.1.1 Indigenist Research

I have drawn upon the early scholarship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic pioneers Martin and Mirraboopa (2003), Rigney (1999, 2001), Moreton-Robinson (2009, 2013) and Nakata (1998, 2004, 2007). I embed my research in the principles of Indigenous research frameworks which are advocated by these particular scholars. In doing so, I uphold the value of political integrity whereby Indigenous research undertaken by Indigenous researchers is responsible to Indigenous communities, as enunciated by Rigney (1999) and

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and the recommendations of the National Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (Henry et al., 2002).

As the first Torres Strait Islander to be awarded a PhD in 1998, Professor Martin Nakata has made a significant contribution to the development of Indigenous research methodologies in Australia. In the same year that he graduated, Nakata defended its utility, arguing that knowledge not only mattered, it also has the power to transform. Nakata (1998) advocated for a future of research that involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leading knowledge production by drawing on our own understanding of ourselves, our experiences and adding our own perspectives. Nakata (1998) questions why we, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, at that time had not been given the opportunity to use both Western knowledge and Indigenous knowledge to "reshape ourselves in a different relation to the outside world" (p. 24). Nakata (1998) acknowledged that such redesigning could only be effective if we remain connected to our cultures and communities and lead new directions in Indigenous research, but first we would need to find our positioning in the denseness of Colonial discourses. Since he published this work, contributions by Indigenous academics across the world have Indigenised the academy to claim self-determination in the research space (Coburn, Moreton-Robinson, Sefa dei, & Stewart-Harawira, 2013; Grande, 2010; Meyer, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The foundation set by Nakata (1998) transitioned into the developments made by Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney. Rigney (1999) hold the view that the necessity to develop Indigenist research methodologies was to transform the culture of academic research from one that facilitates racist oppression to one that liberates oppressed peoples and builds their capacity to determine their own futures. Rigney (1999) responds to the invitation presented by Nakata

(1998) with a reimagination of research that emancipates and liberates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. He draws from feminist research and feminist knowledges and argues the importance placed on lived experiences that grounds feminist research theories to liberation. His anticolonial cultural critique of research examined the roots of racism through the construction of race as influenced by polygenism and social Darwinism (Rigney, 1999). The manifestation of race construction is evident in the colonisation of Australia, which saw the 'racialising' of the original inhabitants. Rigney (1999) affirmed that the intention of racializing was to erase and control Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the impacts continue through social and political structures including research spaces. Rigney (1999) challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to view ourselves as liberated and unracialised because the alternative is to assume a position which contributes to our own demise. Rigney (1999 presented his principles for Indigenist Research based on "resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research, political integrity in Indigenous research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research" (p. 116).

Finally, in this section, I ground my research framing to the work of Associate Professor Karen Martin. The structure proposed by Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) is in her work *Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous re-search and Indigenist research*. Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) work follows on from Rigney (1999) and, like Rigney to Nakata, Martin accepts the invitation to debate and critique Rigney's intellectual offerings. The principles of Indigenist research presented by Martin and Mirraboopa (2003, p.5) are:

- 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;
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.

I have chosen to use Martin's work as the basis of my Indigenist theoretical framework because it allows me to work in my research as a self-determined and emancipated Aboriginal researcher, as suggested by (Harding et al., 2012; Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In this framework, my Aboriginal ontology, epistemology and lived reality are permitted as central to my theoretical framework and in it I exist as part of family, kinship and community structures with real responsibilities and cultural obligations and connection to others that are determined by customary relationship types, as advised by Brayboy and McKinley (2005); Martin (2008); Martin and Mirraboopa (2003); Wilson (2008). Martin's Indigenist framework liberates my research to thrive in Darumbal ways of knowing, being and doing as an Aboriginal woman and researcher, as per Chilisa and Ntseane (2010); Fredericks (2010); Moreton-Robinson (2000).

2.1.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a key feature of Indigenist research. The purpose of 'reflexive rigour' in Indigenist research is to ensure researchers prioritise Indigenous communities over their own academic objectives. The National Indigenous Research Reform Agenda states that reflexivity is "an important way of ensuring that research approaches designed with the aim of 'empowering'

communities and individuals do not ignore the powerful and potentially marginalising influence of 'researcher interests'" (Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour, & Murakami-Gold, 2004, p. 11). In a general research sense, 'reflexivity' refers to a process of reflection undertaken by a researcher focusing on one's background, values and aims and the influence these factors have on approaches to research.

2.1.2.1 Multi-layered reflexivity—Western approach

I include the contributions of a non-Indigenous researcher to the topic of Indigenous research approaches, to highlight the importance for all researchers in this space, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to practice reflexivity. Non-Indigenous researcher, Nicholls (2009), offers a multi-layered reflexivity method to "reframe notions of justice, empowerment and participation within research as a paradigm of relations that nurture self-determination" (p. 121). Nicholls (2009) advocates such reflexivity from positions of 'self', 'interpersonal', and 'collective'.

2.1.2.2 Self-reflexivity

Self-reflexivity requires researchers to identify their hidden assumptions, recognise the power and privilege they attribute to the ideas included and excluded in the research process, and consider how they write and to whom they write in a collaborative research process. The latter requirement ensures non-Indigenous researchers, do not position themselves more powerfully than their Indigenous co-collaborators by concealing their identities within the text of their research. Nicholls (2009) argues that besides this distortion of power "community inquirers who are more interested in the practical outcomes of the research activity or in the production of material for use in the community involved" (p. 122) are not always interested in academic readerships.

2.1.2.3 Inter-personal reflexivity

Inter-personal reflexivity introduces the Black Feminist notion of 'intersectionality' to reflective approaches (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991). By analysing relationships with co-collaborators and considering how those relationships interact in the collaboration process, researchers can locate and examine their positioning in the collaboration. Nicholls (2009) holds that inter-personal reflexivity establishes research 'roles' from which "relationships of trust" (p. 123) can be nurtured. Positionality is the aim of inter-personal reflexivity.

2.1.2.4 Collective reflexivity

Finally, collective reflexivity is concerned with the impact of the research on the collaborators. It asks how the collaboration and its processes were determined and by whom and who was and was not included as collaborators and who determined this. It requires researchers to step in and out of the research process as appropriate by discerning the needs and desires of community collaborators. Nicholls (2009) states that participation in research can be "transformative, affirming, cathartic or empowering" (p. 123). Collective reflexivity considers how the collaborators are experiencing the research process as it unfolds and that progressive impacts (positive and negative) are as important as the impact of the outcome of the completed research.

2.1.2.5 Multi-layered reflexivity—postcolonial Indigenous approach

In addressing the issue of validity in Indigenous research frameworks, Chilisa (2012) suggests that reflexivity requires researchers to critique themselves based on their role and responsibilities throughout the research process. This is particularly important for researchers operating in relational ontologies. The increasing numbers of Indigenous researchers from colonised societies necessitates self-reflection and self-questioning to ensure the protection

and maintenance of relationships (Chilisa, 2012, p. 189). Chilisa (2012) calls for Indigenous researchers to closely examine their positions to determine their role as researchers, healers, colonisers, knowers or redeemers.

2.1.2.6 Indigenous researchers as 'healers'

In the role of transformative healers, Indigenous researchers use reflexivity to nurture their relationships with the living and non-living. Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) measure reflexivity as the extent to which a researcher will design their research to maintain relatedness amongst Entities. As part of the healing that research can facilitate, feminist researchers use reflexivity to achieve social justice and change for communities (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). Ultimately, as Indigenous scholars push further into Eurocentric inquiry to challenge philosophical and imperialistic constructions of Indigenous people, the need to maintain and nurture Indigenous epistemologies through reflexivity becomes paramount (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

2.1.2.7 Indigenous researchers as 'colonisers'

Chilisa (2012) explains that the relationships between Indigenous researchers and the Indigenous 'researched' are based on assumptions that, if not critiqued through reflexivity, privileges colonised research paradigms. Assumptions that perpetuate dominant discourses empower the researcher to the detriment of the 'researched'. Power imbalances continue in favour of Eurocentric knowledge production and systems. To deal with 'coloniser' roles, (Chilisa, 2012, p. 190) recommends Indigenous researchers reflect on the questions below:

- Whose side am I on?
- Do I challenge and resist dominant discourses that marginalized those who suffer oppression?

- Who am I writing about? Self or others or both?
- What needs to be rewritten?

I revisit these questions in my Conclusion Chapter as I reflect on the journey, I undertook throughout this research project as an Indigenous researcher.

2.1.2.8 Indigenous researcher as 'knowers' or 'teachers'

Reviere (2001) presented knowledge construction as a legitimate activity of Afrocentric researchers. The principles for an Afrocentric method require researcher accountability to five Afrocentric canons (ukweli, uhaki, utulivu, ujamaa and kujitoa). Chilisa (2012) explains that the canons are "derived from the seven cardinal African virtues of truth, justice, rightness, propriety, harmony, order and balance and reciprocity" (p. 191). Here, reflexivity is used to ensure accuracy across the vast and diverse experiences of lived realities for African peoples. Chilisa (2012) describes researchers as knowers to counter efforts and claims by researchers to own knowledge and therefore to colonise knowledge construction. Chilisa (2012) asks researchers to reflect if their research is checked by the 'researched' against criteria that ensures the 'researched' own the description of themselves and are satisfied that their voices are recognisable, accurately portrayed and satisfy their expectations of perceptions from others.

2.1.2.9 Indigenous researcher as 'redeemers'

The final 'role' that Indigenous researchers can play is that of a 'redeemer'. Reflexivity in this role is required to address any propensity an Indigenous researcher might have to 'othering' Indigenous peoples. Where a deficit discourse is used, the 'researched' becomes the problem and the Indigenous researcher adds to colonial discourse to "dominate, suppress the colonized and make efforts to fashion the whole world into sameness, that is, into the image

of the colonizers" (Chilisa, 2005, p. 660). Reflexivity is, therefore, an act of redemption for Indigenous peoples. Redemptive researchers critique every stage of the research process for bias, harm, humiliation, embarrassment enacted upon the researched and create counter narratives steeped in Indigenous knowledge to address deficit discourses in literature and theories (Chilisa, 2009, 2012).

2.1.2.10 Applying reflexivity

The inclusion of reflexivity throughout the design of my research has required me to check that my intentions, interests and agendas as an Indigenous researcher are continuously critiqued, as per (Chilisa, 2012; Henry et al., 2002). In order to affect Rigney's (1999) call for an emancipatory imperative of Indigenist research design, researchers must be in a constant state of self-reflection to decolonise research spaces and create nuanced research methodologies that centre Indigeneity. Reflexivity allows research to bring about positive change and impacts to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This is the emancipation that reflexivity creates through Indigenous research methodologies. The National Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (NIRRA) stipulates that reflective practice "is an essential process in reshaping research methodologies" (Henry et al., 2002, p. 12) to avoid what (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) caution as "western research by Indigenous people" (p. 5). I approach reflexivity by drawing on my strength as a Darumbal woman and uphold my relationships with self and Entities higher than my personal and professional goals and achievements.

2.1.3 Narratology

In presenting the lives of the young people who shared their stories with me, I employed a discursive approach underpinned by narratology. Hays and Wood (2011) cite Hoshmand's

(2005) definition of narratology, stating that it "is a mode of qualitative inquiry informed by narrative theory as opposed to other qualitative methodologies that may explore narrative data but not from a narrative perspective" (p. 293). Hays and Wood (2011) assert that narratology, therefore, has two purposes. Firstly, to find the meaning within individual and collective narratives; and secondly, to organise stories of lived experiences into a clear and concise narrative. They add that narratology considers elements such as view of time, action and transactional views of narrative. Hays and Wood (2011) advocate for capturing narratives by focusing on the four directions in narrative inquiry. An 'inward' direction of narrative captures an individual or collective's own experiences, motivations, and morals. An 'outward' direction considers the environmental and contextual elements affecting their lived experiences. The dimension of time (past and future) delineates 'backward' and 'forward' directions of narratives.

Narratology complements and strengthens my Indigenist research framework as a vehicle to carry individual and collective narratives from participants who were involved in my study. Archibald (2008), a Stô:lô First Nation woman of British Columbia, Canada identified seven principles for understanding and integrating stories from Indigenous peoples into education: respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Archibald referred to her work with Indigenous narratives as 'storywork', because of the tendency for Eurocentric research to withhold credit from or discredit Indigenous oral histories as valid forms of data. Honouring oral traditions and histories in research by and of Native populations across the world has been a clear and committed objective also of scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (1999), Solórzano and Yosso (2002) and Martin and Mirraboopa (2003). Indigenous oral histories and storytelling are not only legitimate forms of data but have the

potential to transform and create new knowledge to lead to whole of community advancement and disciplinary (i.e., education) development and innovation (Brayboy & McKinley, 2005; Loppie, 2007). The ultimate objective of narratology, therefore, is social justice.

Stories are a fundamental part of my research. They are nestled into each other beginning with the broad story of my Country, my community, myself, and the participants in the research. Stories are ways by which we reflect and consider our life and our connections to experiences and events. They provide the context that gives us meaning and purpose. Bruner (1990) holds that storytellers are an expression of their culture. Based on this description, the storytellers throughout my research are Entities, collective and individual. Their stories are rich and layered. My Indigenist research framework provides these storytellers with the opportunity to express themselves in the fullness of their connection to their relatedness with self, others and Entities, in directions that are concurrently inward, outward, backward and forward. As an Aboriginal researcher, I practice reflexive critique to ensure the stories avoid what Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls 'sanitisation' to fit a dominant discourse.

What is truth to me as an Aboriginal woman and as an Aboriginal researcher, is knowledge that is borne from the experiences of individuals and is assigned meaning by the collective. The value of knowledge is shown when it can impact and change people's lives (Nakata, 1998). I am encouraged by the structure of the Indigenist research framework, which I have applied. As an Aboriginal researcher I am nurtured by this and my relatedness with others has been nourished as the process of research emancipates, rather than oppress, my Aboriginality. I gratefully recognise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges that taught and guided me and the people who shared their knowledge through voice, silence, presence,

absence, and text. At all times, I was aware and humbled that my role in this research was giving me the opportunity to produce knowledge on Darumbal lands. I was, am and will always be privileged to work with my community for their benefit and advancement and I remain committed to my research and parts thereof being shared and used to improve the lives of those who live here and afar.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

I preface my main literature review with a series of international studies from First Nations' people in New Zealand, the United States (US) and Canada as well as one study that includes students from other minority groups in the US. These studies resonate with the experiences of the participants in my study and are included in the introduction of my literature review to provide breadth and connection to broader discourses involving First Nations' student experiences globally.

The approach I have taken to review the literature in Section 3.2 has been informed by several Indigenous research scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (1999; 2005), Rigney (1999, 2001), Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) and the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (Henry et al., 2002). I have identified four of the key principles of Indigenous research and offer a rationale for the collected information. I will also address the limitations of the scope of the literature and present a summarised section of the highlights.

3.1 International Studies

That students define their families, the type of relationships students have with their families and the quality of relationships between schools and families are critical factors in my study. Lessard, Caine, and Clandinin (2014) explore the concept of familial curriculum between two Aboriginal students in Canada. Their study focuses on the multiplicity of identities and how they intersect with experiences of being an Aboriginal student in a public school system and the spaces 'in-between' school and family life. They found that the multiple worlds in which students live, including the family relationships created with peers, sustain students in school. Lessard et al. (2014) recognise the importance of honouring the ways in which students navigate their multiple realities to support students to resist deficit stereotypes and

definitions of their experiences. Lessard et al. (2014) cite Riecken et al. (2006, p. 280), arguing that the“strength of Aboriginal people is derived from their sense of identity, of knowing who they are and where the come from. A sense of pride provides a resistance to assimliation”. Lessard et al. (2014) argues that little is known about the intergenerational impact of family stories and how young people’s experiences, realities, voices and school engagement is affected by familial narratives. Lessard et al. (2014) recognises the importance and value of resisting stereotypes and monovocal approaches to defining Indigenity. Lessard et a. (2014) concludes that only by working alongside Aborginal youth and their families can a clearer picture of their multiple realities be realised.

Continuing from the findings of the previously mentioned study, which called for closer relationships with the families of Aboriginal youths and understanding the impact of intergenerational family stories, Webber, McKinley, and Rubie-Davies (2016) evaluated the academic counselling program associated with the Starpath Project for Tertiary Participation and Success for Maori and Pacific Islander students in New Zealand. The Starpath project aims to improve the academic performance of Maori and Pacific Islander students through a case management style approach to school, student and family engagement. Interventions include individual student advice and conferencing meetings between teachers, students and parents to agree upon expectations and goals. Students involved in the study explained that teachers had low academic expectations of them and cautiously approached school and parent meetings, unsure if expectations would be set beyond their ability. Thus, agreeing to achieveable academic performance was important for the students. Webber et al (2016) found that parents who shared their experiences and insights of education with their children and had high academic expectations of them had a positive impact on their child’s academic

performance. A valuable finding of the study was the improvement in relationships between teachers and Maori students that resulted in better communication. This was a signficant factor in improved student outcomes.

Furthermore, Egalite, Kisida, and Winters (2015) draw on a number of studies which argue that same race teachers act as role models, cultural translators and positive influencers and are overall advantageous for same race student success. Teachers of the same race were less likely to report behaviours such as lack of attention or incomplete homework. They draw on a dataset of approxiately three million students and ninety two thousand teachers in Florida, US over a seven-year period and call for increased minority teacher recruitment as a credible intervention to address the racial achievment gap in US schools. Their empirical study shows literacy and numeracy skills improved where students were assigned to a teacher of the same race.

The impact of teaching styles and curriculum where dominant cultural practices position First Nations' students as outsiders, is discussed by Pedro (2015). Pedro (2015) conducted an ethnographical study of critical silence literacies of Native American students at an urban high school and challenged the stereotype images of the 'quiet' and 'timid' traits that implied this student cohort behaved in a non-confrontational way. Instead, Pedro (2015) argued that this 'silent' behaviour was a form of resistance which Native American students demonstrate to protect themselves from the microagrressions of racism they experienced when participating at school. Pedro (2015) stated "their use of silence, then, becomes agentive, resilient and transformative because it reflects their overt attempt to have their multiple truths, perspectives, and realities included within schooling spaces" (p. 134 – 135). Pedro's (2015) challenge of the myth of the 'silent Native American' student demonstrates the importance

of critical investigations of First Nations' student experiences to understand the ways these students resist and counter "dominant teachings" (p. 150) so that curriculum and pedagogy is congrutent with the lived experiences of students and redress the 'outsider' experience common amongst Native American school students.

Addressing microaggressions of racism as Pedro (2015) did in his ethnographical study is valuable work and draws comparisons with Zinga and Gordon's (2014) study, which considers how Aborignal Canadian and Caucasian Canadian students perceive experiences of racism at school where Caucasians represent the larger student body. Their study shows that Caucasian students harbour resentment towards the Aborginal student cohort. Caucasian Canadian students also found discussions about race challenging to engage with and resist examinations of how race is implicated in school issues because of fear of being labelled a racist. At their research site, Zinga and Gordon (2014) found a school culture that reinforces negative attitudes and views of the minortiy group in its policies and practices and an Aboriginal student cohort who were resilient in their dealing with such negative atttidues toward them. They recommmend interventions to deal with the resentment towards the Aborigial students by school administratoes, teachers and Caucasian students which, amongst many ideas, includes training for students to productively discuss race and racial issues.

These international studies highlight the importance of family context, teacher relationships and occurences of racism and the impact these factors have on the student experience of First Nations' students from Canada, the US and New Zealand. These are significant issues that unfurl in my study and are worth noting as global contemporary student experiences, which are simultaneously part of the realities of modern day colonised societies.

3.2 Unlocking Education Research: Four Keys

I searched the CQUniversity library database using keywords such as education research, education outcomes, learning outcomes, school success, student experience, post-school transition, career education, and career counselling. These descriptors were searched in combination with context subject words: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, and Indigenous Australians. I excluded studies that were not specific to, nor involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some of these students include people from other comparable cultural backgrounds (i.e., non-Indigenous Australians, Maori, First Nations people of Canada and the United States). The search results for these keyword search combinations resulted in over 500,000 articles.

Whilst there has been extensive research conducted in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, the focus of my research has been to examine student experiences and preparedness for post-school transition. My attention focused on the schooling experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students outside of their academic progress and achievement. There is an opportunity for researchers to understand other phenomena that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience as they engage in the school environment. This requires looking beyond the achievement and attendance rates, curriculum design and teaching practices that traditionally occupy the focus of education research and evaluation.

I have chosen to use four key principles of Indigenous research to organise my critique. The principles provide a clear structure for my literature review and a direction for my research. The extensive breadth of published studies and reports on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education makes reviewing and critiquing the entire list of work impossible. Instead,

I take the approach to examine the contributions made to the principles of Indigenous research by a selection of studies, reports and publications. This approach narrows the focus to publications that contribute a deeper understanding of the issues that justify the rationale behind the Indigenous research principles of this study.

The key principles of Indigenous research which guide this investigation of literature are:

1. Applying Aboriginal and Torres Islander experiences;
2. Avoiding deficit models, thinking, approaches;
3. Preferencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and experiences; and
4. Value storytelling.

There are three reasons that justify the time span of studies selected for review, which range from 2004 to 2017. Firstly, this selection of publications covers the period of time participants were attending formal schooling and beginning their transition into their early careers (2002–2018). Secondly, the studies span across levels and phases of education policy (i.e., National Indigenous Reform Agenda and 'Closing the Gap) providing crucial context for this research. Thirdly, the timeframe coincides with the early progress on Indigenous research reforms.

The primary studies I am reviewing are:

1. *The case for change: a review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes* by Mellor and Corrigan (2004).
2. *Cultural and sex differences in students' motivations, demotivations, incentives and disincentives at school* by Dowson and McInerney (2005).
3. *Where do we look now? The future of research in Indigenous Australian education* by Harrison (2007).

4. *The utility of general self-esteem and domain-specific concepts: their influence on Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' educational outcomes* by (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010).
5. *The case for urgency: advocating for Indigenous voice in education* by Gillan et al. (2017).
6. *Persevering, educating and influencing a change: A case study of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives of academic success* by Pechenkina (2017).

3.2.1 Applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Experiences to Research

3.2.1.1 Addressing the issue of Indigenous research

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences are the central focus of this study, I begin with this key principle of addressing Indigenous research issues. Experiences amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are vastly diverse. More broadly speaking, experiences amongst Indigenous populations around the globe who share common histories of colonisation, add to the richness in diversity of local contexts (Rigney, 2001). In their study *The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education,* Gillan et al., (2017) provide a comprehensive overview of the impacts of colonisation and subsequent policies. In Chapter 1, I detailed the chronology of Queensland's policies that affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. These consequences continue to be experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high schools in contemporary times (Gillan et al., 2017). There has been a tendency for the impacts of colonisation and historical race-based policies to be ignored, underestimated, or deemed irrelevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students today (Gillan et al., 2017). This has resulted in a lack of understanding of the 'historical debt' that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students carry and how this weight of generations affects school engagement and

performance (Wyn, 2009). 'Historical debt' is borrowed from Ladson Billing's (2006, p. 5) argument that gaps in education achievement exist amongst students from groups who have experienced intergenerational inequities based on "race, class and gender". Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continue to be impacted by historical race-based policies that previous generations experienced because "participants remember history and so it still lives on in the present. It does not slide from their view" (Gillan et al., 2017, p. 2). Adding to the weight of 'historical burden' is the denial of the violence inflicted upon Australia's Indigenous populations (Gillan et al., 2017, p. 3).

Between the 1970s and the turn of the century, a significant number of policies, evaluations and research outputs about the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was conducted. Concerns about the direction of Indigenous education in the early 2000s were raised in *The case for change: a review of contemporary research in Indigenous education outcomes* by Mellor and Corrigan (2004). The release of the report coincided with calls from Indigenous scholars for research led by and for the advancement of Indigenous peoples (Nakata, 2004; Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Arguably, the most concerning issue was the high volume of research, 'over research', by non-Indigenous people on Indigenous populations (Chilisa, 2012; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

The growth of Indigenous scholarship across the world has generated a new research approach for Indigenous populations. The new research approach is less vulnerable to criticisms of exploitation and interference and underpinned by self-determination and social justice (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010). As Chilisa (2012) states "for scholars academics and the over researched former colonized and historically oppressed peoples disempowered by Western

research hegemony, issues in research should be addressed within the wider framework of self-determination and social justice" (p. 17). Chilisa (2012) goes on to explain that:

> … social justice in research is achieved when research gives voice to the researched and moves from a deficit-based orientation, where research was based on perceived deficits in the researched, to reinforcing practices that have sustained the lives of the researched (pp 17 – 18).

Many non-Indigenous researchers have gained career notoriety and professional benefits from their research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, whilst their research has had little or no benefit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Rigney, 2001).

Harrison (2007) also recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research has produced a significant quantity of research. However, this large amount of work has relied on scientific methodologies, which limit where research is concentrated. The result of these limitations is a cyclical reproduction of studies and findings. Harrison (2007) adds insight into the generic practice of research whereby researchers begin their study by pathologising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and reaffirming the unacceptably low educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Researchers then put forward ideas for potential improvements which Harrison (2007) describes as "possibilities for redemption" that "are magically discovered in the data, but in reality, they only exist in the researcher's fantasies" (p. 1). In comparison, Chilisa (2012) offers the redemptive qualities of Indigenous researchers. Finally, researchers conclude their studies with a wish list of aspirations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' successful engagement with education (Harrison, 2007). To conclude the cycle of such limited approaches to research,

aspirations are never realised because subsequent studies prove nothing changes and so research begins again in the quest to solve the question of what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students fail or succeed at school.

Despite global calls for more Indigenous scholars and scholarship, non-Indigenous researchers will continue to engage in Indigenous research. Pechenkina (2017) discusses the requirement of self-positioning by non-Indigenous researchers when using emancipatory research approaches such as Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP). Pechenkina, a researcher from Swinburne University of Technology, positions herself as a non-Indigenous woman of Russian heritage in her 2017 study *Persevering, education and influencing: a case study of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives of academic success*.

3.2.2 Taking a Holistic View of Education—Formal and Tertiary

Applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences to education research at different levels and from different perspectives is key to transforming education research (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Besides examining the way in which research, itself is conducted, it is also important to critique how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are viewed in education research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; Henry et al., 2002). The stages of the student lifecycle such as preparation, participation, attainment and transition, present an opportunity to consider how these milestones of academic progress intersect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bennett et al., 2015). For example, applying a tertiary lens to secondary education to support students from marginalised groups allows researchers to see students from alternative perspectives (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). By shifting the standing points from which we view students and their experiences, we can focus research attention on the student to observe and understand other

facets of student experiences (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). This is particularly crucial in order to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as subjects of education research who are multi-dimensional and complex (Fredericks, 2013; Pechenkina, 2017; Rigney, 2010). If education researchers can include in their scholarship the student experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a richer and more nuanced understanding of students at macro and micro levels is on offer. Pechenkina (2017) called for consideration of the complex understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences (inclusive of identities and education participation). Pechenkina (2017) references the work of Indigenous academic Dennis Foley (2000) and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander narratives to illustrate Andersen's (2009) explanation of the 'density' of Indigenous experiences to refute monovocal representation.

3.2.3 Cultural Inclusion

Focused attention on student experiences also presents the opportunity to delve into deeper issues associated with the interplay between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and factors that affect their participation such as cultural inclusion and exclusion. The *National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21st Century* (MCEETYA, 2000) specifies principles and standards aimed at cultural inclusiveness to improve poor educational outcomes and disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more generally. Mellor and Corrigan (2004) state that the premise of the National Statement was how cultural exclusion was implicated in the low achievement and negative schooling in experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This frame of thought was commonly held throughout the field of Indigenous Australian education in the 1990s and 2000s (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). The strategies

implemented at Cherbourg State School by Dr Chris Sarra and the subsequent work of the Stronger Smarter Institute which he founded, highlight the positive impact that cultural inclusion has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Sarra, 2006; 2012). The application of experiences as an Aboriginal educator to the experiences of Aboriginal students at Cherbourg State School resulted in setting high expectations of students. This approach also facilitated and nurtured family and community engagement in the transformational process of the school. Sarra's perspective of Aboriginal students as 'young, black and deadly' members of their community evidenced his strong advocacy for the potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Sarra's philosophy formed his pillars of success that valued social, cultural and intellectual inclusion (Sarra, 2006). The work of the Stronger Smarter Institute to train and develop teachers and school leaders continues the work that began at Cherbourg State School with 'high expectations'.

> The courses compromise a range of sophisticated and experiential processes and those who undergo the challenge have become quite unanimous in their determination to go back to their schools and do things differently with high expectations (Sarra, 2012, p. 283).

The need for culturally specified spaces within schools (i.e., Murri Rooms) is critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student wellbeing and engagement. MacGill and Blanch (2013, p. 144) cite Pratt (1992, p. 6) to describe schools as spaces "of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict". In their article, MacGill and Blanch (2013) explain the 'Nunga Room' as a place where South Australian Aboriginal students accessed support that was based on

Indigenous ethics of care. MacGill and Blanch (2013) claim that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student wellbeing requires safe spaces for these students to cross borders into 'contact zones' and that these spaces for the wellbeing of students are constructed within a framework of an Indigenous ethics of care. The 'Murri Room' is the Queensland schools' equivalent of the 'Nunga Room' in South Australia. The provision and access to this culturally specified space creates a sense of community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Furthermore, these spaces allow the CECs to organise students for their participation in the plethora of activities that are conducted across schools each day (i.e., class preparation, excursions, vocational training, external programs, leadership roles, internal events, liaison with families, financial support and government assistance etc). For all the wellbeing and administrative tasks that are conducted in the 'Murri Room' daily, it is essentially a 'retreat' from the constant navigation involved in the 'border crossing' work described by MacGill and Blanch (2013). Schools that create 'Murri Rooms' with appropriate staffing, have done well to foster a sense of belonging that necessitates unimpeded continuation of the cultural contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010).

Twenty-five years after the creation of Community Education Counsellor (CEC) roles, the Queensland Government released the Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Education Queensland. The Review, which commenced in 1998, identified that the poor education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the time, in areas such as literacy and numeracy, attendance, retention, Year 12 completions and post-school employment, resulted largely from a lack of collaboration with students' communities. The recommendations, therefore, focused on

building and strengthening partnerships between Queensland schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through 'mutual obligation' styled relationships.

Regarding the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in Queensland schools, the 2000 Review noted that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff in support roles skewed the employment data significantly so that the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees across Queensland State schools appeared more impressive than reality. "Many part-time casual teacher-aides are funded by Commonwealth Indigenous Education Strategic Initiative Program (IESIP). While the provision of Commonwealth funds provides another way of generating teacher-aide employment, it paints an exaggerated picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (Queensland Government, 2000, p. 15).

The Review also addressed the high rate of turnover of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Queensland schools. The Review raised concerns about expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers to assume responsibility for all matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, curriculum, engagements and issues. The Review stated that this expectation was unrealistic and urged all teachers to be trained to provide appropriate responses, support and participation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander schooling matters.

Comparative analysis of recent educational outcomes provided in the Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training: An Action Plan for Queensland (Queensland Government, 2016), reports on the high-level goals that have been achieved over the past decade. These successes feature the following improvements for Queensland's Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander students in all stages of education—early childhood, primary and secondary.

- Increased participation in kindergarten from 25.5% in 2008 to 93.1% in 2016;
- Increased proportion of Year 3 children achieving the national minimum standard for reading from 68% in 2008 to 80% in 2016;
- Increased proportion of Year 5 students achieving the national minimum standard in numeracy from 69% in 2008 to 80% in 2016;
- Proportion of students in Queensland State schools achieving at or above the national minimum standards was higher than all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Australia for reading and numeracy for all year levels; and
- Increased proportion of Year 12 students graduating with a Queensland Certificate of Education or Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement was 42.1% in 2008 and 97.0% in 2016.

The 2016 Action Plan recognises that the results which have been achieved to date by Queensland's State schools are due to well-defined aims and focus areas and set targets that are communicated clearly and consistently throughout the State education system. Current goals include improved student retention to Year 12 completion and improved literacy and numeracy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who use English as an additional language.

Similarly, the Queensland Catholic Education Council (QCEC) and Catholic schooling authorities throughout the State have committed to principles and targets to improve the growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders students attending Catholic schools. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 was developed by

the Australia Education, Early Childhood Development, Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) and Catholic schools have committed to the priority areas identified in the framework. These are:

1. Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
2. Culture and identity
3. Partnerships
4. Attendance
5. Transition points including pathways to post-school options
6. School and child readiness
7. Literacy and numeracy. (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2018, p. 5)

Underpinning the Queensland Education and Training's action plan and the Queensland Catholic Education's strategic framework, are principles that guide the direction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education across the State. Both State and Catholic schools accept that educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are inequitable and unacceptable. The guiding principles for both sectors place value on leadership, standalone policies and plans, school and community partnerships at local levels, welcoming and engaging learning environments for students and recognition of the cultural histories, values, languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Pechenkina (2017) calls for understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student experiences which are not limited to simplified causes of underachievement and inequality in education. A restrictive education system stifles progress towards advancement to equality (Pechenkina, 2017). Learning from the academic success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students presents opportunities to develop strategies to assist students to persevere,

educates non-Indigenous people and influences social change. The experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating at different levels of the education system is valuable, rich and offers a great number of ways to facilitate student success (Barney, 2013; Fredericks, Mann, Skinner, Croftwarcon, & McFarlane, 2015; Gillan et al., 2017; Martin, 2017; Rahman, 2010).

3.2.4 Cultural Capital

Another tenet of applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences to education research is the wealth of cultural capital that students possess. Whilst economic factors are a very real barrier to the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of education and training, these students often have a wealth of cultural capital. Pechenkina's (2017) study showed the resistance of three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students against assumptions made by non-Indigenous university staff based on the students' Indigenous identities. The research makes a poignant case, unpacking the experiences of these three high achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at a large Australian university.

Pechenkina (2017) draws on Bourdieu and Davey for their influences on understanding the factors beyond poverty that create educational disadvantage. This is seen in Bourdieu's work on the cultural capital of students and the impact of cultural deprivation on educational disparity and Davey's study in 2009 of poor students attending a wealthy college. In the latter case, Davey (2009) found that despite financial disadvantage, poor students were connected to their own cultural grouping, demonstrated awareness of the dominant culture group and employed strategies to resist assimilation and relinquish their own cultural capital.

Pechenkina (2017) describes universities as spaces in which Indigenous peoples, especially throughout Australia and North America, constantly navigate contestations around the definitions and constructions of success. Pechenkina (2017) draws on the works of Indigenous academics Fredericks (2009) and Andersen (2009) to describe universities as places of opportunity for growth through academic achievement, whilst at the same time functioning as spaces often closed to deeper Indigenous experiences, beliefs, identities and cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are as diverse in backgrounds as they are in academic ability. Deficit-focused support that 'others' Indigeneity and characterises it as 'lacking ability to succeed' does not consider that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are high achievers (Pechenkina, 2017).

Fredericks (2009) explores epistemologies within higher education institutions that uphold the social, cultural and intellectual dominance of non-Indigenous people by persistently de-valuing the scholarship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics. The point of cultural inclusion in education moves beyond recognising the diversity of experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It requires going further and allowing the epistemologies of Indigenous peoples, recognising epistemological differences (Andersen, 2009) to inform education research and educational support and ultimately to transform education (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This level of intellectual work requires educational institutions to accept and allow the emancipatory approaches of inclusive practices based on the experiences of Indigenous scholars, teachers, students and communities.

3.2.5 Pechenkina's Study (2017)—Perseverance in education

Pechenkina (2017) argued that the common perception of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engage with universities at individual levels is usually based on universal

discourses of struggle and underachievement. However, Pechenkina demonstrated in her study that this was not the case. Her participants did not fit the 'mould' of a struggling 'Indigenous student'. They were high achieving students who had come from very different backgrounds but all had experienced challenges at university because of their Indigenous heritage.

The three narratives highlight three strategies for resisting the dominant culture's pressures in the university environment. The first of these strategies is 'perseverance'. The informants gave examples of acts of perseverance through goal-setting and familial motivations. The second strategy was 'educating' non-Indigenous people. Informants narrated instances of behaviour that were ostensibly those of a 'benevolent educationalist' (Pechenkina, 2017, p. 10) but where their presence as an Aboriginal person, often in all non-Indigenous University spaces, presented tokenistic gestures of understanding and inclusion. Students found themselves in positions that required them to educate non-Indigenous people about Indigenous identities. The third strategy was 'influence for social change'. In the example used by Pechenkina (2017), the student identified opportunities where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alumni can be used to change university spaces for the betterment of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohorts. This case highlights the importance of using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experiences in higher education to create culturally specific spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to build the capacity of these students to navigate their way through racial minefields in their chosen university courses. The consequences of learning from lived experiences is a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Lands and cultures to facilitate academic success and improvement.

3.2.6 Avoiding Deficit—Thinking, Models and Approaches

Pechenkina (2017, p. 1) references a rhetoric of 'crisis' to highlight the common discourse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' disadvantage and disparity where success is framed as unusual and unexpected. Pechenkina (2017) explains the problems with disadvantage and deficit discourses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university is grounded in a socio-historical narrative that has encapsulated all Indigenous students as incapable of success. Pechenkina (2017) points out the problematic nature of monovocal and simplified interpretations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences.

Indigenous scholars have long called for traditional research to move beyond deficit discourses (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). This requires education research not only to change positions and see through new lenses but also to change the way in which research is framed in relation to questions, priorities, problems and participants (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

3.2.7 Deficit vs Transformative

Harrison (2007) addresses the deficit practice of comparing educational outcomes, including standardised testing scores, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with non-Indigenous students. Harrison (2007) points out similarities to the boys versus girls comparisons of the sixties. Harrison (2007) identifies four flaws with this type of research approach:

1. Highlights historical inequities
2. Exacerbates power imbalances towards the researcher
3. Reinforces inequality
4. Potential to produce resentment amongst teachers

It is based on these flaws that Harrison (2007) proposes alternative research methodologies. Harrison (2007) draws comparisons between teaching practices and research practices to make his point about the need for new research approaches.

Harrison's first comparison is traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research methodologies and transmission-based teaching. In an education context, transmission-teaching styles are the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student with the aim for the student to be able to reproduce the knowledge to evidence their learning. In the context of research, a 'transmission-based' approach is researcher-centred and focuses on the transfer of knowledge from the participant to the researcher. To evidence their research ability, transmission-based researchers then reproduce their knowledge into the study. Knowledge is found by asking the same question and using the same methodology to arrive at the same conclusion.

Harrison's (2007) call for transformative-based research affects change on students and teachers. All engage in learning with the purpose of expanding knowledge, experiences and consciousness (Johnson, 2015). Within a research context, participants and researchers using transformative-based methodologies connect on various levels as they engage together with the research process (Chilisa, 2012; Stonebanks, 2008). That connection can be emotional, cognitive, social, intuitive, creative and/or spiritual (Chilisa, 2012; Johnson, 2015).

An insightful comparison by Harrison (2007) is made regarding deficit focused practices in the research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and teaching practices that inhibit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation in classrooms. For example, Western teaching pedagogies are traditionally designed for students to find answers as opposed to producing them. Therefore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students know

there is a way to participate in the classroom to successfully answer the question. They understand that teachers know the answer and that to 'find the answer' there is a certain process that has been determined by the teacher and which students must work through. Harrison (2007) claims that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have observed how the system works and recognise that their 'success' in the classroom is dependent on how confidently they participate in the system or how 'compliant' they are with the rules of participation.

He then draws comparisons with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research. Researchers approach research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues in search of 'the answer'. However, the results ultimately are duplicates of prior research projects or slightly modified versions of common research approaches regurgitating the findings that have been well known for decades. Harrison (2007) debated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be more accepting of research if the goal was not just to 'find the answer' but also to produce and nurture relations. Transformative-research methodologies (i.e., knowledge produced not found) supersede common research methodologies (Chilisa, 2009, 2012). Instead, they offer the opportunity for relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to be forged (Wilson, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 2015).

It can be argued that, since it is widely accepted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students perform poorly at school, researchers conduct research that only serves to remind us of the disadvantage we suffer. Harrison (2007) calls into question the motivations of researchers who persist in using 'success' and 'failure' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to frame research questions. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are

constantly problematised through decades of research, subsequent research which does not address and question that epistemology falls into unchallenged alignment, perpetuating Indigeneity as a problem, a problem which needs resolving. Furthermore, research questions that are grounded on a problematised definition of Indigeneity and framed around 'the lack', 'the deficit' and 'the failure' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people often produce answers which as Harrison describes "only exist in the researcher's fantasies because the next report tells the reader nothing has changed" (Harrison, 2007, p. 1).

Harrison's (2007) article concludes with an address to teachers and educators who expound the virtues of acceptance and tolerance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures but for which they themselves lack any personal or professional knowledge or connection. Likewise, researchers in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education must look at research methodologies that centre relations and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to intuitively, creatively, cognitively, emotionally and spiritually produce knowledge (Harrison, 2007). Harrison (2007) advocates that the relationships forged in research are more important than finding the answer to the issues around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

3.2.8 Dowson and McInerney (2005)—Reframing questions and data sets

This section will focus on a study conducted by Dowson & McInerney (2005) in which they examined two groups of Indigenous students by exploring positive and negative motivations and incentives. Their research is an example of reframing the questions (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) often put to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and using a unique mix of participants from whom to draw comparisons in the data sets.

The Dowson and McInerney (2005) study surveyed students from Aboriginal, American Indian Navajo and Australian Anglo groups over a three-year period. The survey was administered to students each year of the study and consisted of four open-ended questions with no constraint on responses. A total of 1,509 students participated, with the total consisting of 270 Aboriginal Australians (141 females; 129 males), 870 Navajo (464 females; 406 males) and 833 Anglo Australians (401 females; 432 males). The questions posed to participants were:

5. What type of things motivate you to work well at school?
6. What things make it difficult for you to do well at school?
7. Why do you think some students leave school before they finish high school?
8. What types of things would encourage you to complete high school and to go on to some further education such as college or university? (Dowson & McInerney, 2005, pp. 2–3).

The findings showed the motivational predictors of educational success were similar between the two Australian cohorts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Anglo Australian students. The predictive factors by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students were found to be more alike than different were motivations, achievement values, "self-esteem, sense of purpose for schooling and sense of self-reliance" (Dowson & McInerney, 2005, p. 1).

These findings challenged widely accepted views that motivating factors and beliefs of self were linked to culture, and, linked to the core of societies who are, by organisation, collectivist (Indigenous), or individualist (non-Indigenous). Dowson and McInerney (2005) were prompted to inquire the findings further in order to understand how achievement

outcomes were impacted by motivations and self-belief. If Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were similar in their levels of motivation and self-belief, then why are educational outcomes for both groups vastly different? Furthermore, what is different for Indigenous students who achieve good outcomes at school in comparison to those who do not? Essentially, what makes some Indigenous students more successful in education than others?

Dowson and McInerney (2005) approached their research with caution. Although not an Indigenist research, their use of positively framed questions avoided a deficit-facing result. Instead, the results led to new findings. Similarly, by including Aboriginal students with Navajo students, the approach to their participant group allowed them to contrast Australia's Native student participant group with another (Henry et al., 2002). The positions, lenses and framing of interview questions matter in appreciative action research (Chilisa, 2012). Chilisa (2012) cites Reed's (2006) usefulness of appreciative inquiry for shifting from deficit-focused research to "theoretical frameworks of positive psychology with emphasis on strengths and positive images of the researched" (p. 244). These elements foster value in research and create opportunities for new insights and discoveries. The outcome that results when 'affirmative assumptions' are used is education research that changes the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

3.2.9 Preferencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voices and Relationships in the Research

3.2.9.1 Positioning our voices in the research

Research must respect voices and stories retold by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Furthermore, these voices must be positioned at the core of the research and they must be more prominent than other voices. Research that fails at this positioning fails Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Gillan et al., 2017; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004;

Rigney, 2001; Roe, Cofin, Fredericks, & Adams, 2010). Mellor and Corrigan (2004) point out that enhancement to research is limited in its capacity to impact policy and decision-making and subsequently call for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to move to the forefront of such education research. The authors state "there is a methodological and substantive urgency to the issues of how to hear and empower Indigenous voices" (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004, pp. 49–50). It is incumbent on policy makers and researchers to listen to the conversations and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure every opportunity is taken to improve our outcomes.

In 2017, the Australian Education Review released a sequel to Mellor and Corrigan's 2004 report, titled *The Case for Change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes*. In *The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education* by Gillan et al. (2017). The authors also revisit the early work by Mellor and Corrigan (2004) to focus with more precision on the educational outcomes data, allowing improved analysis and interpretation of the factors and the disparities that continue to plague Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student success.

A feature of this review is a selection of case studies addressing five key challenges which they strongly recommend as the priority issues if improvements in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to ever be achieved. The case studies set against each key challenge involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, knowledge, values and other elements of culture. The key educational challenges highlighted are:

1. Deficit and race-based assumptions in Indigenous education.
2. Living away from home to study—Boarding schools.

3. Raising school attendance and engagement levels.
4. Providing the best start—Early childhood education.
5. Engaging Indigenous communities in educational programs. (Gillan, Mellor, & Krakouer, 2017, p. 59)

The report showcased community-based programs and the challenges they overcame. The authors inserted a case study of the 'Koori Cultural Program at Thornbury Primary School' where Woiwurrung language teaching is embedded into the Indigenous Studies unit (Gillan et al., 2017, p. 59). The challenge this community program addressed were issues of racism, false presumptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and deficit assumptions about the capacity of students to learn and achieve at school. The benefits are stated as strengthening connection to culture and identity for Aboriginal students whilst challenging racism amongst non-Aboriginal students. Secondly, the challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience when relocating away from their families and communities makes the transition to new schools extremely difficult. The authors cite research conducted by Mellor and Corrigan (2004) and Chandler and Lalonde (1998) which showed that strong cultural identity can combat the disruption to adolescence caused by such relocation, which can have serious impacts on the mental and emotional health of students. The Wunan Foundation in the East Kimberly region has developed a process for participants in their boarding school program in major metropolitan cities to foster strong parent participation and ownership of the enrolment process. Furthermore, culturally strong supports with a boarding house strategy sees students housed in community groups and a House Parent employed from their community. The authors call for an evaluation of the Foundation's programs in order to prove impact and create evidence. In the meantime,

however, strong attendance data and academic achievement is anecdotally pointing toward the program becoming a model for boarding schools and communities alike.

In their conclusion, the authors assert the Uluru Statement is a signal to policymakers and politicians, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to be heard. The collective opinion embodied within the Uluru Statement indicates the position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are taking to refuse policies and decisions that are made for them by non-Indigenous people. The final comments by the authors urge policy and decision makers toward the conviction that informed consultation and decision-making are the only possible solutions if positive change is to be realised. Evidence is required at every stage of policy development, implementation and evaluation. Moving away from ideologically driven policies to using evidence and the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will result in stronger and positive outcomes, especially in the key area of education.

3.2.9.2 Research and relationships

Education research marginalises collective societies through the exclusion of their narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is therefore necessary to reflect on whose stories are included in educational contexts and whose stories are missing and what are the stories and narratives of those whose voices are silenced or indistinct (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). The silencing, marginalising and devaluing of Indigenous voices and epistemologies are the concerns addressed by Indigenist theories and approaches. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are the emphasis of the Indigenous research reform agenda (Henry et al., 2004).

Relational accountability in Indigenist research approaches acknowledges the relational ontology of Indigenous peoples. Chilisa (2012) recommends “these [customary] practices

should provide the form and context against which research with the colonized Other is conducted; using them makes it possible to use multiple social theories in research with a postcolonial Indigenous perspective" (p. 141). Harrison (2007), a non-Indigenous teacher educator, draws on the work of (Nakata, 2004), Langton (1993) and Herbert (2006) to justify that relationships between researchers and communities are a key ingredient to bring to the fore the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is the responsibility of researchers to develop relationships with communities that allow them to be aware of the dynamics within communities and to have the capacity and willingness to respond to the needs of communities at any time (Harrison, 2007). The research agenda and the researcher's profile is secondary to the direction the community wishes to take (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010).

Place-based research that centres the voices and concerns of communities and people has been proven to result in advancements and long-term benefits for the community and maintenance of relations with 'place' (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Other benefits have been the privileging the voices of Elders in research, development for early-career community-based researchers and relationships between communities and researchers that are negotiated (Harrison, 2007).

Negotiated relationships between researchers and the researched are more likely to provoke research questions that are respectful of and accountable to those relationships (Chilisa, 2012). This change in epistemology and methodological approaches creates a more harmonious research process. The negotiated research relationship between education researchers and the Indigenous researched is an opportunity to demonstrate harmony and cultural acceptance between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students and the potential to create new knowledge together (Harrison, 2007).

3.2.10 Telling Local Stories and Valuing Individuals

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research is for the benefit of all students (Gillan et al., 2017). The broad improvements to education research and education more generally offer benefits at a system level perspective. More importantly, system improvements also have impacts at local levels, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students contribute in day-to-day engagement in local schools (Gillan et al., 2017). Exploring community successes can offer learnings which can be replicated in wider contexts to address universal issues. The report by Mellor and Corrigan (2004) highlights concerns with the universal analysis of nationwide data which does not allow for analysis at local and regional levels. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are one uniform cultural group with no variation or differentiation (Andersen, 2009).

Returning to Pechenkina (2017) study, the small focused research allowed thorough scrutinisation of the experiences of the participants. Whilst large data sets are common and provide generalised perspectives of universal themes, preferencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and experiences requires listening to these voices in all contexts, including the local. It was in examining local sites and stories affected by common contexts and challenges that Pechenkina (2017) found participants utilising their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities as their motivators in powerful ways to achieving academic success. Her participants navigated university contexts resiliently despite their identities being debated by non-Indigenous peers and academics and their encounters with incidences and systems of racism. Essentially, the very thing that caused conflict amongst non-Indigenous peers and educators and made it imperative for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

students to be resilient and resist the neglect of the dominant system, their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, was also the fuel that fired their desire to overcome their barriers and achieve their success. However, to resist, required these students to have a well-developed sense of self, resilience against racism, sound cultural knowledge and values, academic knowledge and skills and the willingness to comply with the dominant system (university) in order not to put at risk their academic success.

Stories of individuals, their perceptions of self and motivation factors uncover rich data for education research. A concept I would like to explore at this point in my research and which I believe adds another dimension is 'self-concept'. To do this, the following section covers the work of Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) and presents yet another position from which to view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

3.2.11 Study—Self-concept

The work of Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) looked at the implications of both general self-esteem and domain-specific self-concepts and the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students. Their study was built on the twofold premise that education is a predictor of opportunities in later life and that much of the complex disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience stems from educational inequities. The Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) study is a starting point for this research as I argue that future life outcomes are contingent on educational outcomes.

Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) suggest that consideration must be given to factors beyond the cultural ethnicity and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to explain the constant poor educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at school. Furthermore, in order to understand the inequities of educational outcomes between

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-indigenous students, Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) call for more attention on research that looks beyond the constraints of traditional education research. Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) overlaid psychological constructs onto educational outcomes to produce a narrative of students' outcomes that is multi-dimensional, hierarchical and embedded in educational psychology. This cross-disciplinary approach between education and psychology create a deeper understanding of students' schooling experiences. It allows for a more precise prediction of educational outcomes when impacting factors are identified and appropriately adjusted.

The ability to make accurate educational outcome predictions requires acknowledgement of the broader contexts of students' lives. The backgrounds and environments of students cannot be reduced to factors such as genetics or ethnicity. Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) demonstrate that where explanations for students' educational inequities exist on the basis of ethnicity and socio-economic status, the result is deficit approaches to student engagement. They go on to explain that the complex multi-dimensional context of students cannot be simplified with any accuracy to basic genetics and cultural-practices (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010). They draw on the work of Hattie (2009) to reinforce that academic achievement for all students consists of: "child, home, school, curricula, teacher and teaching approaches" (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010, p. 279). Further explanation asserts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must navigate their schooling experiences around recognition of their cultural heritage, acceptance and celebration of their differences and permission and encouragement to portray positive stereotypes of their cultural group. Teaching engagement strategies that acknowledge the complexities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' lives, inclusive of the way in which they interact and experience

schooling systems, teaching staff and curricula, illustrates the inadequacy of simple factor rationalisation of educational inequities.

Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) showed that when psychological constructs are recognised in classrooms and positive efforts are made to contribute to them, the educational outcomes for students are improved. Furthermore, positive impacts on self-concept are important for general individual wellbeing and personal growth. It is with this in mind that Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) draw links to the work of Swan and Raphael (1995). Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010, p. 281) concur with the link between self-determination and a strong sense of self: "cultural identity, self-reliance, adaptive coping strategies to aid in stress management and the ability to achieve their aspirations and full potential." Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010,) refer to the earlier research work with NSW Aboriginal educative consultative groups by Parente, Craven, Munns and Marder (2003), which recognised "identity, reading, leadership, peer relations, sport and physical health domains" (p. 281) as key factors of successful education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

There are synergies between Bodkin-Andrews' et al. findings and the work undertaken and achieved by Aboriginal Educator Dr Chris Sarra. Dr Sarra's accomplishments as the first Aboriginal Principal to the rural Aboriginal community of Cherbourg, two and a half hours drive north-west of Brisbane, Queensland, has been widely recognised and celebrated. Dr Sarra's commitment to high expectations of students, quality teaching and family and community partnerships resulted in dramatic improvements to attendance and attainment amongst its Aboriginal student body. His work and achievements continued with the establishment of the Stronger Smarter Institute and an extensive body of professional development work that has impacted classroom teaching and school leadership across

Australia. At the core of Dr Sarra's work, is the recognition that student confidence and personal value is critical to successful classroom engagement for Aboriginal students. Dr Sarra makes the following reflection on the link between Aboriginal identity and academic achievement:

> Aboriginal cultural identity, like any sense of cultural identity, is inherently connected to the very essence of who we are … when one implies we should leave our cultural identity at the gate, our cultural identity is being judged negatively. When any person's sense of cultural identity is deemed inferior or detachable, then of course their confidence is dramatically undermined. Education 101 at any university teaches this principle: a student will struggle or become dramatically disengaged when they lack confidence or lose any sense of their personal value. (Sarra, 2018, p. 272)

Dr Sarra's advocacy has been to establish the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to learn in environments that recognise, honour and nurture their cultural identities as opposed to expecting these students to abandon their identities in order to engage in school. He challenges educators and policy makers to examine their views, biases and prejudices about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and calls for them to accept these students, complete in their identities and to expect these students to achieve the highest levels of academic attainment.

Referring back to Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010), their conclusion urges teachers to adopt culturally inclusive practices if improved educational outcomes are to be realised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Culturally inclusive practices require facilitating experiences that allow students to know how academic success feels, thus building their academic self-concept. When teachers use culturally inclusive practices, learning becomes

more meaningful and students are more likely to succeed. One of the final statements is "instruction that taps their personal cultures and experiences, thus directly linking culture to education, [provides] the foundation for an increased self-concept within education" (Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2010, p. 299). This highlights that when culture is a valued resource for students, teachers and schooling systems, student self-concept improves. This is in opposition to what is often the case where the culture of the students is attributed the blame for poor educational outcomes.

3.2.12 Summary of Literature Review

I have attempted to weave together four keys of Indigenous research and a selection of education research publications. The studies have provided justification for the principles of research that I apply to my own research. Weaving in contributions by Indigenous theorists has been my approach to deepen the analysis of the principles and draw out the rich perspectives in the literature.

3.2.12.1 Education research must be informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences at all levels of research

Based on the recommendations detailed by the Mellor and Corrigan (2004), my research aims to apply the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to established education research. More specifically, I am concerned with the schooling and post-schooling experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living on Darumbal Country. By applying this lens to our experiences, we can gain a better, more intimate, understanding of what is happening in schools from the viewpoint of those with recent experience.

I support Mellor and Corrigan's argument that there is a fundamental difference between treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves as unique as opposed to

viewing their experiences as unique. By definition, experience is the culmination of skills, knowledge and practice. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of schooling and transition into post school training, education and employment has many unique aspects but the medium in which that experience occurs (school, tertiary study and employment) is not unique to them.

The uniqueness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people does not need to present any further exploration of education research to find foreign experiences for researchers. Often in education research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultures and experiences are overstated as alien in comparison with non-Indigenous peoples' experiences of the same subject. This can be to the extent that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their experiences, when applied to mainstream education research, is considered inappropriate, irrelevant, or pointless. My research calls for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences as students in mainstream regional schools as a valid area for research.

At the core of my study is the investigation of a particular group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how they engage in very public and common Australian experiences—school, tertiary education and employment. It is in the application of the experiences to research that new knowledge and understanding is found, especially in a research field such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Harrison (2007) states that traditional research offers no new frontiers of knowledge to explore and as Mellor and Corrigan (2004) debates, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research must draw on all of the disciplines at its disposal if it is to be useful and informative.

3.2.13 Avoid Deficit Approach and Race-based Assumptions

The resounding advice threaded throughout the literature reviewed for this study is the call for education researchers to avoid research approaches that focus on deficit. This is not to say that the disadvantage and disempowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be denied. Nor is it a call to minimise or erase the historical debt that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience due to the process of colonisation and its continued impacts. Instead, I as an Aboriginal researcher, have determined that my study will focus on the richness of our stories, the strength of our voices, the continuity of our connection to our beliefs and values and the steadfastness of our families and communities. My approach is to centre strength and resilience arguing that this approach creates purpose and utility from the findings.

3.2.14 Preference Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and relationships

At the absolute core of my research is preferencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' voices and experiences. Harrison called for research that is based on relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The challenge is for research to be directed through these relationships and for the research to have real utility for the communities and not just for the researcher. As an insider-researcher, I have access to particular people and their experiences in my community because of knowledge I have already acquired and relationships I have been born into or have developed. Research based relationships are a critical ingredient for meaningful research and this is the direction my study takes.

Furthermore, Pechenkina's study (2017), which used narratives of students in higher education, highlights the importance of understanding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander student experience. Pechenkina (2017) makes space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' voices and listens carefully to those voices to inform her research about how different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience university. Pechenkina (2017) shows that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices and experiences are preference, rich qualitative data is produced, allowing new knowledge to come out of the research. Rather than interpreting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and experiences in a way that regurgitates the researcher's prior understandings, preferencing the voices of marginalised groups brings their experiences to the foreground. (Gillan et al., 2017) write about the problematic nature of race-based ideologies that inform policies and decisions. The racial lens through which non-Indigenous policy and decision makers view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, underlies and undermines the policies that they recommend. It is therefore important that, in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students engaging in a mainstream compulsory Western education system, their experiences, rather than race, are centred.

3.2.15 Tell Local Stories

Mellor and Corrigan (2004) urged researchers to use disaggregated data in order to understand local contexts of national data sets. Bodkin-Andrews et al. (2010) study pointed to self-construct as a main indicator of self-determination. Dowson and McInerney (2005) found that self-belief profiles of school students from collective cultural groups (Indigenous) were similar to those of students who belonged to individualist cultural groups (non-Indigenous). Harrison (2007) argued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research should be based on relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Pechenkina (2017) advocated for personal narratives to contest the density of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people's experiences. All of the studies either opposed a universalised (miss)understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or indicated there is no universal experience that can be applied to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Gillan et al. (2017) recommended geolocations as a useful comparison to contextualise educational outcomes data and in particular, attendance and retention rates, Year 12 attainment levels and NAPLAN achievement levels. The result is evidence to inform decisions and policies that are not a one-size fits all approach, but can be tailored and localised to achieve the greatest impact.

My research centres the stories of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living, studying and working on Darumbal Country. To date, there has been little research focusing on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences on Darumbal Country. It is the intention of my study to provide that focus in order to give a voice to a particular group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a specific geographical and cultural area. The localised context will create a deeper understanding of the experiences of local young people. This Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research will then apply their experiences to an education theory to answer the research question and fulfil the research aim.

Improvements in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is not only good for those students, but what it requires in terms of inclusive teaching practices, valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and quality teaching, nurtures student wellbeing and promotes healthy citizenship amongst all students and benefits the nation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research must draw on all of the disciplines and discourses at its disposal and allow itself to be located in a more advantageous position than can often be the case when it is conducted on the periphery of general education

research. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education research requires the application of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences to overlay current education research in order for research to inform the efficient and effective development of educational policy.

This chapter provided overviews and analyses of six studies relating to four focus areas. A summary of the significant findings and contributions were presented against the key areas. The intention of this chapter has been to justify the need to focus attention on the high school experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The review of literature has not only confirmed this imperative but justified its urgency. The next section provides the stepped approach to conducting this study of the lived high school experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It positions me as an insider researcher and centres Aboriginal lands and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Indigenous Worldview

Indigenous academics from around the world such as Tuck (2013), Chilisa (2012), Martin and Mirraboopa (2003), Rigney (2001), Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Nakata (1998) advocate for research theories which represent Indigenous ontologies, axiologies and epistemologies as critical for "Indigenous scholarly investigation" (Rigney, 2001, p. 1). When Indigenous realities are considered illogical and Indigenous knowledges are ignored or trivialised, authentic Indigenous theoretical frameworks are compromised (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) differentiate Indigenist research theory from Western research conducted by Indigenous people as ontologically unique. Western societies have held on to research that has been done on and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people despite the differences in Indigenous knowledge formation and worldviews. Indigenous people's ontology is expressed most noticeably through relationships with the human world and other entities such as time (past, present and future), skies, stars, water, animals, plants, places, laws, lore, stories and supernatural or 'spirit' entities (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) state "it is through ontology that we develop an awareness and sense of self, of belonging and for coming to know our responsibilities and ways to relate to self and others" (p. 3).

I apply an Indigenous worldview to this research to validate my ontological position and as credible, valuable and, inseparable from me, as a researcher. I reiterate that my Indigeneity is framed specifically as a member of the Darumbal people. My 'being' a Darumbal person living on Darumbal country is central to the research.

My insider knowledge and relationship with the 'cultural group' was intrinsically linked and I allowed this to be a part of the overall methodology. As an insider researcher, I have knowledge and understanding of community and family contexts. This allowed me to understand nuances of conversations throughout the data collection processes as opposed to 'stepping away' from the individual and community. The story of Darumbal Country itself and all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who live on Darumbal Country are important epistemological elements of the methodology. There are stories within stories. It is the interest and inquiry of these stories that have led me to using a Narrative approach. Narrative inquiry (Frank, 2000) allowed me to effectively collect and analyse the stories of the research participants and position my standpoint within the overall narrative. The sections concerning the following methodology will highlight declarations of bias and ways in which these have been addressed. I am forthcoming with the types of bias I bring to this study and invite the reader to judge the influence of such biases on the study for themselves. This research and the findings in particular, are best viewed from the perspectives provided by Indigenist, feminist, symbolic interactionist and constructivist positions.

4.2 My Darumbal Ontology

This section explains my ontology as the source and basis of my worldview. Essentially, my ontology is my Darumbal worldview and is informed by what I have learned as a Darumbal person living on Darumbal Country. I specify that this is not a Darumbal ontology. The work to articulate a Darumbal ontology in which I and others can locate ourselves, has not yet been conducted. To articulate a greater Darumbal ontology is outside the scope of this study. Instead, for the purposes of this research and for framing the work that has been completed for this specific study, my ontology is defined as my interpretation of Darumbal ontology. I

have shared my interpretation of my own Darumbal ontology with Darumbal Elders and Countrymen (generational peers with Darumbal lineage also living on Darumbal Country) for feedback and verification.

My ontology is located in my 'being' as an Aboriginal woman and more specifically as a Darumbal woman. As a Darumbal person who lives on Darumbal Country, my experiences are intrinsically and inherently, Darumbal. My worldview is constructed by and immersed in, my Darumbal-ness. Despite sharing Darumbal Country with others, my Darumbal ontology persists. Because of sharing Darumbal Country with others, my Darumbal ontology persists. I am approximately the two thousand four hundredth generation of Darumbal people born on Darumbal Country and just the third generation of Darumbal people born under and into White colonisation.

My Darumbal-ness is located deep in 'being' in and part of, physical and spiritual spaces. I am connected to Darumbal Country between the Styx River, which is the northern border of Darumbal Country and Tunuba, the largest body of water which flows west to east through the middle of Darumbal Country. My connection to this part of Darumbal Country is a result of having lived here for approximately 20 years of my life, including most of my early childhood, as well as the areas in which my Darumbal forebears have lived since time immemorial.

My Darumbal ontology is defined by my relationships with Darumbal families—elders, peers and children. I am cognisant of family structures and relations in and between Darumbal families. I purposefully foster relationships with Darumbal families to ensure Darumbal business (customary and corporate) is done respectfully and for the greater good of Darumbal people. Darumbal language is an essential part of my identity. By learning and speaking

Darumbal language to my children, I reclaim that facet of colonisation which impacted on our freedom and ability to speak our language. There are specific Darumbal spaces that are part of my sense of self and therefore my ontological being—Tunuba (main river), Nurim (a particular mountain), the Shoalwater Bay region and the Styx river. These places are intrinsically part of my being because of my relationship with these places, that are best described as sibling. They are the sites of my Dreaming stories that have been passed to me from my grandfather and other Elders. The Dreaming is known to people as *bidi muringa.* It is the time period during which life was created by *guguna* and *wangu* (Creation Spirits) and land and sea areas were connected to knowledge and particular groups of Aboriginal people (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). The knowledge in Darumbal bidi muringa instructed us to know places and their importance. My family originates in the northern region of Darumbal Country. This is where I grew up and where I spent all of my childhood. It is a region that is regularly used by my family for particular food sources, hunting trips for kangaroo, wallabies, echidnas, turtle, dugong and fish, as well as introduced animals such as wild pigs.

Time is a present element in my ontology. It is constantly connecting me to the past and the future whilst ensuring that I remain my 'being' in the present. My existence occurs at once in my physicality, mentality and spirituality. That is to say, I am constantly aware of a deep and timeless connection to Darumbal places, spaces, people, animals, plants, celestial bodies, rivers, oceans, mountains and that all of these elements are, in turn, connected to me. They are all-consuming parts of my existence.

My ontological being has been nurtured in me through my connections with many members of Darumbal Country who have taught me about places and spaces of significance, language and law. The primary giver of my Darumbal ontology has been my father. He has taught me

from a young age what it means to be Darumbal, through explicit instruction about how to behave, how to interact, how to sense and how to relate to my Darumbal world. These lessons were taught to me out on Country as we hunted for food, as we moved through the bush and swam in the creeks, as we killed and prepared to eat the animals, as we felt the Ancestors and watched them move through the breeze in the trees, as we sat around campfires and dinner tables. How to be Darumbal was a topic of daily conversations and in observations I made of my father, siblings, family and kinship as we all existed together and moved in and out of White people's worlds.

4.3 Relational Epistemology

Grincheva (2013) provides an insightful definition and description of epistemic cultures:

> Epistemic cultures can be described as a set of specific social-cultural norms, beliefs, traditions and restrictions, shaped by affinity, necessity and historical coincidence and defined by causal and principled ideas coupled with a common knowledge base and policy goals. Epistemic cultures are nurtured and developed within particular epistemic environments which belong to broader historical cultural paradigmatic context of human civilizations. (p. 146)

Grincheva (2013) goes on to explain that "the concept of indigenous epistemology is different from these 'outsiders' theories and accounts for specific ways of theorizing knowledge and employing particular methodological approaches in exploring 'the truth' beyond the dominant academic tradition." (p. 147)

The epistemology of this research is steeped in Indigenous ontology and informs the methodology. My ontology as a Darumbal person centres the philosophies that underpin

notions of place and knowledge. The collective construction of knowledge is essential to Indigenous epistemologies (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). My Darumbal epistemology is concerned with, as Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) explain, the interrelatedness and interdependency of all of the aspects of my Indigeneity. It is reflected in the meaning, understanding and fulfilment of my ontology.

In the context of the methodological approach of this study, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their experiences, how they retell their experiences and how they attribute meaning to their experiences, are central. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences and knowledge are therefore reflected in the methodology and design of this study. These elements are at the forefront of my approach to the study, my interaction with the participants and my custodianship of their experiences and the meanings attributed to them. I enlist the ideals of respect, roles and responsibilities throughout this research as demonstration of the outward practice of my ontology.

Permission was gained from Darumbal Elders to conduct research on Darumbal Country, including seeking the nomination of participants from Darumbal Elders and community organisations throughout the collection of the data. I am aware of my role as a Darumbal person conducting research on Darumbal Country with participants who are Darumbal and non-Darumbal. Requesting the permission of the Darumbal Elders to conduct research on Darumbal Country recognises the custodianship of knowledge of Darumbal Elders. Belonging to a younger Darumbal generation, I acknowledge that my role is to respect the knowledge of Elders and to learn from them at appropriate times. Conducting research creates knowledge and therefore permission from Elders is imperative. My responsibility to the Elders is to ensure I adhere to expectations of relationships and cultural obligations. This is evident

in the selection of participants, in the appropriate custodianship of participant stories and the completion of the research. These are all elements of my responsibility to my Elders who have allowed me to conduct research on Darumbal Country.

4.4 Axiology

My ontology and epistemology underpin the specific value attributed to this study. It is also at this point that I declare political and moral motivations implicit in the research and which are causes for validation. What is often reported about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who finish Year 12, is their completion numbers, enrolment percentages, attendance rates and test scores (e.g., NAPLAN). Quantitative data and broad generalisations of student experiences are used to paint a picture of what academic success looks like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. I draw upon the reflections of my own and my father's experiences of school, the work I have done across my professional career and as an Aboriginal mother of three Aboriginal children and many others in my kinship structure to suggest there are other elements to the student experience worthy of consideration and investigation. Furthermore, I validate the lived experiences of the participants and emphasise the importance of these realities in a highly quantitative research space. I use this study to raise another corner of the metaphorical rug in an attempt to increase what we know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school experiences.

4.5 Axiology—Political Motivations

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people' are represented in this research in the context of school experiences. These are the appropriate phrases to encapsulate the Indigenous methodology utilised in this research. The distinction of 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander' makes both groups visual

and ensures the Torres Strait Islander participants and others living on Darumbal Country are not erased.

The focus on the school experiences of this student group relates to understanding their lived experiences in a heuristic sense. I contend, that the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences of school is different from what is commonly referred to as 'Indigenous education'. It explains that the concept of Indigenous education is complex in both definition and approach. Determining what actually is meant by the term 'Indigenous education' is difficult. The term lends itself to being a descriptor for a single type of 'education' for Indigenous peoples. The view that the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is derived only from the Western model of education in which they (do or don't) participate impedes nuanced explorations of their experiences. Work by May and Aikman (2003) highlighted that the empowerment of Indigenous peoples to have linguistic and educational control, creates effective community-driven agendas to improve the educational attainment of Indigenous students, whilst securing the educational and economic futures of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people's control over the education of their children, combined with educational practices that embed Indigenous culture, languages to foster recognition and value of Indigenous peoples is the challenge for educators and education leaders the world over.

The reframing of the term 'Indigenous education' to the 'education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' allows for clearer distinctions to be made between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and experiences (informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ontologies and epistemologies) from Western knowledge and experiences. The phrase effectively reconciles the concept of experiences informed by Indigenist ontologies

and epistemologies with the findings of this research, which asserts the plurality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences with and from within Western secondary schooling systems.

Furthermore, the delineation of terms ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are valued as the equals and not inferiors to, non-Indigenous students. To this effect, this research objects to the racialisation of education that sees the same education type prescribed as simply 'education' for non-Indigenous students but as 'Indigenous education' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Racialised education is problematic when it attributes poor educational outcomes to 'Indigenous' factors such as culture, values, beliefs, practices and protocols. It is extenuated when 'Whiteness' is not equally acknowledged for the benefit derived from "accrued institutional privileges through institutional discrimination toward people of color" as argued by Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, and Galindo (2014, p. 297). Racialised education locates responsibility for educational outcomes only on the racially 'othered' people instead of addressing the systems that create the barriers to educational success (Vass, 2014).

4.6 Axiology—Moral Motivations

It is necessary to situate my personal context as an embedded position within the research process. My story is part of the episteme of the overall methodology.

My 'school story' began long before I was born in 1977. Like many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of my generation, our parents and grandparents had limited access to school in a time when the White Australia policy was in effect (Foley, 2011; Goodall, 1990). It was a time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women were forced off their homelands to work for the White pastoralists who had acquired Aboriginal lands by force

through the expansion of the Australian colony. They worked as stockmen and domestics and in my family, most left Darumbal Country for Central Western and Northern Queensland.

My mother is a proud Australian South Sea Islander woman who raised five children to be strong in our identities as Darumbal and 'South Sea' (the colloquial term for Australian South Sea Islanders). My mother occasionally talked about where and when she went to school. She attended Marlborough State School (approximately 100 kilometres north of Rockhampton) in the mid-sixties and early seventies with her siblings. My mother stopped attending school at the end of Grade 7 before working alongside her mother as a cook. My birth was her third at 20 years of age. My parents had very little income as they raised us, but money was never important to survive. Both of my parents have always been highly skilled at hunting and gardening and they often fed not only our family, but other families as well. Our home was always filled with people, either family or friends and sometimes complete strangers who needed somewhere to stay for a while.

Whilst my Mum rarely spoke of her childhood and school in particular, my childhood and adolescence filled with memories of my father's conversations about his childhood, the old people, kin and kinship structures, events that occurred on Darumbal Country, appropriate behaviour and conduct, animals and places and their meanings. As an adult, these conversations are more about expectations of how we as adults need to be responsible for children, family, kin and community. While he instructed us as the leader of the family, I don't recall my father ever using time as a way to chronicle or frame his story. When he spoke of the old people he could have been referencing someone one generation ago or alternatively someone a thousand generations ago. There is more importance placed on 'who' provided

knowledge and 'why' and 'what' knowledge they produced as opposed to 'when' the knowledge was produced.

My paternal family had a significant impact on shaping my worldview. Growing up in the very small community of Ogmore on the northern boundary of Darumbal Country with the majority of my paternal cousins, every aspect of my life revolved around my extended family. My grandparents had moved to Ogmore for work in the 1960s. They were later joined by my father, at that time a young man and his brothers, who had all been working on cattle and sheep stations in various locations throughout Queensland. My father, grandfather and uncles worked on the railway like most of the men in the small town. My father spent most of his childhood between Blackall, Yalaroi, Joskeleigh and Rockhampton. We would sit and listen to him night after night as he told stories of the places he had lived and visited, the people he knew and the work he had done. His stories connected me, a child in the 1980s and 1990s, to the lives of my father, grandfather and great grandfather, from the late 1800s to the 1970s. Many of my father's stories were painful and those powerful narratives constantly guide me. His stories were about being denied a childhood, about working as a child, about violence and racism, but mostly his stories were about family and surviving extraordinary times together as a family.

As a child and a teenager, I was inquisitive about his childhood stories and they created the context which made sense of how I was experiencing school at that time. 'Yarning' (talking casually) is an integral part of my family's interaction. We connected for long periods of time over meals, sharing and listening to each other's stories. The purposes for these yarns were (and still are) to reinforce relatedness between my siblings and our father. There is also a very therapeutic quality to these connections, whereby the unpacking of traumatic experiences

has brought healing and the impetus to drive change. These connections with my father nurtured and enhanced my Darumbal ontology and because of it, I am constantly aware of who I am, of where I belong and my place in the world as a Darumbal person.

What I bring to this study is a range of experiences, knowledge and a deep passion for preparing and supporting the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in and out of Western education. I have worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children preparing to navigate formal schooling in their early years and supported high school students preparing for employment, vocational education and university. I recognise that my personal and professional experiences have been influenced primarily by the educational experiences of my parents. Consequently, my life and my own school story are inherently part of the research process.

I chose the research topic because of my relationship with it. The topic area reflects who I am as a researcher. The role of retelling stories in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups is fundamental to continuing cultural practices, through instilling values, honouring knowledge, guiding younger generations and understanding connection to people and place. Thus, my situated biography within the research shapes and is shaped by the relationship and meaning of the research topic to me.

Similarly, the narratives of the participants' own life experiences guided and established the data as individually-situated biographies and as such, presents an opportunity to record life histories, an occasion for introspection and the prospect of identifying changes to the broader context. It is intended that the research will then raise political contentions about the assumptions and interpretations associated with situated biographies.

Roberts (2002) explains that behaviour and 'social being' can be subjected to unfounded or misguided assumptions and interpretations. Safeguards are required within the methodological process of narrative-based research, to validate the human stories and human meanings behind areas of research that are primarily concentrated on scientific data. This is value-laden research based on clearly defined epistemological positionings and methodological processes, which will be used to defend its credibility and integrity. The next sections will explain in more detail the pillars of the research.

4.7 Research Methodology

4.7.1 Darumbal Country: The Dreaming to Now

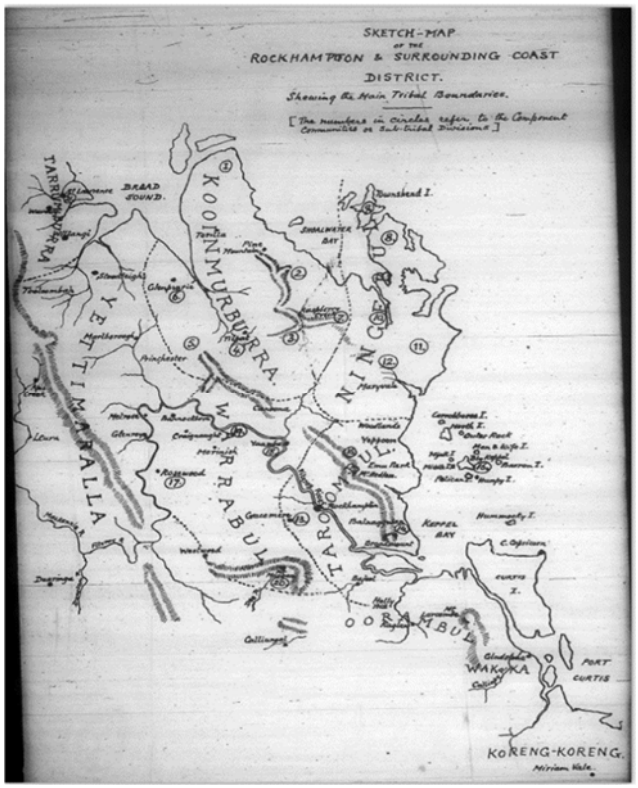

Figure 1: Sketch Map of Darumbal Country by Roth (1898) Northern Protector of Aboriginals

This part of the chapter presents the location of the study as an Aboriginal place and within an Aboriginal context. This framing is important because it positions places in which the participants live and work as Aboriginal spaces and more specifically as Darumbal spaces.

Through this lens, Aboriginal lands are positioned as a core element of the participants' experiences and lives (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

Each participant has their own connection to Darumbal Country, whether customary, as a Darumbal person, or recent, as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who has come to live on Darumbal Country (see section on recruiting participants later in this chapter). Centring Darumbal Country as the site for this research, recognises and values the meaning of 'Country' to be the connection of animals, land, rivers, lagoons, seas, islands, skies, celestial bodies and the spaces between all of these elements to Darumbal people of the past, present and future, in perpetuity. This is what it means to exist for Darumbal people. Defining Darumbal Country in this way recognises relationality as the core of Darumbal ontology and epistemology. As Chilisa (2012) explains, "in a relational ontology, the social reality that is investigated can be understood in relation to the connections that human beings have with the living and the nonliving" (p. 20).

Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) write that relational ontology and epistemology focuses Aboriginal people on their relatedness with others and their surroundings. The presence of non-Darumbal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country, sometimes for several generations, is acknowledged as a different story on Darumbal Country. These stories are worthy of recognition for their own unique and separate experiences, but also as an element of modern Darumbal society. Darumbal Country is an essential element of the relationship between Darumbal and non-Darumbal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Contemporary Darumbal Country now has a 'multicultural' and 'multi-nations' dimension in tune with what has come to be known as contemporary Australian society. This mix of

cultures and peoples represent the broader image of Australia, however there are strong continuous links back through our generations for Darumbal people to Darumbal land and this is evidenced in the 'Dreaming' stories that connect us to the land and were told to us by Elders. Some of our Dreamings were included in the application for Native Title. On 21 June, 2016 the High Court of Australia consented that we, the Darumbal people, are the Traditional Owners of the 'determination area' after a twenty-one year legal process to achieve Native Title (National Native Title Tribunal, 2018).

Darumbal Country takes in much of the Rockhampton and Livingstone shires as well as parts of the Banana shire. The main localities and areas include Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Shoalwater Bay, Emu Park, Bouldercombe, Raglan, Bajool, Gracemere, Gogango, The Caves, Marlborough, Ogmore and sea Country. The total land size of Darumbal Country is estimated to be 10,000 kilometres.

I see this area, not as a region of towns and localities, but as Darumbal Country, the Country on which my great-great grandmother and her generation resisted the first impacts by White settlers, as well as where my great grandmother was born in 1886, during the 'killing times'. It is through my ongoing connection to Darumbal Country, that my identity as a Darumbal woman exists and is strengthened. This is my context as an insider researcher. Darumbal 'history' to me is not linked to the dates scrawled across the pages of pastoralists' diaries, nor Queensland Native Police reports or the records of botanists, geologists and anthropologists. It is a relationship that I have to place and people, living and nonliving, past, present and future. This is my context regarding where this research is located.

4.8 Research Design

This study has adhered to the foundational ethical principles of respect, consultation, reciprocity and safe management of research data (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2011), to ensure integrity throughout the research process. As a Darumbal woman, I do not assume that my connection to the lands on which the study is conducted or my place in the community supersedes my responsibility and expectation to follow the standards set for all researchers as per the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines. This research was designed to ensure the integrity and credibility of the findings and to minimise risk to participants and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. As such, my community-based Cultural Guides provided advice and encouragement throughout my study. They have been an important source of counsel and reflexivity, which has resulted in the research outcomes having potential to provide a wide range of benefits to the community.

4.9 Study Size

One of the obvious limitations of this study is the size of the participant group. With only ten participants it is a small sample group. The study is not a representative sample. This study does not claim that the general views and experiences of this group are reflective of the experiences of the broader population of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are different and additional factors that affect similar groups across Australia. For example, location, timing and impact of colonisation, community cohesion, educational resources and employment opportunities all affect Indigenous people differently. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal country there is access to a

wide range of private, independent and state schools both day and boarding as well as vocational and university education opportunities.

The size of the participant group was determined based on my capacity to conduct the interviews within the timeframe allowed for the PhD program. The study provides a snapshot of one group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in one particular location. Rather than a longitudinal study, which would have allowed for the study of the group more intensely over a longer period of time, this study captured data at a specific point in time. However, the uniformity of data was avoided because participants varied in gender, age, cultural heritage (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander), number of schools attended, length of time since leaving school, and length of employment and/or study.

In contacting local organisations and community representatives I requested the nomination of 1 or 2 staff or students from their workplaces to participate in the study. I kept note of how many participants were nominated particularly to ensure an appropriate range of ages, gender balance and the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders in the study.

4.10 Researching on My Country

4.10.1 Darumbal History

While our history is traced back to the dreamtime, Darumbal Country has also been a site for others coming onto our land, both welcomed and invited, but also uninvited. Non-Indigenous historian Betty Cosgrove (1996) located the first contact of Europeans with Darumbal Country in the diary entry of Captain James Cook on Monday 28 May, 1770 when he noted his navigation of the sandy channels between the dotted islands of Darumbal sea Country. Botanist Joseph Banks, who accompanied Cook, recorded his finding of a new plant species (speargrass) and a species of fish (mudskipper) upon his investigation of Darumbal Country.

Whilst they did not make close encounters with Darumbal people on their short expedition through the Bay area, Cook indicated that he had sighted smoke by day and fire by night and people on one of the outlying islands. Cook named the area 'Shoalwater Bay', recognising the shallow waterways between the mainland and the islands.

In his circumnavigation of Australia in 1802, Matthew Flinders recorded having observed 'Indians' on what is now known as the Keppel Island and on islands in the Shoalwater Bay area (Cosgrove, 1996). Flinders came across evidence of habitation by Darumbal people on the mainland, but it was through a separate exploring party on Flinders' expedition that the first European contact occurred with Darumbal people in the Shoalwater Bay area. Cosgrove (1996) documented that early contact between Darumbal people and Europeans between 1820 and 1842 was a mixture of friendly and aggravated encounters. This included a hostile meeting between a party of approximately seventeen Darumbal men and geologist J. Beete Juke, whereby the Darumbal men used tactical ambushes to halt Juke's party from pushing forward inland from the coastline.

There were reports that Europeans had been taken in and were living amongst Darumbal people before the dispersals (shootings) and skirmishes began in the 1860s. During this time the 'guerrilla' warfare that took place on Darumbal Country began the colonisation of the Rockhampton and coastal regions through brutal killings of large numbers of Darumbal people. In case studies of the Keppel region by historian Steve Mullins (2006), an account is given by a Mr Robert Johnstone (former Queensland Native Police Officer) on 26 February 1903 at the Brisbane Technical College, in response to a lecture by Dr Walter Roth on Aboriginal 'Superstitions, Magic and Medicine':

> When he had left the Rockhampton district (early 1870s) there was not a blacks' camp he could not go into unarmed and camp with them, because they knew very well that if they had done no wrong they would not be punished. In the massacres that occurred in the district and in cases of murder, it was utterly impossible to punish the blacks except by dispersing them until they give up their ringleaders. His experience was that in cases of murder the blacks did not wait for the native police to walk among them and shoot them down, but in many cases had to be followed for five or six weeks and driven from place to place before they would give up the ringleaders (p. 33).

Mullins (2006) explains that the 'ringleaders' were Darumbal law men who were "custodians of complex law and spiritual knowledge and the policy of especially targeting them posed its own particular threat to the community of local Aboriginal culture" (34). This insight demonstrates the value Darumbal people and White settlers placed on law and spiritual knowledge. For Darumbal people, it was imperative to protect the custodians of that knowledge at all costs, for the continuation of Darumbal law and spiritual wisdom. For White settlers, it was imperative to exterminate the custodians of that knowledge at all costs, in order to have devastating impact on the Darumbal people and their relationship with all of the physical and spiritual elements that make up their existence and in order to progress settlement. It is estimated that the frontier wars fought on Darumbal Country devastated the Darumbal population to about 10% of the original total by 1887 (Mullins, 2006).

During the early to mid-1900s, Darumbal people experienced relocation, removal of children and further marginalisation on their lands. The implementation of the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act of 1897 across Queensland saw Aboriginal populations, including Darumbal people, become wards of the State, requiring permissions

from the Chief Protector to work, maintain personal finances, to move beyond designated areas (i.e., Reserves and Missions), or to marry. A copy of my great grandmother's permission to marry is attached to the end of this thesis (see Appendix A). The forced removal of children from parents and their families impacted Darumbal people as it did elsewhere across Australia. Further devastation was experienced by the removal of whole clan groups, such as the Woppaburra people of the Keppel Islands to Fraser Island, approximately 320 kilometres south along the Coral Sea. Darumbal men and women who remained on Darumbal lands worked for homesteads across the region as stockmen and kitchen hands. Others, like my grandfather, moved away from Darumbal Country to do similar work, occasionally visiting Rockhampton to see family and friends, but returning to resettle permanently on Darumbal Country in the 1960s.

4.10.2 Contemporary Darumbal Community

In 1998, the descendants of the Darumbal people who survived the devastation of the frontier wars, filed a claim for Native Title with the Federal Court of Australia. The process to satisfy Native Title legislation required the descendants to provide evidence of intimate knowledge and connection to Darumbal Country and ongoing practice of 'traditional' law and customs on Darumbal Country. The Darumbal Native Title application was reported to be one of the lengthiest processes in Queensland Native Title history. On the 21st June 2016, eighteen years after the claim was filed, the Federal Court recognised the Darumbal people as the Traditional Owners of Darumbal Country. The Court determined the Darumbal people had traditional rights and interests to a land area of 15,000 square kilometres.

The following section creates a profile of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that resides on Darumbal Country. The data is taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics

Community Profiles for Rockhampton and Yeppoon. For the purpose of this dissertation and in keeping with the epistemological underpinnings of an Indigenist research approach, I have preferenced Darumbal Country as the location to frame the Community Profile. It is hoped that this section will construct the imagery necessary for the reader to understand this study.

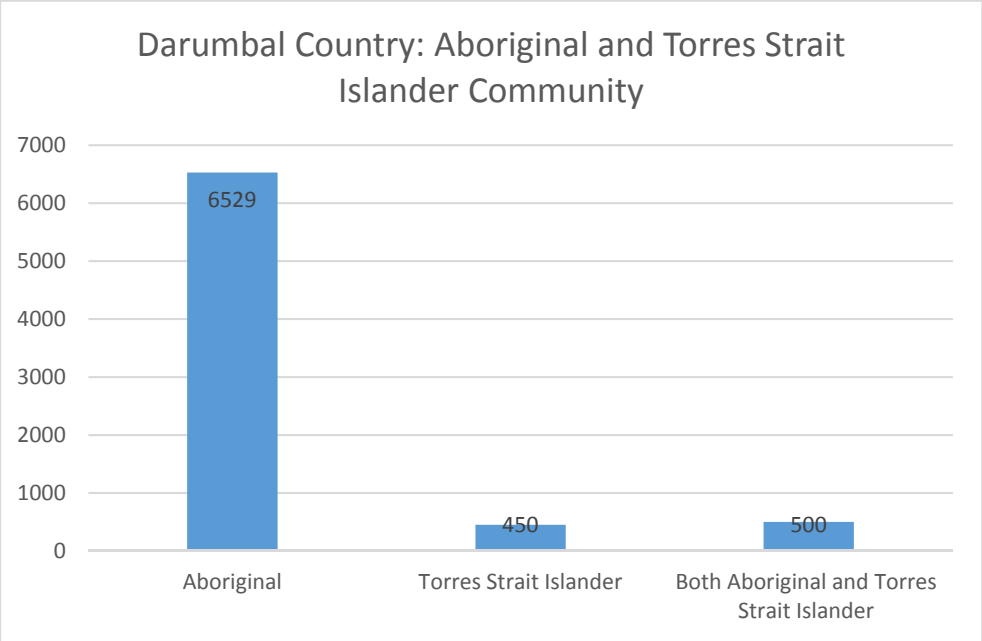

Figure 2: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: Population Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

In 2016, Darumbal Country was home to 7,479 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This Indigenous population consists of 6,529 Aboriginal people, 450 Torres Strait Islanders and 500 Indigenous peoples who identify as having both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. There is no national data collection about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the level of language group, Aboriginal nation, or Island of origin. This makes it difficult to ascertain the local population demographics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in particular locations, however based on researcher observation and

consultation with informed community members, the most noticeable groups now living on Darumbal Country are:

- Darumbal descendants;
- Gungulu (Western neighbouring nation);
- Yimman (South West neighbouring nation);
- Previous residents or people with family connections to the town of Woorabinda (former Lutheran Aboriginal Mission); and
- Torres Strait Islanders (most commonly, Mer, Saibai and Moa Islands).

The main employment industries of employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on Darumbal Country are coal mining, health care, social assistance services, takeaway food services and supermarket and grocery stores. Home ownership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Darumbal Country (37.1%) is higher than the state average (33.9%) and slightly lower than the national average (38.1%). However, participation in the labour force is lower on Darumbal Country in comparison to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the State and at the National level.

4.11 Education Attendance

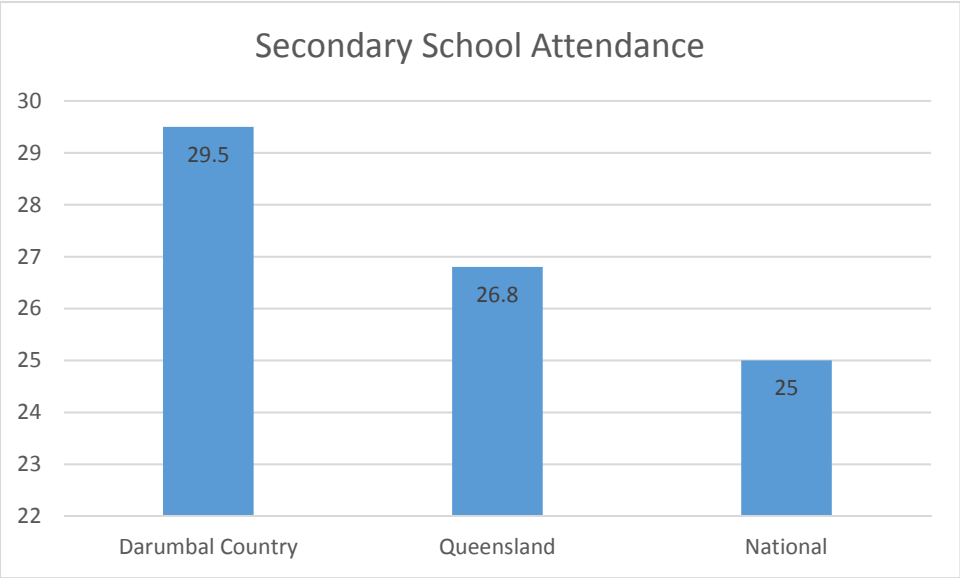

Figure 3: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: Secondary School Attendance Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

There are 11 secondary schools on Darumbal Country, including seven Catholic and Independent schools and four State high schools. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend all 11 schools in the region. The graph above indicates that of the total number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country at the time of the 2016 Census 29.5% attended a secondary school. In contrast, the Queensland state average was 26.8% and the national average was 25%. These statistics recognise that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 12–17 year olds on Darumbal Country are attending high school at a slightly higher number than the state and national averages. Therefore, young adolescents from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country are more likely to attend high school than their counterparts in many other areas of the state and across Australia.

4.12 Attainment

Of the 7,479 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country, 18.9% reported their level of highest educational attainment to be Year 10. In comparison, of Queensland's total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population, 17.8% reported Year 10 as their level of highest educational attainment and 18.0% for Australia's National Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population. Again, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community living on Darumbal Country exceed the State and National averages for Year 10 attainment (see Figure 4).

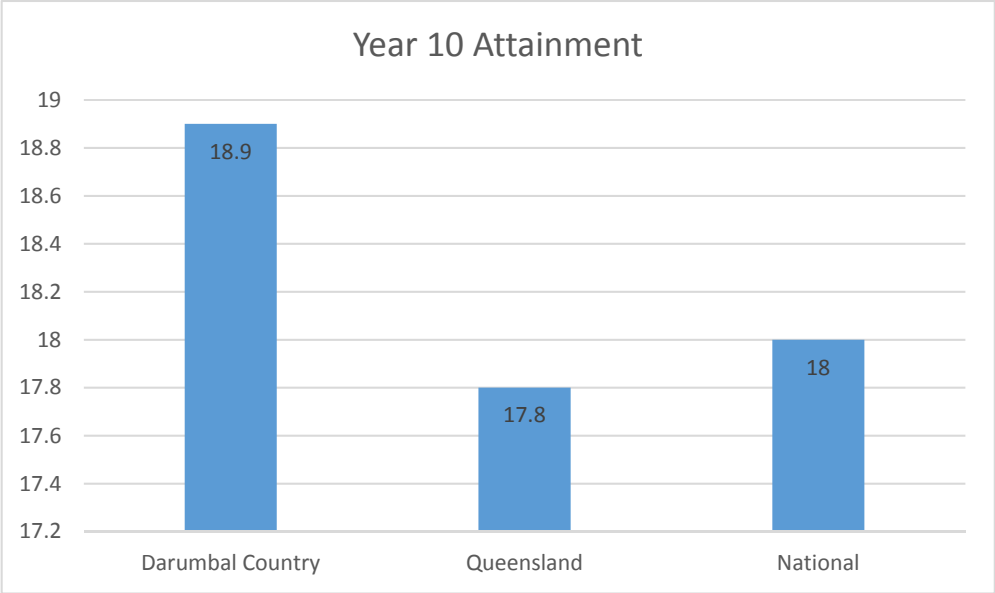

Figure 4: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: Year 10 Attainment Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

With regard to Year 11 (see Figure 5), 8.5% of the 7,479 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country reported this grade as their highest level of educational attainment. Queensland and Australia each average 8.1%. With regard to Year 12 (see Figure 6), 18.1% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country reported this year level as their highest educational attainment. In comparison, the

State average is 17.7% and the National average is 14.0% of the total Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander populations respectively.

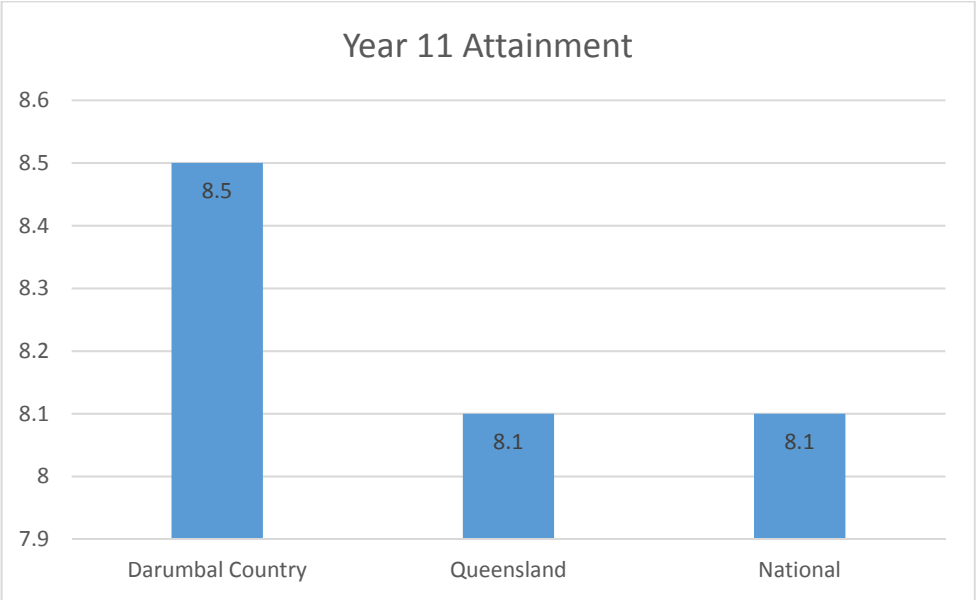

Figure 5: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: Year 11 Attainment Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

The attainment statistics of 2016 prove that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country are attending, participating and completing secondary school at rates that are higher and in some cases significantly higher, than other communities across Queensland and Australia.

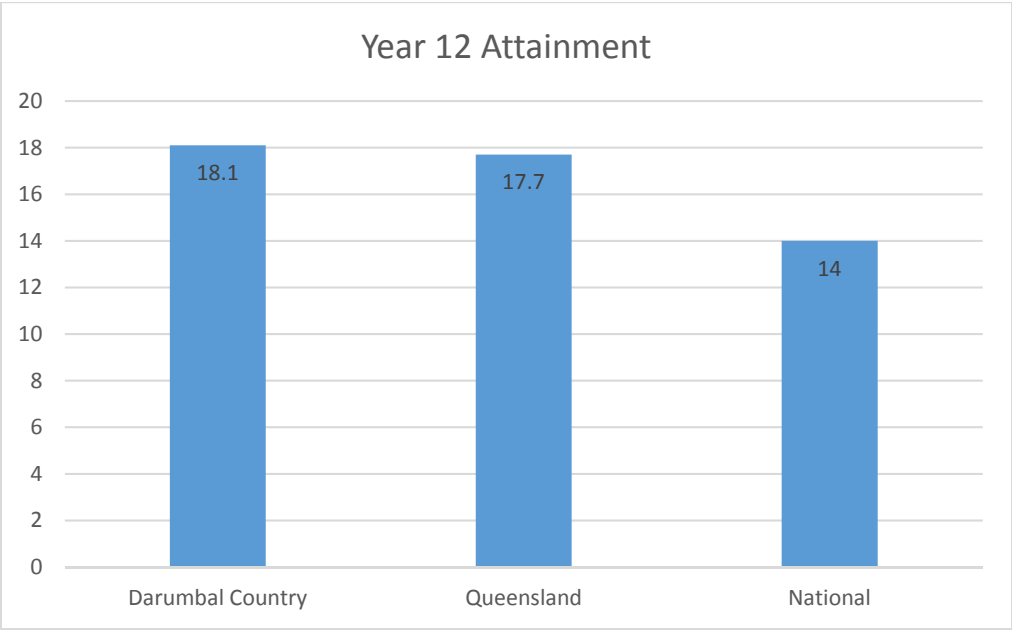

Figure 6: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: Year 12 Attainment Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

The Year 10, 11 and 12 attainment levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country is strong when compared to state and national data. This can be attributed to the combination of the availability of education resources and infrastructure on Darumbal Country (schools and tertiary education and training providers) and the popular occupation types of coal mining, health care and social assistance services. The latter of which, requiring high school standard proficiencies in literacy and numeracy. The impressive data of secondary school engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country is not reflected in the transition to tertiary studies. The 2016 statistics show that tertiary level qualifications are lower on Darumbal Country than the State and National levels (see Figure 8), despite CQUniversity's main campus being located on Darumbal Country since 1967.

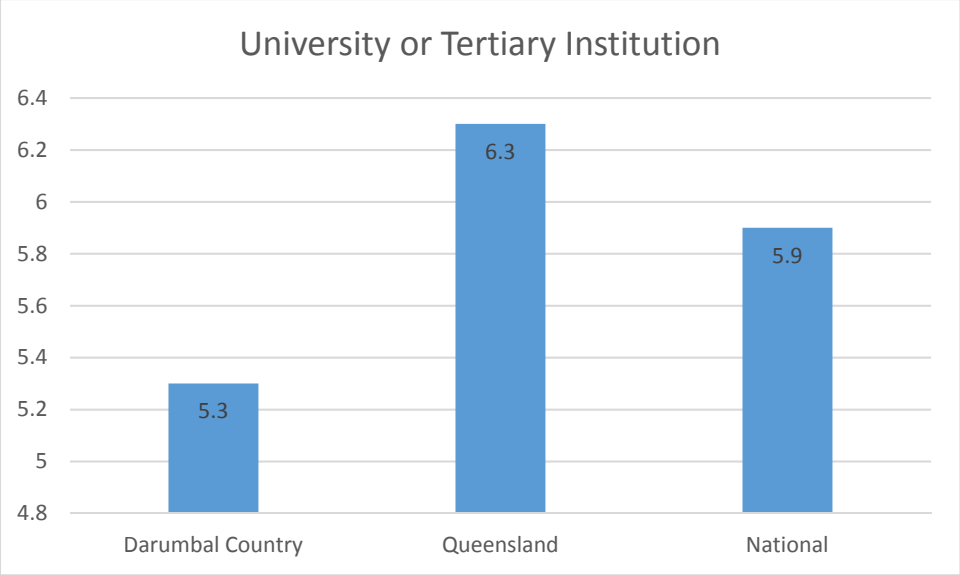

Figure 7: Darumbal Country Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Profile: University or Tertiary Institution Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

Important features of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country are the Native Title Holders (Darumbal Corporation) and several other organised Darumbal associations. Each has their own specialised area of responsibility, based on interest (significant site management, cultural performances, language education). Several large Aboriginal- and Torres Strait Islander-controlled organisations involved in providing social service support, especially to children, youth and family. Regional offices for State and Federal government departments (i.e., Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Department of Child Safety, Queensland Health, Department of Education and Training etc) also reside on Darumbal country.

It is important to note that in the fabric of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country is a large active Australian South Sea Islander community. This community are descendants of the Pacific Islanders who were not deported under the *Pacific Islanders Labourers Act* 1901 as discussed in Chapter 1. These 'blackbirded' Pacific Islanders, largely from Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands, have a unique history and

connection of their own with Darumbal Country. Many of them, after being kidnapped from their Island homes and brought by ships to Australia to work in the cane, cotton and cattle industries, set their feet first upon Darumbal Country on arrival. Over the past 150 years, the Australian South Sea Islanders, Darumbal and non Darumbal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have intermarried, creating networks of families across several distinct Black cultural groups.

My identity as an Aboriginal woman does not automatically make my research 'good research' nor does it make me a 'good researcher of Aboriginal people'. Conducting a research project on my Country does not automatically qualify me as having a comprehensive understanding of the issues facing other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on my Country. Similarly, being an Aboriginal person does not make me a spokesperson for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in my community. Hence, allowing others to speak for themselves in and through my research via the participant group was crucial. The underlying purpose of my research is to position the voices of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as immensely valuable in education discourse.

I approached my research with some trepidation, emerging from my inexperience as a researcher, but mostly from my desire to respect the people who would participate in the study and to be sensitive with the stories they were willing to share with me. Part of the process of becoming a researcher is learning the process. The PhD program allowed me to work through this research process. I was able to explore many concepts and notions, theories and philosophes, some of which have been included and many of which have not. One of the critical lessons I have learned through this process has been to learn about my community from a different perspective. This was facilitated particularly through the writing

of the methodology section. I have come to see my community not as an outsider looking in but by embracing my position as an insider and focusing on one specific element (student experiences) of one specific phenomenon (school) of my community. With such concentrated focus on this particular element, I have been able to use the school stories of the participants as a lens through which to see and make meaning of my community. I appreciate that a community of people can be viewed differently, depending on the lens by which it is being viewed and that by identifying biases, as I am doing here, a clearer view of what is being seen and interpreted is gained.

4.13 Ethics and Permissions

The Guidelines for Research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AIATSIS) were important in designing the research and collection and analysis of data. These guidelines are there to protect researchers, communities and individuals from the risks associated with research. I found the guidelines not only steered me ethically, but also led me to a place of spiritual safety when directing me back to my Elders. As an Aboriginal person, there is security in the wisdom of Elders and trusting traditional knowledge. Gaining approval through Central Queensland University's Human Ethics Committee to ensure the credibility of my research was of some comfort. As part of that process, I requested a letter of support from Darumbal Enterprises Incorporated, a local organisation representing the Traditional Owner group through which permissions for cultural heritage, Native Title and many other requests for Darumbal people's approval or involvement are negotiated. The letter of support I received from Darumbal Enterprises stated that all of the Directors of Darumbal Enterprises had considered and approved my request for support for my study. This was a significant

milestone in my research journey. I had been approved to conduct the study by my guibiyah (Elders). I felt an enormous responsibility with this permission.

4.14 Gathering Stories

4.14.1 The Process to Find the Storytellers

The process to source participants was completed whilst adhering to ethical and cultural expectations. Darumbal Elders, key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and leaders in the local community were consulted over several weeks about the study and to nominate potential participants. These key people included Darumbal Enterprises, managers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, the Regional Community Education Counsellor; the Indigenous Education Coordinator, Rockhampton's Catholic Diocese and school-based education workers. The purpose, design and the intent of the research was explained to each group of key people. It should be noted that these key people are stakeholders and had ongoing input as the research progressed. The community stakeholders were asked to nominate potential participants who met all criteria (see next section). They were also asked for advice about the most appropriate way to contact participants. In most instances stakeholders contacted participants to let them know they had been nominated to participate in the study and that I would soon be contacting them. As a researcher, I was aware of the responsibility this activity had on stakeholders and offered wording for the stakeholders to use to make the process easier. This worked effectively and ensured that I was not nominating or contacting participants 'out of the blue', as I considered this process could have jeopardised the integrity of the research. In contacting local organisations and community representatives I requested the General Managers to nominate 1 or 2 staff or students from their workplaces to participate in the study. I kept note of how

many participants were nominated, particularly to ensure a good spread of ages, gender balance and the inclusion of Torres Strait Islanders in the study. Although the local population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is predominantly of Aboriginal heritage, fortunately, an even mix of participants was nominated.

4.14.1.1 Selecting storytellers

This study takes a strengths-based approach. It provides an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who have completed Year 12 to speak of their experiences. This criterion is a critical element of the exploration of students' experiences during senior phases of learning, where there is a lack of research and student narrative in particular about the experiences of this specific student cohort. The research was conducted as part of a Doctor of Philosophy program. As such, the size and scope was limited by the available budget to support the study and the timeframe in which the study had to be conducted. It was not possible to interview or survey all of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people living on Darumbal Country, who were working or studying and had completed Year 11 and/or 12 from 2010 onwards. Nor was it possible to interview all of the key stakeholders in the region. Therefore, this study was selective about which participants were involved. It was necessary to choose participants who had completed Year 12 since 2012 to ensure recency of schooling experience. Ten participants were selected by others, as a quasi-snowball sample, to eliminate as much bias from the research as possible. As a qualitative researcher, I am fully aware of the bias-laden nature of narrative research. The option to have participants nominated was important to ensure a level of objectivity where appropriate.

All 10 participants identified as having Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage, self-identified as such and were accepted within their community as legitimate members. The

region is central to this study and provided the common element of place for all participants. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country there is access to a wide range of private, independent and State schools, both day and boarding, as well as vocational and university education opportunities. Participants attended secondary school, seven at private schools and three at public schools, during their senior years (Years 11–12).

Finally, participants completed Year 12 in or after 2012. This measure ensures close proximity of experiences to the time the data was to be collected but also allowed for participants to have gained post-school work and study experiences. Furthermore, participants experienced similar environmental factors such as government policies and initiatives, education programs and school processes. Broader social factors such as influences of the media were consistent across the participant group within the timeframe. The research criteria allowed for students who studied at more than one school or between private and public systems. Only two of the ten participants moved to a different school at some point in high school. Confirmation of participants' part time or full-time employment and/or study status came by way of their nomination from their employers or their tertiary institute. The original ideal number of participants was for a maximum of eight in total. However, this was adjusted to extend the number of participants in response to recommended inclusion of additional participants from members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The size of the group would be a limitation of the study if it were not for the rich data that has been collected from deep discussions of experiences with the participants. With only ten participants, it could be considered a small sample group and not particularly representative. I do not claim that the general views and experiences of this group are reflective of the experiences of the broader population of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

and I know there are different and additional factors that affect similar groups across Australia. For example, location, timing and impact of colonisation, community cohesion, educational resources and employment opportunities can affect different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people differently.

The size of the participant group was determined by my capacity to conduct the interviews within the timeframe allowed for the PhD program. The study provides a snapshot of one group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in one particular location, capturing data at a specific point in time. Whilst a longitudinal study with a larger participant group would have been in keeping with the recommendations of Mellor and Corrigan (2004), I have chosen instead to focus on personal stories and localised data as recommended by (Gillan et al., 2017). Fortunately, any uniformity of data was avoided because participants varied in gender, age, cultural heritage (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander), number of schools attended, length of time since leaving school and length of employment and/or study. A future research project could be conducted that incorporates the objectives of this study over a longer time period.

4.14.1.2 Preparing to gather stories

Personal narratives are at the centre of this research and represent the continuation of traditional oral histories. These personal narratives are stories of contemporary school and post-school experiences. By collecting the personal narratives of my participants, I wanted to invite participants to go on a journey back into their recent history and allow them to reveal and explore outcomes of their own schooling experiences. I am aware that participants could be at various levels of awareness of the effect of their schooling experiences on their 'post

school' lives, therefore, it was important to me to build rapport with the participants and support participants as they began to explore memories, motivations and decisions.

To collect these personal narratives, I conducted semi-structured interviews of about 60-90 minutes each. The interview schedule was flexible to enable multiple opportunities for participants and myself to further discuss, elaborate, or clarify thee questions and answers that were posed to the participants. In total, six participants were involved in Stage One, which consisted of two one-on-one interviews with each participant and four in Stage Two participated in the Yarning Circle.

4.14.2 Stage One

First interview—familiarisation and rapport was built between myself, as the researcher and the participant as I explained the objectives of the study and how the interview would be conducted. After each interview was completed, I reflected on the questions and answers. I considered the direction I needed to take with framing the set questions for the second interview.

Second interview—these were conducted approximately one to three weeks following the first interview. The second interview provided the opportunity for participants to elaborate on their first interview responses and allowed further exploration of key points and emerging themes identified from the first interview. Set questions extrapolated additional information that enabled some common data across all participants to be analysed for comparison in the second stage. This approach also allowed time for the participants to reflect on the first interview and consider subsequent memories and thoughts that may have been provoked by the discussion in stage one.

4.14.3 Stage Two

Yarning Circles (Focus Groups)—this stage introduced a further four participants into the data collection and was conducted after the first stage was completed. I had originally planned to have the six participants from the first stage (interviews) come together as a group to further explore their schooling experiences. However, after having consulted with community members, I was advised to seek out young Darumbal leaders who were not involved in the interview stage. The involvement of the young Darumbal leaders in the study would allow me to capture voices of young people who were recognised as having influence over younger people and their peers and had close relationships with their Elders. The aim of the Yarning Circle stage was to provide an environment for participants to share their story with peers and to let new ideas, attitudes and perspectives become clearer through a flow of conversations. Two Yarning Circles were held four weeks apart.

4.14.3.1 Listening to stories

The data for this research was collected in two phases: Phase One involved the semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. Text messaging by phone and face-to-face discussions were used to arrange meeting times and venues. Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were given time to read the Plain Information Sheet (PIS) and to ensure they understood the conditions of participation. I read through the PIS and asked if they had any questions about what was on the PIS. After a brief discussion to clarify any final questions and comments, the participants signed the Consent Forms. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and one-on-one. I met with each nominated participant privately. Interview venues were decided through mutual agreement. I met with two participants in meeting rooms at work sites. Two other participants met with me at cafes near their residence

or place of work and two at 'park tables' on the grounds of the University campus. I met twice with each participant. All participants were invited to contact me if they wished to contribute additional information or clarify previously supplied data. I asked each participant if they would like me to use their real name or a pseudonym in my thesis. This was to give participants the option to 'own' their personal narrative and to be "visible in the scripts" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 207). Only one participant chose for their real name to be used. Interviews were recorded via voice recorder and audio files sent to a transcription services for transcribing.

During the first interview, I focused on familiarisation with the process and building rapport with the participant. Connections were established to identify each party beyond just the usual researcher-participant relationship. I talked about the objective of the study so that this was clarified with participants. Initial questions focused on school experiences (refer to questions included in Appendix D). The second interview focused on the transition out of high school and into tertiary education and/or employment (whichever was applicable). Set questions were used to aid extrapolation of information from participants to ensure some common data across all participants to be analysed for comparison and contrast. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to elaborate on their first interview responses.

Phase two consisted of the Yarning Circles, again using semi-structured interviews with open ended questions. As mentioned earlier, it was initially intended that the Yarning Circles would bring together participants from Stage One to share experiences. However, the recommendation from community members to involve young Darumbal leaders in the data collection, to reflect the strong leadership in the community of the Darumbal Traditional Owner group, was deemed a valuable and worthwhile change to make to the study.

A modification to the original Ethics Application was submitted and subsequently approved. The Yarning Circle brought together four young Darumbal leaders recommended by Darumbal Enterprises, with the aim of ensuring Darumbal experiences were included in the data. Yarning Circles were conducted at CQUniversity Rockhampton North campus in a meeting room which was appropriate for group discussions.

Yarning Circle participants were contacted via a Darumbal representative and were advised that I would be in contact with them to gauge their interest in participating in the research. Participation was arranged quickly and easily as participants were willing and interested to share their stories. Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were read the Plain Information Sheet and signed the Consent Forms. There were approximately four weeks between Yarning Circles due to conflicting commitments with participants. Interviews were recorded via voice recorder and audio files sent to a transcription service for transcribing. At the beginning of Interview 2 for each participant and Yarning Circle participants, I provided a summary of the previous interview including the questions I asked and the responses they gave. Each participant was asked to provide changes, clarification or rejection of my summary points.

Through this collaborative process with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to locate participants suitable for the design of the study and data collection methods, I contend that these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are my research partners.

From a collaborative process with the community to locate participants, through to the design of the study and data collection methods, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are research partners. It is research in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives and values drove the research design. The findings of the research will be

presented back to the community and advocated for, even after the research process is completed.

Figure 9 below illustrates the nested structure of my research. The foundation is my Indigenous ontology. It is simultaneously the foundation and the frame that holds my research together. Within my ontology is the relational epistemology that informs my methodology. At the core of my research is Indigenised narratology. It is central to my study and pivots the connection of my ontology and epistemology with the storytellers and their stories. This nested visual has helped me to construct and organise my research.

Figure 8: Ontology, Epistemology, Design, Analysis and Narratives

4.14.3.2 Finding the storytellers

The process to source participants upheld ethical and cultural expectations. Key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and leaders in the local communities were consulted over a period of six months before participant nominations progressed. This ensured the educators and community leaders had a thorough understanding of the context, aims and intended benefits of the study to potential participants and the community. As stated earlier, the key

educators involved in the consultation of the study were the Regional Community Education Counsellor; the Indigenous Education Coordinator, Rockhampton Catholic Diocese and school-based education workers. These educators had the opportunity to provide input throughout the research process. Both the educators and community leaders were asked to nominate participants who met all criteria (see next section). They also provided advice for the most appropriate method to contact participants. I was aware of the time and effort this responsibility placed on stakeholders. However, the alternative was to locate and contact participants myself, which may have jeopardised the integrity of the process and the research. The educators and community leaders nominated and contacted potential participants without issue and quite quickly.

4.15 The Storytellers

4.15.1 Overview

This section examines the stories of each of the participants in the research. Each story profiles the lived experiences of participants and positions each participant as the expert of their own experiences. The point here, was to familiarise the reader with reflections from each participant and interpretations of their experiences of school and their entry into the world of work.

The stories of each participant are compared and contrasted with each other. This process identifies experiences amongst the participants that are shared or unique and creates a profile of each participant. As participant profiles are created, their narratives are revealed. As an insider-researcher, I utilised my understanding of the cultural and social contexts of the participants as well as my knowledge of the school environment, based on my professional work experiences as an Indigenous Liaison Officer and a university-based School Outreach

Officer, to inform and guide the interpretation and meaning of their experiences in order to create meta-narratives. Finding the narrative within multiple stories requires looking through the accounts of the participants for points of commonalities and difference. A meta-narrative is essentially the combined narrative of the narratives.

Cortazzi (2007, p. 2) defines narration as “a major means of making sense of past experience and sharing it with others”. It is through narrating our experiences that we organise our understanding of the world. Plummer (2007) described personal narratives as links between the inner and outer worlds of the informant, that provide the moral guidelines by which people choose to live their lives. “Indeed, the stories we construct of our lives may well become the ‘stories we live by’” (Plummer, 2007, p. 3). Plummer (2007) goes on to explain that it is through personal narratives that collective memories are created and communities imagined, as cultural history and personal accounts connect.

By analysing all the elements of personal narratives (i.e., themes, subjects, mannerisms, backgrounds), researchers can identify significant moments in the lives of each informant as an individual and as a member of a larger cultural group or community (Cortazzi, 2007). The significant moments and events are key to understanding what is important to the informants because they are the moments that are retold time and again (Plummer, 2007).

First Nations’ scholars who use narratives as a research methodology argue that within stories are systems of beliefs and values which guide the safety and wellbeing of humankind and the environment. Behrendt (2019)“these stories contain our code of conduct and reinforce the worldviews that are structured through our totemic systems” (p. 177). Indigenous peoples’ stories draws in Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies and philosophies and the findings can challenge systems that have oppressed Indigenous peoples’ knowledges and experiences

under colonisation (Archibald, 2019). Analysis of Indigenous storywork requires deep understanding of interconnectedness between people, their stories, their places and cultural protocols or lore (Behrendt, 2019; Christian, 2019; De Santolo, 2019).

In presenting the participant profiles, this section identifies the significant moments and events that hold meaning for the informants. These insights provide a chronicle of each participant and ensure all the elements of the personal narratives are appropriately organised to allow for analysis in order to locate the meta-narratives. The interconnectedness of relationships between multiple and overlapping factors is a critical part of the analysis of the stories in my research. My position in this research as a Darumbal woman is central to how the analytical work of the narratives is conducted.

I also draw on my previous work experiences with schools, as an employee of the State Department of Education and as the employee of a university's school outreach program, informs and guides the approach of applying meaning to the participant narratives. The knowledge I have acquired through my professional experiences with school students, both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in various secondary schools across Queensland over the past 15 years, allows me to 'see' the narratives with an informed perspective of each student's experience in classrooms and other types of spaces within the school environment. It also provides me with an understanding of the post-school pathways for students. To this end, this chapter provides space for the participant profiles to be presented and the meta-narratives to be highlighted. The following analytical chapter will examine the meta-narratives in detail.

4.15.2 Stage One—Individual Interviews

4.15.2.1 George's story: 'For the love of my great grandparents'

I first met George (actual name) when he accompanied his manager from a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisation on to the university campus for lunch one day. He was a tall athletic young Aboriginal man; whose surname was familiar to me as it was a name from a community not far from my own. George was quiet and respectful when I was introduced to him. A few weeks after this encounter, George's name was on a list of other young people nominated to participate in my study by Elders and community representatives. I happened to have another encounter with George on campus before the interviews took place, so I took the opportunity to thank him for his interest in participating in the study (by that time he had already indicated to me that he was willing to engage in my study). I thought it would be helpful to quickly explain to George the nature of my study and the process I intended on taking for the interviews. Upon hearing my interest in his experiences of school, George began to share with me his reflections of school. About an hour later the conversation ended. I thanked him for the chat and advised him that I would be keen for him to retell some of those stories with me in the actual interview. He was very keen.

George's story represents one that is typical of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys across Australia. He was a star footballer and gained notoriety across his district for his athletic ability and representative achievements in sport. George's story began in a small rural community about four hours from the nearest regional centre. He left his home, barely a teenager, to start high school at a boarding school. He had been raised by his great grandparents and his strong connection to them was evident throughout both interviews. George was sent to boarding school with his cousin once he was high school aged. He

reflected on the experience of transitioning from a small rural school to a large boarding school, recalling in detail the emotions he felt when he walked into the dining hall for the first time and other such experiences. His transition into high school had a significant impact on his participation at school. His great grandparents expected nothing less than for George to embrace boarding school, to find his feet and make responsible choices, following in his older cousin's footsteps. However, the culture shock he experienced as he settled into his new school could still be heard in his voice as he retold stories of the sights and smells of the boarding school halls and dormitories. His transition from the safety and stability of his great grandparents' home in a small close-knit town was at the forefront of his mind as he found his feet in a school that reminded him of a movie scene.

> ***George****—But, yeah. At the start being Indigenous going there, it was "confronting". Like, in sort of, like, whoa! Just crazy. Yeah. It was the first time we ever went into the "dining" hall. It was like I was on "Harry Potter". You know, you go in and find the candles and, like, a real big dining hall. That's how it was like—all the rows. And, there was four rows. They were long rows. Yeah, really long rows. Five tables in the rows.*

George learned to navigate high school independently of direct family support but ever cognisant of the expectations of his great grandparents. The support George received from his family was in nature, emotional, such as empathy and encouragement. His academic and pastoral care support were things George had to navigate for himself at school. It required of George the ability to establish his own network of support—with sports coaches, dormitory staff and peers.

George was able to establish a wide friendship group, with mostly non-Indigenous peers and not all from sporting backgrounds. He credits his great grandparents for demonstrating a strong work ethic and wide social networks in his small rural town.

> ***George****—I reckon I wouldn't have work ethic. I wouldn't have, that. I wouldn't have—just social, like knowledge. Just speaking to people and like knowing how to approach people in the right manner. Stuff like that. Some Indigenous people lack in areas, you know. That's things that—my [great] grandparents would have gave me and plus, growing up in a country town—where there's all like a lot of non-Indigenous people. And one of my actual good mates—like, really good mates as well, he's non-Indigenous. And I'm really close to their family. They're property owners and I go out to their property all the time. When we were young and still to this day, we're like good mates. You know. And he's like a little, you look at him and you wouldn't think like I was mates with him, you know. He's complete opposite of me. He's non-Indigenous, little short fella. He has like glasses, works at a bank. He's my best mate.*

4.15.2.2 Michael's story: 'Becoming my own person'

Of all the one-on-one interview participants, I am most familiar with Michael. I first met him when he was in Year 9 or 10 at school. His mother worked briefly where I was working and she introduced me to her son at a social event. From then on, I occasionally interacted with Michael at social events when he returned home on the holidays from a boarding school in the northern part of my State. He had transferred to a school in North Queensland to complete Years 11 and 12 after experiencing a difficult time at one of the local high schools. His mother, a single parent who had raised four children on her own, is an incredibly smart and strong Aboriginal woman. He did not discuss his father during the interviews but he did

acknowledge his father's family and the connection he had to his father's traditional homelands.

Throughout Michael's interviews, he shared about his experiences growing up with high expectations conferred upon him, not directly by his mother or family, but by the pressure of the success of his siblings and mother. Michael shared about the domestic violence his mother had experienced in a relationship before he was born. It was obvious that the violence his mother had escaped and her strength as well as that of his older siblings, was a part of his own story and motivation for all of them to improve their lives and the lives of others, especially other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Michael became a father not long after graduating from high school. Being a positive role model for his son was an important reason for him persisting with university study, undoubtedly because of the example his mother had been. He was involved in numerous extra-curricular activities at university and in community groups including Coast Guard and volunteer environmental groups. Michael is an enthusiastic young Aboriginal man driven by a desire to get the most out of life. His interviews showed he had reflected on himself and his decisions often and was always conscious of what he was experiencing. This was evident in his decision to pursue martial arts as a strategy to manage his own wellbeing. Michael's interviews brought out characteristics of personal resolve and resilience that he started developing at a young age.

> ***Michael***—*Things I can remember are bad things because you do remember the bad things more than the good things. I know a lot of it was hard for me because out of my grade I was the only Indigenous student. I was pushed aside even for Indigenous activities. It was pretty hard. Mum got involved. She stuck up for me every single step of*

the way. Towards Grade 7, I started copping a fair bit of racism. From students and mum caused a bit of drama up there but also defended me. A lot of it stopped. I am thankful for that. I am glad I spoke up about that. I guess a bit wary of people these days. It would be hard for me to associate with non-Indigenous people.

4.15.2.3 Timmy's story: 'Chasing dreams'

I recall first meeting Timmy when he was nearing the end of high school and his school had organised for some of its Indigenous students to attend an on-campus day at the university where I worked. He was from my home town and we share family connection on my father's side and his mother's side. Besides his visit to the campus in a large school group, I had never had any personal contact with Timmy prior to the interviews.

Timmy was nominated from community representatives based on his Year 12 attainment, sporting achievements and transition to a job with a local community organisation. He was 19 years old when we met to discuss the research. I was advised that he had shown potential at work as a committed and reliable employee. We met for the first time at the interview venue. As there was no pre-discussion or relationship prior to the first interview, I was expecting the interview to be slightly challenging. It was not. Timmy was shy at first, but seeing my interest in his life and experiences, he relaxed and opened up to sharing a great deal about himself.

Timmy had grown up in Rockhampton and came from several large Aboriginal families on his mother's side. His father was a non-Indigenous man. Timmy was comfortable enough in the interviews to open up about his upbringing, including the difficult breakup of his parents and the effect it had on him and his siblings. He attended several local schools in Rockhampton

and as a result of outstanding achievements in rugby league, won a scholarship to a school in a different city. Timmy moved to Townsville around the age of sixteen for football pursuits.

On his own in another large regional city, he lived in a share-house with house parents and fellow football scholarship students. There he learned to live independently and the skills he learned to be self-reliant became a source of pride and strength on which he formed his identity as a mature and responsible young man, both during and post-high school. He transferred to a very large public school with a large proportion of Indigenous students. Timmy created strong friendship groups with other footballers at his school; however, the most valuable relationship at school was the one he developed with the Indigenous Community Education Counsellor. This relationship was very important to him. This person was his main support person during his senior years and would 'translate' or 'interpret' the school world for him.

Timmy's story is about changing and adjusting goals. As a young Aboriginal man who had caught a glimpse of a football career, he had come back home after an injury had significantly impacted his career progression in the football world. At home he was working for a community organisation which specialised in child protection and assistance for homeless people. He was learning about his identity as a young man as this was not something that he had intentionally learned when he was younger. However, Timmy had created a new life for himself back in his hometown of Rockhampton. His goals were now focused on his job and the meaning he derived from it.

> ***Timmy***—*It's important to me to know that I have something to look forward for each day, something that I can wake up and know, you know, it's something I have to do. Whether it's a day where I don't like getting out of bed or something I don't want to do*

but it's sitting there and it's encouraging me to get up and it's encouraging me to do it because having that goal makes you feel proud inside. Because you have something that you want to go and achieve, even if it takes you forever to do it, you're still going to get to that goal. Everyone has bad days where they don't want to do anything but, I guess you have to find that little bit of motivation in yourself. You know, 'Why are you doing this?', 'What do you really want to achieve from it?' and I guess that's what I live by each day. You know, if I get out of bed I will make a difference, it might not be the same as yesterday or tomorrow might be different but it's just moving yourself and motivating yourself to get what you want. You have to achieve it. If you want it, you have to go and get it.

Since participating in the research, I have had many casual conversations with Timmy. The topic of conversation is always Timmy's work and his aspirations for the future. I have often thought that because our association was initiated through his participation in this research, that he is comfortable to share with me developments in his career and the new skills he has learned or achieved.

4.15.2.4 Jordelle's Story: 'Working through disappointments and focusing on the future'

Jordelle was born and raised in a small rural town about three hours' drive west of Rockhampton. She remained in her hometown throughout primary and high school. Both of her parents are Aboriginal and come from the same region but not from the same language group. Jordelle shares in her interviews the difficulties she experienced while she was in high school due to the relationship breakdown with her father. As her mother's oldest child, Jordelle and her mother shared a strong bond and she shared possibly an even stronger bond with her mother's parents.

Jordelle*—Basically my family is supportive and they're the type of people that's always going to be there for you no matter what. I guess my role was to help my mum raise my brother and sisters because I didn't have my dad so, it was kind of up to me to help her to bring us up.*

Jordelle's experiences at high school were impacted by health problems and this, coupled with challenges with her relationship with her father, made high school a difficult period in her life. The relationship with her high school Indigenous Education Worker was rich and valuable in the formation of Jordelle as a young Aboriginal woman. It was in high school that her understanding of Aboriginal culture and identity was learned and connections to other Aboriginal peers began to influence her. Jordelle valued the input and teaching of Aboriginal Elders whom she could access at high school when the Elders visited the school for special occasions such as NAIDOC Week. The visits of Elders from her local community for special school events contributed to her establishing links to her culture.

At the time of the interviews, Jordelle had recently relocated to Rockhampton to study for a vocational qualification at TAFE. The interviews occurred only months after she had completed high school. The relocation was a big accomplishment for Jordelle. She was staying in a share-house facility with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who had also relocated to Rockhampton to study. Jordelle's story is filled with grit and determination to achieve her goals. Her story was one of overcoming her own health issues despite family heartache of a significant breakdown in her relationship with her father. She was fuelled with a desire to achieve her goal to start her own small business.

Jordelle*—Having an education to me means that you can go and do so much greater things. It's having that knowledge of knowing you went through something and you*

studied and all your hard work it pays off in the end is something you really want to do. Having that education means I could become a pastry chef or I could own my own business so it makes it stand out.

Of all the stories I collected from participants, Jordelle's story stood out for me for a number of reasons. The challenges she faced not only as a young Aboriginal woman from a rural area but also her experiences as a person with disability. Layered on these aspects of her identity she had encountered numerous difficulties with her relationship with her father. Despite so many setbacks and challenges, the level of resilience, personal vision and drive that underpinned Jordelle's aspirations was truly inspiring to me.

4.15.2.5 Taleisha's story: 'Discovering who I am'

I had only met Taleisha when she arrived for her interview. She was recommended to participate in the study because she worked as an Indigenous staff assistant at a local high school which has a large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population. Taleisha had also been a student at the high school where she was working at the time I interviewed her. She had remained in her hometown of Rockhampton throughout her entire schooling life.

Throughout the interviews, Taleisha revealed that her reason for working at the high school she attended as a student, was because of the impact someone in a similar role had made on her own life and in particular, the development of her Aboriginal identity. Taleisha valued the Indigenous Education Worker at her high school to the extent that she aspired for a similar career. Again, grandparents feature heavily as loving influencers who guide decision-making of young people.

Taleisha was raised by her non-Indigenous mother after her mother separated from her Aboriginal father when Taleisha was five years old, due to substance abuse. Her deteriorated relationship with her father had cut off access to her identity as an Aboriginal person. However, Taleisha's story is one of self-discovery, of learning more of her Aboriginal culture and values and dealing with the ongoing desire for connection and acceptance by other Aboriginal people and her father's family. Taleisha shared the complex navigation skills she has acquired, which are common amongst many fair-skinned Aboriginal people. School was more than a place for learning traditional education. For Taleisha, school was where she learned what it meant to be an Aboriginal person amongst her friendship group of other Aboriginal students.

> ***Taleisha***—*Yeah, it was hard though because you know, I am not a white kid so I'm too white for the black kids too black for the white kids. It was hard to find my group of friends to fit in with sometimes. It feels great, it made everything so much easier, you didn't have to pretend to be who you are or, they don't care, you know? It just easy.*

As a researcher from within the community, I made a number of observations about Taleisha's experiences. My observations in this paragraph are based on what Taleisha disclosed in the context of what I know about the school she attended and the friends she associated with whom I am familiar. Taleisha's experiences as a fair-skinned young Aboriginal woman is reflective of the dilemma that she and others who look like her and identify as Aboriginal experience when their appearance and cultural identity are not obvious. I am familiar with Taleisha's friendship group. They are also fair-skinned young Aboriginal women who are strong in their identity, with parents who are active members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It is unfortunate that Taleisha found it difficult to be accepted by

others but wonderful that she found a group of friends with whom she has much in common and with whom she feels accepted.

4.15.2.6 Toni's story: 'Family responsibilities'

Toni was a young Aboriginal and Australian South Sea Islander woman. She was born and raised in Rockhampton and comes from a large South Sea Islander family. Her family are well-known in the community as being hard-workers and generous givers of their time and particularly for their cooking at large community events such as birthday parties, weddings, funerals and cultural market days.

Toni was raised by her whole family, which included many Aunties and her grandparents. She was the first grandchild of her mother's family and as such, when growing up, she took on a lot of responsibility for assisting her grandparents. Likewise, Toni's grandparents were very involved in parenting her as a young child and even now, as a young woman. Toni's relationship with her father, like the two previous female participants, had broken down to the point that he was uninvolved in much of her life, including her education.

Toni's story is about hard work. The statements made above based on observing her family in the community are indicative of Toni's personal story through high school. She took on an afterschool job to pay for her high school tuition fees when her single mother could no longer afford the fees and the costs of raising Toni and her much younger siblings. I have seen Toni accompanying her grandparents to church, working in the community hall kitchens to help out at funerals and taking care of her siblings at Market Stall days.

In her interviews, Toni shares what it was like to stay in her hometown of Rockhampton and to attend a large school with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the

effect these factors had on her to form her own identity as a young woman with shared identities as an Aboriginal and an Australian South Sea Islander. School played an important role in Toni's early maturing as a young adult and, like the other female participants, she owned the responsibility and expectations placed on her shoulders by her mother and grandparents.

> ***Toni***—*Education is important to have the knowledge, that you've been through it and experience those things because a lot of my aunties only went to Year 11, I know mum had to drop out because she had me, but being the only one who went to Grade 12 it kind of felt good because I experienced it and learnt it all. Pushing to stay in school and make sure you get the proper education so you can do better after school. I think that's what they wanted most importantly because when I was in Grade 11 looking for my traineeship my aunties said that this was really important as it is going to help you more. I didn't understand how it was going to help me. But now that I'm out of school I realize it actually has helped me it gave me that extra step when I came out of school to go straight into a manager's position at the fish and chips shop and then into this traineeship with this certificate II so it was good.*

Toni demonstrated personal attributes developed to levels beyond her teenage years. She reminded me of many Indigenous girls who take on caring responsibilities and make significant decisions for themselves during high school all the while being integral parts of large caring families.

4.15.3 Stage Two—The Yarning Circles

The Yarning Circle brought together a mix of young Darumbal leaders. The group consisted of two young women and two young men all around the age of 18 and 19 years. A total of six

young Darumbal leaders were nominated but only four were able to participate due to work commitments. Whilst the group is small, they were recommended to participate in the research by Darumbal Elders because of their leadership in community activities. Their experience as leaders had been developed throughout their lives, but particularly as teenagers with close relationships with Elders who guided their active participation in knowledge of cultural dances, language, stories and other responsibilities as Darumbal ambassadors. Additional participants were not sought to increase the numbers.

I have known all four participants, Jamal, Nikki, Zavier and Keisha, since at least 2011. Zavier and Keisha are relatives of mine. Through kinship structures I am an Aunt to both of these participants. Zavier is the son of my cousins brother and Keisha is the granddaughter of my father's cousin. Jamal and Nikki are members of two other large Darumbal families and are the children of other Darumbal women whom I have become close with through our involvement in Darumbal traditional business and broader Indigenous community events.

I have observed all four Yarning Circle participants growing up as children, teenagers and young adults. They attended Darumbal events and activities, including Darumbal hunting and camping trips, Native Title meetings and education programs. I have also interacted with all four participants when I have visited their schools in my professional role involved in the university's school outreach programs. More recently, I have engaged with all four participants as employees in workplaces I have visited for work-related meetings and events. Three out of the four participants are lead Darumbal traditional dancers, as well as musicians and language teachers.

I was very excited to have received their recommendations to my study from the Elders. However, my excitement was also mixed with nerves as I considered how to navigate my way

through multiple connections and levels of relationships with these participants as an Aunt, a Darumbal 'leader', an educator and a professional stakeholder, to establish myself as a researcher of my own people. As stated earlier in this chapter, my position as an insider researcher allows me to draw on the knowledge and understanding of my community and the family contexts of the participants in order to recognise nuances in the narratives. Aside from these factors, I was confident that my personal connection to them afforded me their trust and I was seen as someone who genuinely cared for them and their experiences. The participants were enthusiastic to be interviewed. They all showed signs of nerves, mostly due to knowing they were being recorded and being aware that their participation was part of my PhD program.

The topic of the first meeting of the Yarning Circle centred on the participants' experiences at school. As the participants and I gathered for the Yarning Circle we greeted each other and prepared ourselves before the interview started some made comments to the effect that school felt a long time ago or that they now felt 'old' because of how time has gone by so quickly for them. The Yarning Circle allowed participants time to reflect thoughtfully on their years at school. Comments were broad-sweeping and general. However, they did recall specific occasions which were more memorable for them and generally they all had positive experiences of school and their reflections were fond ones.

The second meeting of the Yarning Circle was on the topic of post-school experiences. This topic was rich in conversation and subsequently provided rich research data. The participants were highly engaged in this discussion. They were eager to share their insights with me and each other. Their experiences and learnings were well thought through, which demonstrated

a high level of awareness and understanding of their positions as young Darumbal leaders Zavier speaks to.

> ***Zavier***—*Since the old days it's been our duty to care for Country. So now it's still our duty, our mission to care for Country, care for our community. So it's definitely a big part of our responsibility as Darumbal people to help our community and do whatever it takes until the end of time. With the right tools and right knowledge I reckon Darumbal people should be the leaders in the community.*

From my observations of these young Darumbal leaders in the Yarning Circles and from their participation in Darumbal business in the community, this high level of self-awareness is expected by Darumbal Elders and taught to young Darumbal leaders (i.e., the participants in my research) by both the Elders and older Darumbal leaders.

Below is a short profile of each Yarning Circle participant.

4.15.3.1 Jamal's story: 'Being accountable to my Elders'

Jamal was two years out of high school when he joined me and the others at the Yarning Circle interviews. He had attended an all boys' school in the local area. Jamal was a model student, applying himself academically and as an outstanding rugby league player. He was working for a local Indigenous community organisation at the time of data collection. It was the second local Indigenous organisation he had worked for since he had graduated. He had found it relatively easy to secure his first job based on his reputation as a model student at school and as a young leader in the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Jamal had been raised in a very strong kinship structure and was given roles of cultural responsibilities from his family early into his teen years. Jamal became very active in the

Darumbal and wider communities and this flowed into his school community. He was marked as a student leader because of his positive influence with both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Because of the Darumbal knowledge, which had been passed down to him from his Elders, Jamal had a highly developed understanding of Darumbal history. Jamal shared about how he had been called on in classes by teachers to provide his perspectives whenever an Indigenous topic or issue arose. For the most part, Jamal would offer his views and share insights as a Darumbal person, however he reflected on how difficult it was as a child between 14 and 17 years of age to know what Darumbal knowledge he was permitted to share and the accuracy of the information he was sharing with non-Darumbal people at his school. Jamal was acutely aware that he knew more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures than most of his teachers, so he felt obligated to share what information he knew to benefit his schoolmates and teachers.

> ***Jamal***—*You'd learn that little bit of culture, but, yeah, they don't really prioritise the history of Aboriginal people or some stuff like that whereas, what's it called, they want to teach kids more about all the other things instead of our Indigenous history.*

Jamal retold accounts of where non-Indigenous teachers preferred to bring in an Elder to conduct a smoking ceremony instead of teaching curriculum on atrocities and racist policies inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

> ***Jamal***—*sometimes teachers would rely on you to teach the kids and teach the teachers and stuff like Nikki was saying. And sometimes they try and cover it up with they throw in a smoking ceremony on this day with their assembly and they try and incorporate little things here and there but not really cover the whole history of it.*

Jamal felt this 'diversion' did less to educate students than teaching students Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories. This type of situation usually leaves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feeling that they are expected to be grateful to the school for organising a cultural ceremony to be performed.

Throughout high school and his early career working for local Indigenous organisations, Jamal's cultural knowledge and natural leadership abilities were highly desired. However, Jamal was cautious in his representation of Darumbal people and Elders. He stated that he found it challenging knowing when to speak for Darumbal people and when not to speak for Darumbal people, given his age.

> ***Jamal***—*Back then there was a lot of pressure. I wasn't as confident as I am now so I was kind of like, "I don't know if I can tell you this," or, "I don't know the answer," or I told them what I did know and yeah. It was a bit daunting at times.*

Balancing his reputation as an up-and-coming leader, his responsibilities at work and his responsibilities to his Elders required Jamal to approach all of these with trepidation so as not to 'get into trouble' with his Elders for stepping out of line.

4.15.3.2 Nikki's story: 'Fostering connection and pride in culture'

Nikki's story is very similar to Jamal's as both come from the same family network. Similar to Jamal, Nikki was raised to have a role within her family, which was to be a custodian of a particular aspect of Darumbal culture. Nikki was two years out of high school when I interviewed her as part of the Yarning Circle. She was working for her family's business alongside her grandparents and mother. She had started taking on more work responsibility after getting her license and car.

Nikki attended a local high school which has a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, many of whom were either from the local region or from far north Queensland. Her experiences of high school were positive. I remember on occasions catching up with Nikki's Mother while Nikki was still at school and chatting about her progress throughout years 11 and 12. Nikki and her Mother would often tell me about her study sessions with her friends and what assignments or exams she was working on at the time.

Nikki utilised the support provided by the Indigenous Liaison Officer at the school describing the Liaison Officer as 'deadly'.

> ***Nikki***—*She was deadly. Without her I probably wouldn't have been able to make it through high school. There were just so many times that she had my back, basically. There was a few times where I'd have to do an assignment that I didn't do so I'd just be there sitting in her office going hard for it, but just within my schooling life, my personal life, my wellbeing.*

Nikki knew a lot about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body at her school. She was involved in school life as an Aboriginal student leader and spent time with her Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. She reflected on how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body at her school was sometimes perceived as problematic by non-Indigenous students because of their preference for congregating together. However, teachers could see the crowd of students as an opportunity to interact and build rapport.

> ***Nikki***—*People who had a positive vibe towards us, or some had negative, but because we all used to be together in one spot around the school so all the teachers would interact with us and say, "Hello."*

I observe a common feature in Nikki's experiences at school, the way her family has raised her with cultural responsibilities and her early career work. All of these elements have guided Nikki to become an active representative of her family in the community. As an Indigenous student leader at school, she actively fostered cultural pride and support amongst peers and valued the support from the Indigenous Liaison Officer. She has chosen an early career pathway that allows her to pass those values on to younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students and to build rapport and encourage participation amongst non-Indigenous students to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

4.15.3.3 Zavier's story: 'Influencing the younger ones'

As mentioned earlier, Zavier is one of my relatives and just like Jamal and Nikki, was two years out of high school when the Yarning Circle interviews took place. I have been a part of Zavier's life since he was born into our very large Darumbal family. His mother's heritage is Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander. Zavier is related to me on his father's side. Zavier is one of eight children in his family. His upbringing into his mixed heritage has crafted his very strong identity as an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander man and is a result of his parents, who are very active in the local community with all three cultural groups.

Zavier attended a large public primary school before being enrolled into one of the largest high schools in the region, which is a private Catholic school. He had great school attendance, was an average achiever, an outstanding rugby and rugby league player and was one of the stronger Indigenous student leaders at the school. He was part of a cultural dance troupe and was often pulled out of school to perform at local events around the region.

After Year 12, Zavier got a job at another local high school as an Indigenous Teacher Aide working alongside a Community Education Counsellor (CEC). It was work that he found fulfilling because he was passionate about supporting younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to finish high school, whilst also becoming confident in their cultural identity. He acknowledged that he got the job because of his participation in the dance troupe and the rapport his father had built with this particular high school.

> ***Zavier****—working on your land, our land, we have a lot of connections because we have a lot of family here. And a lot of people—a lot of people know who you are because of your last name so, which makes it like—sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's not. Most of the time it's easier to get into things. So like because I've got my job because of dad because he's the elder at the school so they—because they asked dad and I think they knew him and he referenced me so that's how I got mine. So I was pretty lucky really to get the job I have now. Do you know what I mean? I've actually been pretty lucky to stay on for this long.*

Zavier's story of how he secured his first job post-school could be seen as nepotism or a chance opportunity. However, on closer observation of the level of participation in the community as a school student, it become apparent that Zavier had positioned himself for the opportunity through his development and demonstration of interpersonal skills and public speaking. As a traditional dance performer and his experience teaching cultural dance to others, Zavier has a strong commitment to fostering pride and connection to culture amongst his peers.

4.15.3.4 Keisha's story: 'Finding others and myself'

The final participant to be discussed in the participant profiles is Keisha . She is another relative of mine but, belonging to my extended kinship network of family, I didn't know Keisha or many of her siblings and cousins until about 2011. It is not unusual for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to not have personal relationships with those in extended kinship structures due to the number of people across the levels of generations in family networks. I got to know Keisha when she attended university school outreach programs toward the end of her primary school years.

Similar to Jamal, Nikki and Zavier, Keisha was two years out of Year 12 at the time of the Yarning Circle interviews. However, unlike the other Yarning Circle participants Keisha did not have a high profile in the community, based on cultural work and involvement. She was well known for her participation in sport. Keisha played for one of the most successful women's rugby league teams in the region and travels with the team to play in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rugby league carnivals across Queensland. Although quietly spoken, Keisha had a sense of humour that draws people to her.

Keisha attended an all girls' private school in the local region as a boarding student and here she took on a role as boarding captain. Whilst the school did not have a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in comparison with other schools in the region, they were a visible cohort of students consisting of local girls and girls from far north Queensland. The school did not regularly participate in combined school events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nor was there a very strong link between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with the school. However, Keisha explained that most of their cultural activities were organised within the school.

Keisha—*We didn't get to celebrate most of the events. So if it was for the Torres Strait Islanders like Mabo Day. We only did two or three masses for NAIDOC and stuff, but we did one project [which] was the Yarning Circle and that was really good. We got all the girls together planning ideas and stuff and building it at the end of the year, so yeah.*

A Yarning Circle is a process and medium for a group of people. It has been practiced by Aboriginal groups for thousands of years. The Circle fosters an open learning space for cultural knowledge and business to be discussed. There is no 'leader' positioned in front of or higher than other participants. Everyone enters the space respectful of the knowledge and contribution others make to the collective wisdom. The Yarning Circle which Keisha refers to above, was a project which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at her school undertook together. Many primary and secondary schools across Australia have installed Yarning Circles in outside spaces and utilise them as a teaching and learning strategies as well as a place for student wellbeing. The physical structure and appropriate use of Yarning Circles indicate that Aboriginal cultures are honoured and valued in that school.

In this type of school environment, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events and activities were conducted sporadically and in the absence of access to family and community (due to being a boarder), Keisha found herself learning about her culture from peers.

Keisha—*I like learning the Torres Strait Islanders' dancing or music. Their culture is really good to mix with the girls in boarding, but not in school and stuff. In the school we wasn't allowed to muck around, do our culture in the school unless it's on a particular day, like it was a NAIDOC or anything like those.*

Keisha built a close relationship with an Aboriginal teacher at her school and reflected that it was one of the most valuable relationships she had formed with a member of staff. Even though Keisha was not active in teaching or sharing culture in the communities, in comparison with the other Yarning Circle participants, she was motivated to learn as much as she could from her peers and the Aboriginal teacher at the school.

> ***Keisha****—There's one lady who I think she was an inspiration at my school. Her name was Telah. She used to if we were in meetings and she's not present or the Indigenous Liaison Officer wasn't there we wasn't allowed to speak without them. If we were in boarding we needed a parent consent so we used to have Telah, or Maria (Indigenous Liaison Officer). So mainly Telah was really good and she'd always bring us altogether and everything.*
>
> *She was a PE teacher and she was sort of like a teacher aide to us and yeah. I really enjoyed her being there. She helped me with my speeches, assignments and stuff. She helped me get boarding captain, which is good. Yeah. So I loved it having her there, she was cool.*
>
> *It made me feel happy and glad that someone is supporting us Indigenous girls and helping us and everything and putting us first as well, doing us a big favour. We do homework club and everything, do all those and it was really good and yeah.*

As a young adolescent, Keisha wanted to develop her identity as an Aboriginal woman. Her efforts though, were restricted by what she perceived as a lack of cultural inclusiveness and content in teaching practices, limited teacher involvement and enthusiasm in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander celebrations and commemorations and a lack of organised support and

activities for herself and peers. She demonstrated resourcefulness by accessing her peers and determining that the Aboriginal teacher at her school could assist her to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Soon after Year 12 Keisha, was employed at a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation working in a family support role. Her passion for her community and desire to make a positive impact guided her decisions regarding her future. Keisha's quiet resolve as a young teenager to form a strong cultural identity has made her an up-and-coming leader in the community, recognised by the Elders who nominated her to participate in this study.

The participant profiles above provide a brief overview of the personal stories of each individual in the research. The aim of the participant profiles is to give the reader an insight into the personalities of the informants, their family background, their experiences at different schools and the early career pathways they have each chosen. The personal narratives are rich with lived experiences and feature significant moments, relationships and events. They are moments, relationships and events that have meaning and give meaning to the person who has lived them. The next section explores the meta-narratives of the interview and yarning circle data for the purpose of drawing out the themes of the data collection providing Indigenous narratives from Indigenous stories.

4.16 Building Indigenous Narratives from Indigenous Stories

4.16.1 Overview

This section explains the analytical process I used to identify the global themes across all of the participant stories. Before any analysis of narrative data could occur, it is necessary to engage in a 'circuitous process' of listening and hearing, thinking and understanding (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). I observed the communication with participants over texts and

phone conversations, I noted their body language when we interacted in person, their choice of name to address me as 'Aunty', 'Aunty Mel' or 'Aunty Lu' (my 'nickname'). My observations of interactions were valuable for me to 'hear' the stories.

In their discussion of Tribal Critical Race Theory, Brayboy and McKinley (2005) explain that 'hearing' stories is critical to its use as data. The various interactions that occur between the researcher and the participant in narrative data inquiry is dependent on the relationship that exists or does not exist between the two parties. If relationship and trust are established, then the conversations and interactions that occur outside of 'formal storytelling' provide valuable insights and context for the actual stories. In an Indigenous context, narrative is, as Archibald 2008 identifies, a natural medium for Indigenous peoples because of its use through generations of Native societies to transmit important social, political, spiritual and scientific information. Moreton-Robinson (2013) states "by listening and hearing I am being informed by knowledges and shared experiences" (p. 343).

4.16.1.1 Auto-reflexivity data analysis

4.16.1.1.1 Insider-research: Doing Indigenous research as a cultural insider

In my 'Theoretical Approach' (Chapter 2) I committed to a reflexive practice that draws on my strength as a Darumbal woman and maintains my relatedness to self, Entities and others. I acknowledge that my commitment to my relationships is a higher priority than my academic, professional and personal ambitions. To this end, I explain the reflexive practices I implemented throughout my research process. I chose to utilise a blended approach of Western and Indigenous methods. Firstly, I will describe my multi-layered 'self', inter-personal and collective reflexivity approach as proposed by Nicholls (2009). Secondly, I discuss my roles and responsibilities from an Indigenist research approach.

In reflecting on 'self', I considered the three factors posed by Nicholls (2009) which, by necessity, I continuously addressed throughout my entire research process. These were: (1) my hidden assumptions; (2) perceived and actual power in my relationships with stakeholders and participants; and (3) my position as an insider-researcher. These factors became immediate issues from the moment I decided to undertake a PhD program. The conversations with family, friends and others who are all members of the community in which my research occurred became possible stakeholders and I was cautious to be sensitive and open in those initial discussions about my potential research. As an Aboriginal researcher, ethical standards were implicated in my research long before I applied for University Ethics approval.

As mentioned in an earlier section, I am positioned as an insider-researcher on multiple levels. Firstly, I live in the community where the study was conducted and have a large network of family who also live here. Secondly, I am a member of the Darumbal Traditional Owner group and an active participant of the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community on Darumbal Country. Thirdly, I am involved professionally in education in the region and have insider knowledge of the school experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from previous work as an Indigenous Liaison Officer and Community Education Counsellor in high schools in Brisbane, Queensland and a University Schools Outreach Officer in Rockhampton, Queensland. I maintained my awareness of my position as an insider-researcher throughout my research. I held meetings with my Guides throughout my research with the concentration of occurrences in the first 12 months and the final 18 months of the research. My Guides consisted of respected Indigenous leaders in the community who are similar in age to myself. Their positions in the community have been as representatives of Elders and all three make a significant contribution to local education. They provided me with

guidance and support, made inquiries to ensure my consultation with other community members was extensive, nominated participants and suggested changes to the participant group involved in Stage Two of my data collection. Their support and interest has been a source of encouragement and motivation for me. They consistently brought Darumbal Country into our conversations, not because they have feared that my connection to Country was waning, but because it was evident to them that this research is about this place and we, who live here. "Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups" (Brayboy & McKinley, 2005, p. 429).

4.16.1.2 Applying a cultural lens and using indigenised narratology

The narratology that underpins my Indigenist framework allowed me to 'hear' and understand Indigenous stories. I honoured the stories that were shared with me by being patient and nonjudgmental in my reflection and analysis. The most significant demonstration of honouring the stories, though, was my commitment to complete this research by the due date despite many personal challenges. When I felt that it was impossible to continue, I was reminded of and motivated by my responsibility to the storytellers, the participants and to my Elders who gave me permission to undertake my research (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

As I critiqued and reflected multiple times on the stories and my observations, the meanings of each participant's story became clearer. I organised the stories in such a way that common themes emerged. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) refers to this method as 'thematic analysis'. This process organises the data, which were sections of recorded dialogue, into concise categories based on similarities, likeness and homogeneity. Thematic analysis can be used to

sort and organise both quantitative and qualitative data. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) explained that organising qualitative data through thematic analysis requires the data to be examined for similarities and likeness and categories to be subsequently produced or 'emerged'. This is opposed to quantitative thematic analysis, which assigns data to pre-determined categories.

An inductive thematic analysis uses coding to sort the data (Lapadat, 2010). This approach required me to use key words, or 'codes', against sections of dialogue from participants. A section of dialogue was assigned one or more codes. If the story could be assigned multiple codes, it was. There was no maximum number of codes per data dialogue section, as I allowed the stories to speak for themselves and the assigned codes were used to ensure that all of the story was captured in the analysis and not just the main idea based on my judgment. This ensured that the resulting themes were "grounded in the data" and not based on theoretical constructs (Lapadat, 2010). The categorising process identified themes and then these were analysed through a cultural lens. The cultural lens is influenced by the researcher's ontology, axiology and epistemology (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

4.16.1.3 Process for analysing data

The data collected from each interview was inserted into a separate table so that the data collection resulted in two separate tables for each participant, including two separate tables for each of the Yarning Circles. The tables were identical for each interview and captured six pieces of information:

1. The speaker identity indicated whether the speaker was the interviewer or the participant. In the case of the Yarning Circles the participant was assigned a number (i.e., P1, P2);

2. The turn taking column captured the sequence of interview data provided by a speaker;
3. Interview data provided the question or the response that was given by the speaker;
4. Code captured the keywords from the interview data;
5. Category summarised the codes; and
6. Notes were made which allowed additional thoughts, links, reminders and ideas to be captured against the interview data, code and category.

Table 1: Example of headings used in tables for data organisation

Speaker ID	Turn taking	Interview data	Code	Category	Notes

It was important to examine keywords within the context in which they were used, to ensure the code accurately reflected how the keyword was being used by the participant. For example, when participants discussed leadership and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' schools, the context for their participation was important, to determine whether the reference was made in the context of having a 'voice' or being ambassadors of their communities in their schools.

Below, in Table 2, is an example of how keywords were identified and subsequent codes and categories applied to a specific interview data set. The excerpt below is taken from an analysed transcript.

Table 2: Keywords

Speaker ID	Turn taking	Interview data	Code	Category	Notes

P2	0003	I think, yes, at my school because maybe every two weeks we used to have a meeting with all the Indigenous kids where everyone would just gather around the rooms and we'd just talk to each other, yarn about things coming up, or which maths we were going to participate in and do stuff like that.	Regular student meetings Cultural space Student leadership Planning activities Student participation Representation Voice	Ambassador	Students were actively involved in student life at their school

4.16.2 Personal narratives of the participant profiles

From the stories of each of the participants, the underlying narrative was identified. This can be achieved by analysing the direction of the stories (Hays & Wood, 2011). The nature of the questions required participants to reflect on past experiences so 'backward' directed narrative was frequently used. However, in order to ascertain the overall direction of their narratives, I reflected and considered their stories at length. I noted the 'others' they spoke of, who they were, how often they were mentioned and the nature of their relationship and the role they played in the participant's story. I examined places and spaces they reflected on and whether they had initiated those topics or if it was in response to my questioning. I reflected at length on the experiences and events they focused on as their minds cast back to memories that they appeared to recall regularly and some they had almost forgotten. I noticed commonalities across participants. It was important for me not to be prescriptive in

summarising the narrative of each participant, but rather to bring the richness of their lives to the fore and to reduce any risk of 'sanitising' their stories.

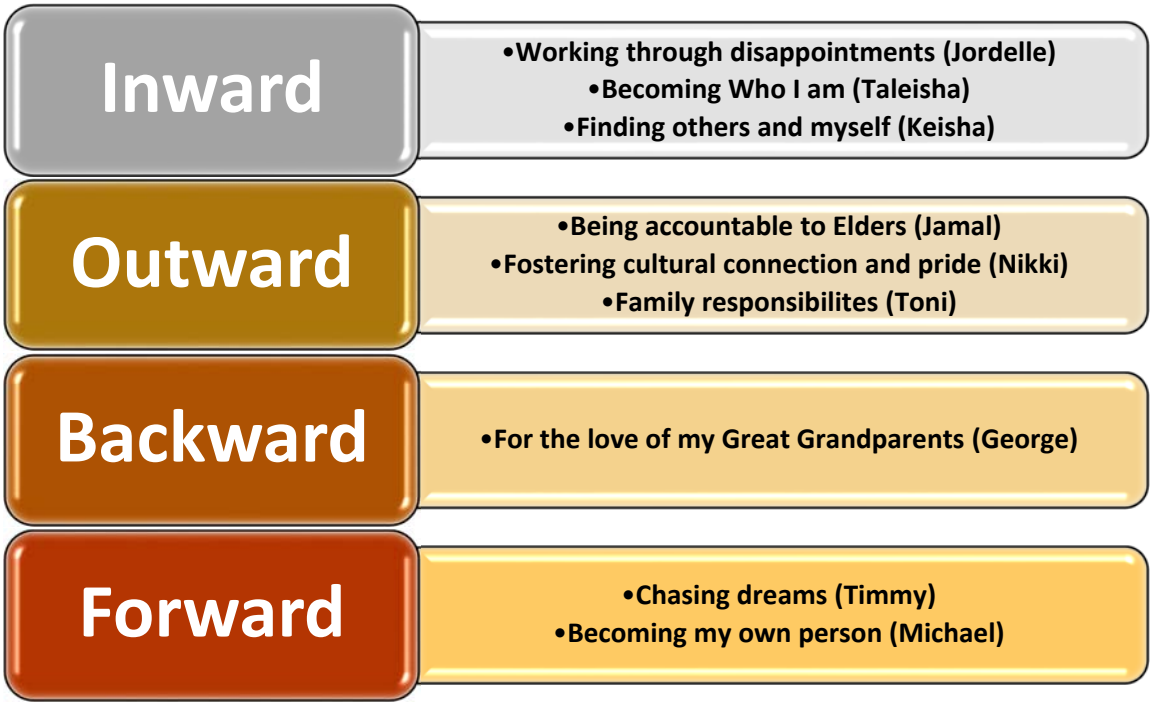

Figure 9: Directions of personal narratives

4.16.3 The themes

Six significant themes emerged from the analysis of the participant narratives. Each significant theme consists of a second level of specific themes with these being explored in the next chapter. This layering of information is indicative of the thickness of the data (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011).

1. Acting as ambassadors
    a. Teaching the teachers
    b. Creating culturally specific areas
    c. Negotiating
    d. Sharing Indigenous knowledge.

2. Creating intricate webs of relationships
    a. Relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers
    b. Relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school support staff
    c. Relationships with teachers
    d. Post school relationships.
3. Creating ambassadors for the future
    a. Participants and parents
    b. Participants as parents
    c. Impacts of grandparents.
4. Creating and acquiring cultural capital.
5. Autonomy and interdependence.
6. Cultural obligations and school expectations
    a. Influencing the younger generation
    b. Transitioning from high school
    c. Meeting expectations post school.

4.16.4 Conclusion

I have presented my view of the world in this chapter. My Darumbal-ness permeates through this research because of the centrality of my Indigenous ontology, epistemology and axiology in my research. The processes I implemented to consistently examine my intentions and remain accountable to my community has enriched my Indigeneity, my relationships and my research. How I know, am and do as an Aboriginal woman and more specifically as a Darumbal woman are integral to the analysis of the data which follows in Chapters 5 and 6.

The next chapter explores the meta-narratives in greater detail. More responses from the participants are included to further illuminate the experiences of each informant and provide the space for the voices for the participants to shine through. The aim of the following analytical chapters is to delve deeper into the themes that emerged from the participant data. The 'narrative of the narratives' is drawn out of the voices of the participants.

Chapter 5. Building Relational Capacity

The aim of the next two chapters is to give the reader a fuller understanding of the school and early career pathway experiences of the participants and to move towards answering the research question 'what can be learned from the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12?' By understanding these young people, a clearer picture is gained of their lives. Importantly, this is done by giving voice to the school experiences of the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live on Darumbal Country.

These chapters are a close examination of the six themes which emerged from the data analysis. Each theme is discussed individually using additional data from participants as further evidence. Cultural and social contexts are given to elaborate on the participant experiences of school and early career pathways. Ladson-Billings (2012) and Hattie (2009) both urged the exploration of the links between race and education to improve our understanding of how these elements have been "intricately linked for centuries" (Ladson-Billings, 2012, p. 116). Each theme concludes with a discussion. I have used this method to organise my data analysis to provide a conclusion at the end of each theme to transition to Chapter 7 to state and explore the findings of the research.

5.1 Theme One—Acting as Ambassadors

A reoccurring theme throughout the one-on-one interviews and Yarning Circle discussions was the experiences of participants who valued and actively contributed to the collective voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Even as young adolescents, the participants felt a strong sense of responsibility to be ambassadors of their Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander communities and families within schools and as young adults in their workplaces.

The collective voices consisted of students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff and community members. Their experiences ranged from sharing effective engagement strategies with teachers to improve their own academic outcomes; contributing to culturally specified spaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; sharing cultural knowledge and practices; to making significant contributions to classroom teaching, which sometimes positioned students in precarious situations regarding gaining correct Elder permission to share cultural knowledge.

When asked about the level of expectations their teachers had of their academic abilities, participants believed their teachers had 'average' expectations of them. They did not perceive that teachers' expectations were high or low but rather, 'moderate' and that they encouraged students to do their best. However, after reflecting on the level of achievement they obtained at school, most participants who had not chosen the more challenging 'OP' subjects, indicated they could have applied themselves with greater effort to achieve better academic results, either to have pursued an OP pathway or to have achieved more highly in their non-OP subjects.

Keisha, Nikki, Jamal, Timmy and Zavier reflected that had they known the level of academic ability required for them to complete Year 12 they would have applied themselves more than they did because they believed they were capable of achieving more than they did. As Timmy stated:

> ***Timmy:*** *[I was] just wasting time—That's why I always thought—I should have just done OP [pathway]*

Even with moderate levels of teacher expectations perceived by the participants, most of them felt that the support they were given in class from teachers was insufficient for them to achieve even to the average standard of non-Indigenous students. Throughout the interviews, participants disclosed strategies they employed to access additional teacher support and resources in order to be successful at school as Jamal explained

> ***Jamal*** *– I think I had a very respected relationship with most of the head people not just because I was Darumbal but because, well, some of it because I was Darumbal, and I did a lot of welcomings and cultural kind of things. So I had a lot of input and stuff that so we kind of built that kind of relationship.*

They recognised that the effort they needed to apply to pass their subjects required regular school attendance, participation and engagement in class and fostering relationships with teachers for the purpose of accessing additional resources and support.

Jamal was able to obtain additional support from teachers for himself and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by developing mutually beneficial relationships. This participant was an outstanding student leader who won high praise from teachers at his school and from other teachers across the school district. He led cultural dance troupes, was authorised by Elders to provide Welcome to Country ceremonies at his school, spoke Darumbal language at school events, mentored younger students and represented his all boys' school in rugby league. I was made aware that he did not accept a nomination to be his

school's captain in his final year, choosing instead to concentrate on his studies and other leadership roles he already occupied. This participant felt it was necessary as a student to build positive relationships with his teachers by becoming an exceptional 'role model' student, allowing the school to access and use his Indigenous knowledge and position so that, in return, he could access the support and resources he and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students needed. As he explained

> ***Jamal***—*we could change little things. We could negotiate with the teachers what we think we needed and the teachers they'd act accordingly. I had a good relationship with most of my teachers and that sort of helped me get through school so that extra bit of support from every teacher in my classes. When I was at school what I learnt was [good at] being able to adapt. Adapt to your surroundings and, yeah, when you need to adapt, when you need to stand out. That's what I picked up.*

For Michael, the non-verbal communication styles of teachers were important to him. He reflected that for himself and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teacher behaviour and interactions with students had an impact on his academic achievement. When non-verbal communications were friendly and non-threatening Michael felt he could engage productively in class. Michael explained that when teachers had a relaxed approach to teaching it relieved the stress he experienced as an Aboriginal student studying the highest level ('OP') subjects.

> ***Michael***—*just getting them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] to laugh is a start, getting them to smile, enjoy themselves. It's not really what you say it's your body language, how you act. You can say "high school's going to be hard" and then they'll [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] fear that for the rest of their high*

school time but if you actually get them to enjoy themselves, goes a lot further than anything else.

Toni came from a large family and had caring responsibilities for younger siblings and grandparents. In addition to this, Toni worked a part time job managing a fast food shop. She worked in order to pay for her college fees and school expenses because her mother was not able to afford the cost of sending her to school in her senior years. Toni decided not to do OP subjects to avoid the stress of difficult subjects on top of challenging personal commitments and responsibilities. For Toni, finding a teacher who she felt could support her across multiple subjects and give her access to study space at school was important.

Toni—*Mr. Path in the Arts room he used to let me go into the arts room and do my assignments and he used to be a really good help as he is not only one teacher, he teaches every subject so he was able to help me with a lot of my work. Yeah everyone was stressing and it made me wonder why everyone was stressing in Year 11, like you're not even in Year 12 yet. So I changed my path, I did a non OP and then I just cruised through school like I didn't feel stress to get everything done, I was getting my points I was passing everything I was right and I was able to pass my class and able to help the OP kids, my friend was so stressed about her OP score she was failing math and I said you need to pass math for that so I tried to help her a bit and it felt good to be able to help someone.*

There was a sense of frustration amongst participants who, out of necessity to achieve the medium academic standard, were burdened with a large number of preconditions for school success. Pertaining to their unwritten conditions to success, were relationships with teachers that hinged on their abilities to be exceptional students, able to give the school use of their

Indigeneity, juggle family responsibilities, work part-time jobs and be resilient in challenging interpersonal relationships with teachers from different cultural backgrounds. This was expressed by Jamal previously on page 150 when he indicated that there was a currency he had and used as a Darumbal person going to a school on Darumbal Country. Also, Toni shared that caring for her grandparents and working after school to pay for school fees were responsibilities she took as part of being successful at school.

> ***Toni*** *– Year 12 come and I thought I might have to working a bit harder now and I woke up to myself a bit and really get into studying and working if I wasn't studying I was working to make sure I could pay. Yeah I cried about it for a couple of days, she [Mother] said I could go to a different school and I said I'd rather stay there and commit myself to it than change schools I was already too far in to change, and I'm one of those kids if something changes it's hard to get back into a new routine. So if I changed it would lose me so I'd rather stay there. it sort of taught me more going to school and having that traineeship like having it while I was at school doing my education it helped me get my confidence up as well to talk to people I used to be a shy kid so having that and then going to a big school with heaps of variety of classes to take make me have more confidence in myself as well.*

> *Timmy commented that he obtained teacher support because he was a 'good student'. This further evidenced the participants' perceptions that personalised support was contingent on their willingness to be better than their average Indigenous peer. Timmy—'Cause I was just a good student—really. So, all my teachers went out of their way a lot for me. But if you were like a 'bad' kid at school, they probably wouldn't.*

In addition to the frustration that I observed amongst the participants in relation to this topic, it was evident that the participants experienced fatigue as they progressed through each year level. Harnessing relationships with teachers was deemed a necessary responsibility, not only for the individual participant's success, but for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student collective who would encounter particular teachers in the future.

What I observed at times throughout my interviews with the participants was how they pieced together the meaning of some of their experiences as they narrated these to me. For instance, through the interview process participants demonstrated a realisation that during high school, non-Indigenous students, for the most part, did not share a sense of obligation and responsibility for the experiences and successes of other students similar to themselves. Participants may also have felt isolated by teachers who required 'role model' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to 'do more' as a student for the school than what was required of non-Indigenous students, thereby exploiting the participants' cultural obligations towards each other in order to improve teacher student relationships and the academic engagement and progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Furthermore, participants felt that their access to academic support at school was affected by teachers' lack of appreciation and compassion for the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This was evident where teachers questioned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' expectation that their school adopt and follow cultural protocols such as Welcomes by and Acknowledgements of Traditional Owners or where teachers avoided lessons in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history in preference for a symbolic cultural ceremony. Toni and Jordelle spoke of the deference by teachers they experienced.

Toni—*I know one of our teachers, she came to one of our fun days, it was a NAIDOC Mass and she understood why we did "Welcome to Country" and "Acknowledgement" she understands the differences and stuff. And when we explained it to her she was like "oh, now I know why you girls go the way you do when we do this kind of stuff" and it sort of made her a friendlier teacher like she was happy to explain when she knew and understood it and when we explained it to her properly. But it's like we don't want to explain it to everyone maybe different grades has to understand each Indigenous kid in that grade because we are all kind of different. Well we are all different not just kind of different.*

Jordelle—*Someone to sit down with them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] and talk to them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] and say 'We are here to help you finish all the way to Grade 12' for them to be supported. I found it near the end of Grade 12 that everyone started helping. It should've happened as soon as the kids started. From Year 8 all the way to Year 12 they should have that support. Not just from the Indigenous people [support staff] but from everyone.*

Participants were aware that the large majority of teachers lacked basic understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Thus, their teachers had little to no knowledge of the cultural contexts of their students from these backgrounds nor how these students functioned as learners within their cultural contexts. Additionally, their teachers knew very little about the histories, values and cultures of Aboriginal people. Participants identified strategies teachers could apply to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes.

Jordelle—*Personally, I think they should actually be there and listen to what we have to say. Not just listen as in 'We'll try this' actually listen to us and ask for our opinions and listen to how we feel. We do come from a tough background as well, everyone has their days. It would be good to have someone who has actually been through it.*

Toni—*Maybe educating the teacher more and maybe the teacher talking to the Indigenous kids about where they are from and how they grew up and what they understand so the teacher can teach covering everyone so that everyone is on the same page, understanding everyone's background and upbringing. A lot of teachers are familiar with Indigenous backgrounds but some of them aren't really. They know the basic knowledge that they get taught when they're in Uni but they might need to go out into the community to know a bit more like have fun days or something when they just go with the Indigenous kids so they can show you all that kind of stuff and understand it more.*

Participants acted as brokers between younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers and had assumed roles as change agents, either during or post high school. They used their knowledge of their cultures and societies and their understanding of school teachers and the schooling system to make the high school student experience easier for themselves and their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers.

Taliesha—*I want to help other kids too like me mucking around who didn't think that they were good enough to be something because I never felt like I was smart enough to go to Uni or anything like that because you see these people and they are very serious and real students and that was me mucking around with all the kids in class, so I think I want to show other kids as well so for me that's why I want to get my degree and stuff.*

In the 2018 Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report, the Australian Government (Australian Government, 2018; Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018) recognised that teacher quality is a critical ingredient of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student Year 12 attainment. This led to a commitment to the training and ongoing development of teachers.

> The Australian Government is committed to improving the quality of the teaching workforce in Australia, from initial teachers to experienced teachers and school leaders. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be successful, a culture of high expectations in schools, strong student teacher and community relationships and support for culture are important. (Australian Government, 2018, p. 56; Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018)

The participants in the data collection (which occurred between 2015 and early 2018) pointed to each element required to improve teacher quality that correlated with the 2018 Closing the Gap Report: teacher expectations, student—teacher relationships and support for culture. The alignment of participant data to the Closing the Gap Report objectives in their call for improvements in teacher quality, indicates the accuracy of participant insights and validates them as experts of their own experiences. Research cited in Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti and Gilbey (2018a) in relation to higher education institutions being places of belonging, identified the "often-unnoted emotional labour expected and needed by students" (p. 246). The authors further state that:

> … the relentless move towards neoliberalist measurement of teacher performativity and reducing individual academic autonomy in the design and delivery of teaching

> poses an existential threat to the capacity of teachers to form and sustain the quality of staff-student relationships characterized as pedagogical caring (p. 246)

Unsurprisingly, teacher training does not sufficiently prepare teachers to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as individual learners from collective societies in the context of their Indigenous worldviews. The Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2018 is an admission of the ongoing shortfall which has real impact on student outcomes. For the participants in this study, this gap in teacher abilities necessitated that they navigate high school as both learners and teacher trainers simultaneously.

5.1.1 Creating Culturally Specified Areas

Participants identified spaces at school where they felt more comfortable and confident in comparison with other spaces. Although participants did not explicitly state that classrooms, libraries, staff offices and even schoolyards were not safe areas for them, it was clear that certain supported spaces fostered their wellbeing and productivity more so than others.

> ***Zavier****—you got, yeah, some sour faces or some happy faces. People who had a positive vibe towards us, or some had negative, but because we all used to be together in one spot around the school.*

Participants needed spaces that allowed students to interact freely as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their peers. The most readily identified 'safe' space was the 'Murri Room'. This culturally specified space usually consisted of an office and a student common area where the Community Education Counsellor or Indigenous Liaison Officer was located. These spaces provided students with an escape from the gaze and critique of non-Indigenous teachers and students that can often be overwhelming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander children. The Murri Room allowed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to meet formally and informally to do school work, share their views about general student issues, meet socially and exchange knowledge and practices within their cultural groups without the interference of others.

> ***Nikki***—*There was a few times where I'd have to do an assignment that I didn't do so I'd just be there sitting in [the Murri Room] going hard for it, but just within my schooling life, my personal life, my wellbeing.*

The Murri Room was seen as a particularly safe place for the more vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students such as those who boarded at schools from home communities in the Torres Strait Islands or in Cape York as well as younger students in the junior levels of high school. Toni spoke of the value of the Murri Room to these students.

> ***Toni***—*It's really important because I know she's helped a lot of kids there especially the boarder kids they don't want to talk to anyone, if they have anything they always go to [the CEC] or the younger kids that are home sick they are in [the CEC's] office most of the time, like if you're looking for a black kid you just look in [the CEC's] office straight away because they know if they've done bad they would run to the seniors and they would go to [the CEC].*

A significant factor of the Murri Room was the space it provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to organise themselves to discuss issues, develop what Ladson-Billings (1995) discussed as cultural competence and socio-political consciousness.

Zavier—*And at each meeting there's usually about only 20, 20 something, that always rocked up, but, yeah, we were all pretty close, but all the ones that were turning up to the meetings were the ones who participated in the dancing and all the cultural things.*

Nikki—*I think, yes, at my school because maybe every two weeks we used to have a meeting with all the Indigenous kids where everyone would just gather around the rooms and we'd just talk to each other, yarn about things coming up, or which maths we were going to participate in and do stuff like that.*

Keisha—*we learnt about each other's culture, but not too much really, just from everyone where their tribe is whenever we had our Indigenous meetings and yeah so. Yeah, because we pretty much learnt that everyone was from pretty much all different bits and places around Australia.*

Culturally specified spaces in schools were particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who attended boarding schools. Participants noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students often sought retreat in the office of the Community Education Counsellor (CEC). Away from their families and communities, this cohort of students often experiences intense culture shock and homesickness. They are a vulnerable group of students, easily identified in large white-dominated Catholic schools. In addition, they are separated from their small remote communities and schools that are often populated fully by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

5.1.2 Negotiating

One of the skills participants developed during high school was the ability to negotiate with non-Indigenous teachers. The development of diplomatic abilities was required to navigate

conflicts and challenges with non-Indigenous teachers for themselves and on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers. The level of negotiation skill required by the participants ranged from basic confidence to engage with non-Indigenous teachers to bargaining for school time to conduct cultural maintenance and exchanges.

> ***Timmy***—*if I ever sort-of was having a bad day at school or something, like, I'd always just go talk to them [teachers], but some kids might not have any kind of connection with any teachers, like, white teachers, some of them might feel safer to go and speak to one of the Aunties [Torres Strait Islander staff member]. Yeah ... like ... so I just think there wouldn't be too many kids that would. Indigenous kids that would want to, really, sort of, talk to, like, a white teacher.*

> ***Toni***—*Probably like when they're in classes there are a lot kids in class, everyone understands that. But like when they try and give examples, try and give the Indigenous kids a different example like an easier example. Because I know in a lot of our classes the teachers would say stuff and we'd all turn around a look at each other and think I don't know what that means? Like, we're different. We didn't learn that kind of stuff when we were younger because we had different up bringings to everyone.*

> ***Jamal***—*it got better towards the end. Coming up to Grade 12 you get a bit more voice. You get a better voice towards what the Indigenous kids can do at school and going on extra activities, going on meetings. It was influenced by a lot of the teachers as well, so if you'd go and ask the teacher and they said it was okay. Usually they'd say it's okay to start a meeting or start up another dance, another dance practice during school hours. So, yeah, pretty much at [high school] because there's a higher percentage of Indigenous kids there so, yeah, it's good how they sort of share a little culture around, hey.*

Negotiation skills with non-Indigenous teachers were essential to secure safety in the sharing of cultural practices at school between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student groups such as cultural dances. It required participants to build relationships with teachers to gain permission required for such sharing to occur. Whilst this subject will be covered at length in a later discussion about cultural capital, it is worth noting at this point that in terms of being ambassadors of their culture and communities at school, participants created strategic alliances with teachers as they progressed through each year level and used those relationships to the benefit of the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body.

As I observed how the participants discussed the importance of dance as an expression of their cultural identity and collective belonging I noted the potential risks if participants failed to establish relationships with teachers. For example, without permission from teachers, students could be prohibited from meeting to practice and exchange cultural dances. Such action is highly likely to have a negative impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences at school. Cultural continuity is compromised and the contact zone of school becomes risky to conduct safe border crossing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In addition, the school's reputation as an inclusive place for this student group is undermined and the relationship between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and communities is weakened.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recognise that cultural continuity is critical for wellbeing and this is particularly important for young adolescents. However, within the space of the school environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are constantly manoeuvring themselves and their peers through existential, epistemological, intellectual and personal minefields. It is incumbent upon all teachers to understand how power and

knowledge affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school environment. MacGill and Blanch (2013, p. 149) unpack this further by stating that "within this understanding comes the recognition of teachers' complicity in minority students' agency or oppression." Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students employ negotiation skills to deal with the power and knowledge imbalance that weighs heavily against them and in favour of the dominant cultural group. This is seen in the need for negotiating permission to utilise their cultural assets (performing cultural dances and/or conducting student meetings outside of the Murri Room) in the school environment (i.e., the contact zone) without repercussion. MacGill and Blanch (2013, p. 149) also lay out protocols for teachers who take it upon themselves to invade the Murri Room, which can have significant impacts on the welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who access the space for safety.

> Knock and being invited into the space, as is custom throughout the rest of the school, rather than barging into the space uncritically provides a symbolic gesture that recognises the role and value of the Nunga room as a safe house for learning (MacGill & Blanch, 2013, p. 149).

5.1.3 Sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge

An interesting theme to emerge from the data was the shared experiences of participants who recollected instances of contributing significant amounts of cultural knowledge during classes. Often this occurred in, but was not limited to, Australian history subjects. Participants felt teachers deferred to them to provide perspectives and insights as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Jamal—*And when we did learn or talk about Aboriginal history or culture like that I think the teachers kind of depended on whichever Indigenous student was in the class to have an input as well to teach the class or teach the teacher.*

These pedagogical practices were reflected on as having been both advantageous and dis-advantageous for participants. For the most part, these experiences were reflected upon as opportunities for the participants to share their local and collective perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, cultures and affairs. However, participants expressed concern regarding the expectation of their involvement. There was an admission from one participant that they had not been confident providing aspects of cultural knowledge at the request of teachers because they had not been given permission to share particular knowledge.

Jamal—*Well, back then there was a lot of pressure. I wasn't as confident as I am now so I was kind of like, "I don't know if I can tell you this," or, "I don't know the answer," or I told them what I did know and yeah. It was a bit daunting at times.*

Participants acknowledged that they were often identified for sharing cultural knowledge by teachers because they were recognised as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student leaders through their involvement in their student body. One participant pointed out that some peers, who were not confident in discussing their cultural knowledge or had very limited cultural knowledge to draw upon, had a very negative experience with this classroom teaching practice.

Jamal—*It'd be hard for kids who don't know where they come from. Especially like ones from missions because a lot of them don't know where they're from. Yeah. I mean I'm*

not sounding discriminating or anything. Sometimes teachers would rely on you to teach the kids and teach the teachers and stuff like [other participant] was saying.

Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to contribute heavily to subjects relating to them also meant that oftentimes teachers did not cover the set curricula for the lesson. This frustrated one participant in particular who recognised that the teacher's deference to them meant that important content, which should have been covered in lessons, was omitted.

Jamal—*And sometimes they try and cover it up and they throw in a smoking ceremony on this day with their assembly and they try and incorporate little things here and there but not really cover the whole history of it [the phases of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history with White Australia].*

Zavier—*they don't really prioritise the history of Aboriginal people or some stuff like that whereas, what's it called, they want to teach kids more about all the other things instead of our Indigenous history.*

The active engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in curricula relating to their peoples, communities, histories and cultures is fraught with danger. Such danger lies not in the appropriateness of student engagement in these types of pedagogical approaches, but in the power and knowledge imbalance that explicitly or implicitly critiques the legitimacy of Indigenous identities and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are fully aware of how 'Indigenous' they look and act through non-Indigenous people's eyes. This is the juxtaposition of acceptance and resistance of the notion of 'double-consciousness'. Du Bois (1903) termed the experience of oppressed people who see themselves through the eyes

of their oppressors as having a 'double-consciousness'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are aware of the vulnerability of their position in relation to the non-Indigenous teacher and the non-Indigenous students in their classrooms. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students simultaneously face the dilemma of (1) knowing how they are viewed (often through the lens of stereotypes) by non-Indigenous peoples; (2) needing to build and negotiate relationships with teachers to access and utilise cultural assets in the broader school environment; whilst (3) recognising the critical need for cultural continuity for student wellbeing.

These classroom situations induce stress for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and are indicative of the extent to which the learning environment can be unsafe spaces. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are not confident in their understanding of their histories or lack confidence to articulate their knowledge or to speak in front of others. Significant contributions of knowledge from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to be pre-arranged with students, parents and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school support staff to ensure the needs of the students, the experiences of the families and the protocols of the community are prioritised sensitively and with appropriate execution and recognition.

5.2 Theme Two—Creating Intricate Webs of Relationships

Throughout the data collection participants discussed healthy and unhealthy relationships with others including:

- fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- non-Indigenous students;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff;

- non-Indigenous teachers; and
- significant relationships with parents, grandparents, other family members and community Elders.

Participants created intricate webs of relationships in the school environment, which enabled them to access information and support required to navigate their way high school until the completion of Year 12. This web-creation continued after participants had graduated from high school. Participants often used skills which they had developed and honed, to traverse through school to position themselves, prepare and transition to employment and post-school study.

Discussions about post-school relationships pointed to significant relationships with parents, grandparents and community Elders. Whilst peers were important in life post-school, they were not discussed nearly as much or as in depth as relationships with parents, grandparents and community Elders. The nature of these relationships with mature adults was influential, motivational, directional and supportive. This was indicative of the participants' recognition that, in order for their personal aspirations to be realised, they needed guidance and encouragement. Participants referenced significant others who know and understand them, the context of their lives and the potential impact their achievements had on their families and communities.

5.2.1 Relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peers

During high school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers were identified as valuable sources of support by all participants. Much of the discussion was based on the recognition that this particular peer group was significant because of common lived experiences with participants. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students formed groups that were familial

in nature. Whilst most of these family-type of peer support groups consisted of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from across Central Queensland communities (Rockhampton, in particular), students also came from communities from across Central, North and Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands such as Woorabinda, Yarrabah, Palm Island, Aurukun, Bamaga, Lockhart River, Thursday Island and Murray Island. Participants spoke of some family connections to some of these and other areas, but these connections were not discussed as pre-requisites for creating relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from other communities.

> ***Nikki***—*We all got along and was one big happy family together. We used to walk around the school like we owned it. So they kind of made you feel like you're deadly and they've got your back in every situation. So, yeah, it was like a big family.*

The peer group members were loyal to each other because of their appreciation of many shared experiences, such as: belonging to Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander families and communities with similar values and structures of relationships; being young adolescents; being high school students and attending the same high school; and sharing the same experiences of balancing all of aforementioned experiences at the same time.

> ***Zavier***—*So seeing all those same faces all the time really pretty much brang us together seeing a familiar face really, especially because we had a lot of families there that were Indigenous. So, yeah, brother and sisters, cousins, yeah, we all just got to know each other. So, yeah, a lot of the time as I got older they some of the time came to me, me or some of the other Grade 12 students in there, so, yeah, it was real good.*

The participants shared about being compassionate to their peers, in particular those who came from communities outside of Rockhampton. They understood that their experiences,

growing up in a large regional city, were vastly different from the experiences of some of their peers who came from small remote communities.

I observed how participants assumed schools based on the influence they had with peers. They were motivated by their obligation to use the skills they had to advocate for their peers who contended with the challenges of transitioning to a world dominated by non-Indigenous people. Perhaps the most commendable trait of the peer-to-peer relationship support was the trust which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students demonstrated in each other. This was evident in the discussions where participants shared how they had developed relationships with peers to the extent that cultural knowledge and practices were exchanged.

The participants recognised the comparative disadvantage of their realities with non-Indigenous students. For this reason, they looked to each other for support to navigate their participation at school and their preparation for and transition out of high school. They were conscious of the stereotypical views of non-Indigenous staff and students that suggested that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were unfairly provided with additional support or access to particular opportunities. Regardless, they managed these attitudes and views from non-Indigenous people in order to be able to access the resources they needed for positive engagement at school.

> ***Toni***—*We kind of going there [activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] so that we get that step further because we probably don't have it as easy as whites have. You [non-Indigenous students] will probably all go into Uni and go straight into work, like for us we probably won't go to Uni. Like it's probably not a chance we will probably just go to work and we need that kind of stepping stone not like other kids.*

Shared experiences at school fostered strong bonds between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For instance, one of the participants shared how they had often attempted to educate non-Indigenous students who felt they had been discriminated against because of the opportunities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students received.

> ***Toni***—*I know they got really offensive but towards the end of Year 12 they were like yeah you go and do that. I guess because they have other things in school that they do. They kind of come to an understanding towards Year 12. But at first it's like why don't we get that, why don't we get to do that it's like we do it's just we need that isolation a bit so we can have a bit of a step to keep up with you I guess.*

The discrimination perceived by non-Indigenous students was based on the specialised support services at school (i.e., Community Education Counsellors, Indigenous Education Workers) and the opportunities to attend specific career fairs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student peers provided a community of students who understood the inequity in educational outcomes for themselves and were aware of the importance of accessing the supports provided for their own success. The challenges involved in accessing that support was not only limited to their own capabilities but also in dealing with non-Indigenous students' lack of understanding and awareness of the impact of social, political and historical policies had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Navigating themselves through the negative attitudes of some non-Indigenous students (and possibly teachers) made the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student peer groups invaluable. The support for each other was vital to sustain themselves, as they justified to non-Indigenous students the need for specialised support in

order to experience the same level of achievement the vast majority of non-Indigenous students experienced every year.

The pride in which these reflections were shared by participants indicated that these exchanges were meaningful and enriching. Often they were done through organised activities and other times through unplanned interactions. The exchanges of knowledge, experiences and practices facilitated growth in understanding cultural identity, cultural protocols, social skills and self-awareness. Cultural dancing was highlighted by participants in the Yarning Circle as activities which were used to express and share specific Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures.

> ***Zavier***—*at each meeting there's usually about only 20, 20 something, that always rocked up, but, yeah, we were all pretty close, but all the ones that were turning up to the meetings were the ones who participated in the dancing and all the cultural things.*

Participants involved in the one-on-one interviews highlighted activities such as representative sporting engagements, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student meetings and significant events such as National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC).

> ***Toni***—*I know with Indigenous masses and NAIDOC Masses and some days with career expos we would have off and other like events like Indigenous camps and stuff, I know some of the [non-Indigenous] kids got angry like why do they get to go to do that. But at our school the Indigenous Mass Graduations we got to bring someone I think it was NAIDOC Mass we got to bring someone as well, but with the camps and stuff.*

Peer support at school was a valuable asset for participants of the research. It provided connections to community on the outside of the school as well as support when engaging with the dominant cultural group within the broader school community. Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh and Teddy (2009) recognised that learning environments which fostered peer support generate significant and long-lasting impact and positive outcomes for students. When peer support cannot be provided from non-Indigenous staff or students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students rely on established support networks and relationships with peers.

5.2.2 Relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander School Support Staff

Arguably, the most significant relationships participants had within the school environment were with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who worked in support roles. These roles varied between the schools the participants attended but often these roles were known as the Community Education Counsellors (CECs), Indigenous Teacher Aides, Indigenous Liaison Officers or Indigenous Education Workers. This research will refer to these staff generically as 'the CEC' or 'the CEC team' to recognise the Aides, Liaisons and Education Workers, who often work alongside a CEC or have similar responsibilities as a CEC. CECs were mentioned by every participant in the data collection.

The majority of participants indicated that CECs were critical to a positive school experience.

> ***Nikki***—*Yeah, [the CEC] was like my super hero in Year 11 and 12, saving the day all the time, she is the best.*
>
> ***Timmy***—*I used to be really close with the 'Indigenous Officer' up there. She helped me out heaps.*

Nikki—*Definitely with my Liaison Officer. She was deadly.*

Zavier—*So I think it's really important to have that Indigenous Liaison Officer there because it's someone obviously who understands us a bit more better and how an Indigenous person's life works, kind of thing. So they understand all the different factors that could contribute to that student and it's, yeah, more of like you have that kind of family relationship rather than like a teacher and a student. You have like that's your aunty, your uncle that kind of relationship with them.*

Jamal—*Yeah. We would have had about four of them like the Indigenous team, as you would say. But, yeah, it's good to have someone who will understand, well, understand and accept different cultures type thing.*

The CEC team had impact upon daily school attendance and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Sometimes the basic decision to come to school was made easier because the CEC worked on that particular day, which meant school would be a safe place for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student.

Timmy—*But, yeah, you can just tell that I reckon if they had more people that was just there just to support the Indigenous kids, I reckon you would probably see a lot of kids [at school]. 'Cause the kids might think, like, "Ah! Aunty's going to be at school today, I'll go and see her."*

Keisha—*Without her I probably wouldn't have been able to make it through high school. There were just so many times that she had my back, basically.*

Nikki—*There was a few times where I'd have to do an assignment that I didn't do so I'd just be there sitting in her office going hard for it, but just within my schooling life, my personal life, my wellbeing.*

Taleisha—*Kids come up to [the CEC], we have kids in our office who we share with [the CEC], we have kids in our office 24/7, even at lunch time come and sit in our office, they don't want to sit outside or see other teachers, they want to be in our office. We, you know, they put their food in our fridge, they use our microwave, you know and that is security for them, they have that escape place that no one else can go and annoy them at. Other teachers can't just go up there and get up them for anything because it's just [the CEC].*

The significance of the wellbeing support which the CEC provided to students was threaded throughout all conversations with participants. The CEC was trusted because they connected with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ways that non-Indigenous teachers could not.

Timmy—*If I ever sort-of.. having a bad day at school or something, like, I'd always just go talk to them, but ... some kids might not have any kind of connection with any ... like ... they might not have any connections with any teachers, like, white teachers, or they might not. so they might not ... like, some of them might feel safer to go and speak to.*

The broader school environment outside of the Murri Room was described as recognised as unwelcoming for many of the participants and their peers. The importance of culturally specified space was also evident in the impact the CEC team had outside of the Murri Room.

The physical presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff reassured students that they were safe and supported in other areas of the school as well. Participants shared how they often created their own spaces outside of the Murri Room where they would come together to enjoy each other's company and provide a sense of belongingness for their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers.

> ***Timmy***—*I'd like to have seen more of Indigenous teachers—or—something. More, like, just they don't have to be teachers, but, just, like, some kind of support people, like—I don't know someone walking around like, some Indigenous person being there. I wouldn't have a clue what they would call them at schools, but I reckon just 'cause kids like feel, like safer—I guess.*
>
> *Like, all the Indigenous kids loved him [male Indigenous Liaison Officer] because he'd just muck-around with them and they all used to all love and like, talk to him and-that, at and you would always see him having this ... like, during class time, if you were like walking around the school, you would always see him like he would be sitting at a table with a kid, talking to them.*

The most valuable contribution that CECs made to the experiences of the participants was the advocacy they provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Their own cultural backgrounds as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made interpersonal connection easier for students especially in relation to non-Indigenous teachers.

> ***Timmy***—*Yeah ... like ... so I just think there wouldn't be too many kids that would ... Indigenous kids that would want to, really, sort of, talk to, like, a white teacher.*

Jamal—*Because a lot of the boys were from different areas so they had different needs per se. And, yeah, it's good to have someone who is up there with the teachers who will speak up for you because as a student if you try and say something, then the teachers won't listen, but if you have someone out there that can explain it a bit better with the teachers and just someone up there who has got a good voice. I reckon that's very important.*

CECs were able to use their relationships with students to enforce school rules. The trust between CECs and students fostered a relationship in which students felt safe to be disciplined. This is in comparison to the same experience having potentially detrimental effects on students if conducted by a non-Indigenous teacher.

Toni—*I know when I was in Year 12 there was a lot of young Year 8 Indigenous kids and they were so naughty and they were always in trouble and they would always run to us but if it was a teacher problem they would always run to [the CEC], she would make sure they got punished but not too much overboard with a punishment of a view of what they are going through as well, not just what they are seeing. But I think if she wasn't at our school none of us would probably be at school there without her, she keeps a lot of us there she does so much for us. I was grateful for her so much, she saved us so many times.*

Taleisha—*I think more Indigenous students need [CECs] because at our school we really only have [the CEC] and one other person and that's it. And [the high school] is a big Indigenous based school and we don't have the staff. It also stresses out [the CEC] because if she is doing something and then kids are in trouble she has to deal with that by herself. She doesn't have anyone to back her up.*

The CEC positions across Queensland date back to 1975. The roles were first created for a research project conducted by a school Guidance Officer who employed and trained Aboriginal Counsellors as assistants. The cross-cultural insights the Aboriginal Counsellors brought to that particular research project resulted in the implementation of CECs across Queensland State schools in Brisbane, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Charters Towers Mt Isa and Cairns. The CECs worked closely with school Guidance Officers, complementing the vocational preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with cultural understandings, community awareness and appropriate communication skills. Clark (1981) explained that minority groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, tended not to access the specialist services that Guidance Officers provided because of the significant differences in worldviews.

The role of CECs evolved from assisting Guidance Officers to preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for vocations post-school, to increasing the number of students completing high school. Again, Clark (1981) explained that in the early days of CEC roles, there was a recognition of the external factors which influenced the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Those factors were social and cultural as well as financial and environmental (demographic makeup of school profile). Without working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in these contexts, efforts to increase completions would be useless and possibly damaging to the self-concept of students.

Since 1975, when CEC roles were first implemented, the duties and responsibilities of these roles have evolved. In schools with large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers, CECs are often assisted by Indigenous Teacher Aides and Indigenous Liaison Officers. The expectations for contemporary CECs are to be highly skilled communicators and

presenters, experienced in counselling young people and adults, as well as having broad knowledge and ability to apply social and cultural protocols. They are also expected to be strong in advocacy for students and liaise with parents and communities as well as be strategic in terms of reputational benefits to schools.

The responsibilities of Community Education Counsellors in comparative years are set out below in Table 3:

Table 3: Community Education Counsellor's Role Description

Source: Community Education Counsellor—Role Description, 2011

1975—Community Education Counsellor Position Description	**2018—Community Education Counsellor Position Description**
Provide pastoral care support for Aboriginal and Islander primary and secondary children within the school and community	Provide educational counselling and support services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander secondary students within a specified school
Liaise regularly between school staff, parents and children	Participate in the development of activities, in and out of school, likely to enhance the involvement in education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families.
Assist teachers in interpreting pupil behaviour and in developing relationships with the children	Develop and undertake support service programs designed to meet the needs of the school/s that will encourage the educational participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander secondary students.
Increase parent understanding of the educational process and of their role in the education of children at all levels	Establish and maintain links with out of school sources of information and support services to assist in the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students.

1975—Community Education Counsellor Position Description	2018—Community Education Counsellor Position Description
	Provide information to the school community about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social and cultural perspectives.
	Utilise, in an accountable manner, State- and Commonwealth-funded school-based programs that focus on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander secondary students and communities.
	Provide advice and information to school administrators regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social and cultural protocols in order to meet the needs of schools and their communities.
	Ensure that relevant information concerning Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander social and cultural issues is readily available to all members of the school community.
	Participate in activities to develop productive partnerships between members of the school community
	Establish and maintain links with "out of school" sources of information and support services to assist in the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students.

It was apparent through the interviews with all participants that the student relationships with CECs were valued more highly than any other school-based relationship. Whilst there were other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff, such as Indigenous Teacher

Aides and Indigenous Liaison Officers who worked alongside the CEC, participants were specific in pointing out the impact the CEC had on their schooling. Participants positioned themselves alongside CECS as ambassadors and, as a consequence, were able to better understand the 'hidden curriculum' of school. Throughout the early literature on CECs by Clark (1981) and the data collected for this research, CECs have maintained the provision of cultural nurturing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

After four decades of these roles in schools, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students still experience schools as unsafe places and spaces. Furthermore, the same is said of any disciplinary action which CECs enforce with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, that is received more readily when delivered by a CEC as opposed to a non-Indigenous teacher. One participant shared their experiences of witnessing 'punishments' handed out by the CEC, to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students responded more positively than would have been the case if a non-Indigenous teacher were to do likewise. Another issue of concern, when considering the evolution of the CEC roles, is the persistent issues with Guidance Officer counselling and the differences in worldviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These same issues have existed over four decades with little to no change in the provision of career and vocational preparation and advice that considers these worldviews of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

> [Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and training action plan] aims to embrace and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, identities, languages, histories and traditions in learning environments so that they are positive places of belonging and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Queensland Government, 2016, p. 5).

In this policy context, the data from participants verifies the pivotal role of the CEC role as specialised support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students in schools. The role of CECs is central to achieving educational equity and improvements in academic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, schools and for both State and Catholic education systems. To participants, CECs provided physical and cultural nurturing within the school environment. They motivated and inspired students to attend and achieve. They interpreted language that teachers used, that even Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who spoke only English could not understand.

> ***Toni***—*When there in classes like there are a lot kids in class everyone understands that but like address when they try and give examples, try and give the Indigenous kids a different example like an easier example because I know in a lot of our classes the teachers would say stuff and we'd all turn around a look at each other and think, I don't know what that means?*

CECs equipped students to understand the system of education and hidden curriculum that assumes knowledge that non-Indigenous people take for granted. The CEC role must be a permanent and ongoing fixture in all high schools that are committed to safe and welcoming learning environments and improving the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

5.2.3 Relationships with Teachers

Participant responses in regards to relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous teachers, highlighted that these were often difficult to create, fragile in nature, but incredibly valuable when fostered. The type of relationships that were effective were with teachers who were approachable, communicated clearly (verbally and

non-verbally) and were trustworthy. Trustworthiness was incredibly important for participants, because it required teachers to prove themselves worthy of being trusted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students outside of the Murri room. There were clear examples from participants that these types of relationships were formed and had sustained impact on them post-school. As Toni shared from her experience

> ***Toni***—*I used to be a shy kid so having that and then going to a big school with heaps of variety of classes made me have more confidence in myself as well. And with the teachers pushing you I probably … if I wasn't at that school I wouldn't have the confidence to go up and talk to them so much, I talk to anyone now which I always do and I speak up if I don't think something is right. That's what they pushed in school to make sure you know what you're talking about and make sure you understand everything. So I understand that.*

Participants also reflected on their interactions with teachers and identified those who had set clear expectations in relation to behaviour, uniforms, school participation and academic achievement, as having a positive impact on their student experience and transition into employment. As George and Nikki shared:

> ***George***—*We'd wear suits and stuff to school on, like, special events at night and, stuff like, leather shoes. That's how I dress for work every day now. I'm just used to it. I'm not 'ashamed' of dressing like that. But, I used to be. Now, that's how I gotta dress for work. So, that played a big role, like, when I was at school. When I go to dinners and, like, certain places and, like, approach and, like, speak to people and how to engage conversations and stuff-like-that. I know how to do that just 'cause of the school I went to.*

Nikki—*I think their strictness kind of sets their students up for life as in the way how you have to have this, this and this. You have to dress like this. You have to look nicely, present yourself well, try your best. So I think that was a life skill. I think that's one of the life skills they kind of set us up with, which I think is very beneficial for students.*

Participants, like Michael and Taleisha, identified that it was necessary to build familiarity with teachers. This was sometimes accomplished more effectively outside of the classroom or beyond a strictly teacher-learner interaction. The latter aspect helped participants to see the teachers as 'normal' people and by doing so lower the power and knowledge imbalance in their favour.

Michael—*The teachers were laid back, they cared about education but they would walk in the class with a smile or start off with something funny. Few of the teachers would swear and be down to earth. Just this relaxing atmosphere and then when we were comfortable they'd push us to do our best. My highest mark I ever got in senior school was double As that was for sports. My teacher, she helped me get my double As.*

Taleisha—*I think my drama teacher as well, Miss [Surname], she was a foster kid and then she became a teacher and she always said that to us, doesn't matter where you from I was a foster kid and in my house they didn't want me and I am a teacher. So I think that was like a real eye opener too because all these people from different backgrounds and then all of them doing stuff.*

Respectful relationships with teachers had a positive impact on the self-confidence of the participants. Interactions with non-Indigenous teachers who had relationships with students

outside of classrooms indirectly developed the interpersonal skills of the participants to engage with white people, as Michael shares:

> ***Michael***—*I remember my Head of Boarding saying to me, I saw him as a father figure, I remember him saying to me, I got a scholarship at the Bond University and he said you can do much better than Bond University, trust me. He's always pushed me to do my best. I said to him before I graduated, I've always seen you like a father figure. You've meant so much to me in these last few years.*

Of all the participants, only one participant, Keisha, recollects being taught by an Indigenous teacher. The impact the Indigenous teacher had on Keisha was significant in terms of participation in school leadership and academic participation as she explains:

> ***Keisha***—*[Indigenous teacher] was a PE teacher and she was sort of like a teacher aide to us and yeah. I really enjoyed her being there. She helped me with my speeches, assignments and stuff. She helped me get boarding captain, which is good. Yeah. So I loved it having her there, she was cool.*

Participants also discussed negative experiences with some teachers. Those teachers showed little interest in understanding who they were as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and left participants feeling invisible and unvalued. Keisha expressed frustration at the Deputy Principal of her school whom she said demonstrated a lack of regard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

> ***Toni***—*It [relationship with teachers] was important to me because I couldn't get along with some people because they were really good teachers but their personalities didn't match how they taught.. it just really bugged me that they were really nice to other*

students but they weren't nice to you so having that teacher to go back to and complain to helped and felt like it just wasn't going unsaid or unseen. the teachers would see it too and they would be like addressing it for you and if anything bad ever happened to you at school you know that teacher would always be there to support you, you wouldn't be on your own. So I could go to that teacher if I was having problems so it was easier for me to explain to them because I had that bond with them. It was easier to explain to them and talk to them than the other teachers. Not saying the other teachers were bad they just some of them took on too much … than they could have.

***Keisha**—We never got along with our deputy principal or our principal because they didn't respect our culture.*

For one participant who was known for his sporting abilities and who struggled academically, the lack of recognition and credit for any improvements he made in his schoolwork discouraged him from applying himself further to his schoolwork.

***George**—But, that's what I would like to see if I was still at school. Knowing what I know now and then going back to school. Knowing the knowledge that I know now. Yeah, that's what I would like to see. Academic stuff, instead of getting age champion and sports like-that like, for sports things. Because a lot of us 'black fellas', you know. We went away for like, North Queensland and stuff, you know. But yeah education and stuff—really.*

But, I got recognition but, I didn't get recognition like—"good on ya!" like most of the students used to get. It was more of the shock factor because of the student that I was.

If I got a bit more recognition, I probably would have put my head in the books a bit more.

Teachers made assumptions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more like White Australians than the other non-White cultural groups of students in their schools. For example, Toni shared how teachers' assumptions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students came from similar family structures and used Australian English similarly to White Australians. These unchallenged assumptions resulted in the erasure of core elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' identities. Toni explained that this was a negative experience for students and impacted negatively on the ability of students to engage effectively in class. This exclusionary practice meant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students witnessed other students' language needs being recognised and supported by teachers while theirs were ignored.

Toni*—Yeah like language and scenarios. Not every Indigenous kid knows what a standard household is, some of them don't have that. So when they are talking about—when mum and dad are at home—some kids might get offended by that because they don't have a dad they don't have a mum so like what's standard for white kids is different to what a standard is for black kids. It's kind of different. Like they understand that but they don't know how to accept it I guess. Some of the words they use, they drop out Rs and put As in and everything so they kind of don't know what they are talking about there. For some of them, English is their second language. So it's like if you have enough patience to explain it to an Indian kid then you should have enough patience when it's an Indigenous kid. It's like exactly the same pretty much. But I think it's just*

patience as well with the teachers. They know it, they just want to get through the work. They don't have the patience to understand every single one, every Indigenous student.

Further to teacher assumptions of the use of English by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the speed at which curriculum was taught impacted the self-confidence of participants.

Michael—*We all struggle with English. Not just because we had English as a second language, but the subject itself just crushed a lot of us … I'd always be checking to make sure my wordings right and I wouldn't get a lot done in a long amount of time so I'd always be going back, or I need to change this, or I'd start again because I didn't like the first paragraph. [We needed] Tutors. Hands down we just needed someone to actually help us instead of thinking it's a waste of time.*

A particularly disturbing comment was made by a participant in regard to the experiences of peers who had relocated from remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It was her opinion that teachers would intentionally make school difficult for these students to the extent that teachers would behave in a particularly negative way towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities. It would deter students from returning to school after they went back to their communities during school holidays.

Toni—*Yeah to give them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote communities] some time when they feel like they hate this place, to go away and make them realize how good it actually is makes them want to come back and do that stuff all over again I guess just going through, liking it, not liking it going back liking it that kind of kept them coming back and then sometimes I think the teachers would just get to them so they wouldn't come back.*

This examination of relationships between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students demonstrates the important weight that students place in this connection. The relationships with teachers have the potential to greatly improve the level of classroom engagement, academic achievement and development of healthy self-concept that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can experience. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2011) sets out two specific standards that clearly stipulate the teaching practices for educators in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. When these standards are met, students are engaged authentically in classrooms as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and as members of cultural collectives. The professional standards for teachers relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are set out below:

> **Standard 1**—*Know students and how they learn* sets teachers the goal of creating strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The teaching standards to achieve this goal are:
>
> **Graduate**: Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.
>
> **Proficient**: Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Highly accomplished: Provide advice and support colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives.

Lead: Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 9).

Standard 2—*Know the content and how to teach it* focuses on understanding and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and contributing to the National reconciliation process. The teaching standards to achieve this goal are:

Graduate: Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and language.

Proficient: Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Highly accomplished: Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Lead: Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011, p. 11)

The participants of this research have demonstrated the importance of the benchmarks for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the importance of assessing teacher performance against standards.

5.2.4 Post School Relationships

Relationships post-Year 12 were discussed briefly throughout interviews with participants even though no specific question was asked of any of the individual participants nor during the Yarning Circles. The insights into post school relationships are based on information that was discussed in answer to other questions and researcher observations. Hence, a small sub-theme centred on post-school relationships with significant others is included here.

> ***George****—But, it was good being on my own. I like it, but, you need your mates too—sometimes. They played a big role at school, you know—me and my mates. We're still friends til' this day.*

I noted in my observations that some peer relationships remained intact post school but the family-type nature of such connections became less noticeable.

What was evident was the way in which relationships with family and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community intensified post-Year 12. This demonstrated a transition 'back to community' as the core learner and teacher relationship, as it once was prior to commencing formal school in early childhood.

> ***Jordelle****—When I am feeling down, I normally tend to keep to myself. It's just a way of knowing I don't really want to share how I am feeling. But I always talk to my Aunties, they are always a big part, they're always there to listen and give me advice and it's also*

having some supportive friends to help me. So when I am feeling down it's just always telling them how I feel, to get it off my chest and to let it all out.

This is not to say that, throughout high school, family and community were not significant relationships for the participants, nor were friendships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers after school not important. What it does illustrate however, is the impact an injection of peers has, in establishing systems of connections during high school for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This injection of peers is a valuable by-product of the schooling experience and will be discussed further in the following section.

It is important to re-emphasise that, while the experience of schooling is a significant feature of childhood and adolescence in terms of duration and socialisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students remain centred in a collective society pre-, during and post-school. Students maintain their position and connections to cultural elements and in the case of the participants, these become stronger post-school. Below (see Figure 11) is a diagram developed by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association to illustrate the elements of social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is included here to highlight how the experience of school is situated around the centrality of relatedness.

*This conception of self is grounded within a collectivist perspective that views the self as inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community.

Figure 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model Source: Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014

5.3 Theme Three—Creating Ambassadors for the Future

5.3.1 Participants and Parents

With the exception of one male participant, all the participants in the first phase of data collection spoke extensively of their parents' experiences with formal schooling, post schooling education and work. This may have been due to family responsibilities in which the female participants were largely involved throughout high school and that the male participant concerned was raised by his mother as his sole parent. The other participants used their parents' experiences as stepping stones in resolving and developing resilience to complete high school under very difficult circumstances.

> ***Jordelle****—I personally think just having family, my mum and my grandparents there, even my aunties that were very supportive, there was a time in Year 11 and 12 when I didn't feel I wanted to go to school anymore because just the thought of my dad, just the stuff he was saying to me and it really brought me down to the lowest. They kind of*

built me back up and said you know you only have this much of your schooling left just go in there and do it, so I just put my head high and I went through it.

***Toni**—Pushing to stay in school and make sure you get the proper education so you can do better after school. I think that's what they wanted most importantly because was when I was in Grade 11 looking for my traineeship my aunties said that this was really important as it is going to help you more. I didn't understand how it was going to help me. But now that I'm out of school I realize it actually has helped me it gave me that extra step when I came out of school to go straight into a manager's position at the fish and chips shop and then into this traineeship with this certificate II so it was good.*

Participants also harnessed their parents' experiences to guide their decisions post school. Stories of their parents, Aunts and Uncles who also had parental relationships with participants were sources of inspiration.

***Jordelle**—I know my mum's family went through High School and they were big on education so they kind of pushed me to get through that as well. I was the first grandchild to finish and go all the way through Year 12 and to come to TAFE so, I guess that was a big part of them and a part of me to know that education took us all that way to be a part.*

***Taleisha**—So my dad and my mum both dropped out school, my mum was a teen mum with my older brother, so she dropped out school, my dad he is dyslexic. So he dropped out school as well and back then it wasn't known.*

Michael—*I think she [Mum] has. She's made something of herself to inspire us. I'm always inspired by what mum has done. She's been to many places. She's done a lot of things.*

Relationships with parents during high school informed future aspirations. Participants, like Michael, Toni and Zavier, saw their parents as role models and examples on which to base their own lives. Michael, Toni and Zavier recognised the resilience their parents had demonstrated to overcome challenging, and sometimes dire, circumstances. They developed a deep respect for the decisions their parents had made to give them a range of opportunities.

Michael—*I can see where she is coming from. She's always told us she's always sacrificed things for us. She's always tried her best to do everything by us. I guess that sort of now reflecting on me. My mum and my brother. I have had very stand out role models they have helped me but I have lost contact with a few. Definitely, my role models have been the biggest support I've ever had.*

Toni—*Education is important to have the knowledge, that you've been through it and experience those things because a lot of my aunties only went to Year 11, I know mum had to drop out because she had me, but being the only one who went to Grade 12 it kind of felt good because I experienced it and learnt it all.*

Zavier—*So back when I was only in primary school I used to act up a lot. And, yeah, that used to always scare me when I was little with the primary principal and that stuff and—but then mum wasn't really aggressive she was more assertive and she would—she would show us these pictures of people who we were much more fortunate than and really kind of made me think of how fortunate that we are to live in a Country where we*

actually have a house and a roof and have a career. And then I kind of apply that lesson to everyday life.

The application of parents' life lessons to participants' personal situations shows that participants accessed rich cultural resources through their connections with family. Cultural and social resources are made available to participants by their families, kinship and communities, through sharing of stories, experiences and lessons. The value in retelling the stories of experiences with education systems, employment and tertiary education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are stories of struggle and survival. Participants can begin to understand the contextual experiences that impact on their social and emotional wellbeing as demonstrated in Figure 11.

Parents passed on stories that either directly or indirectly related to the experiences they themselves had with school and education. The participants drew on these stories for two purposes. Firstly, it was a method by which the participants learned how to deal with adversity. The participants had observed and/or experienced some of the challenges their parents had encountered, in Toni's case her birth was the challenge for her mother. Because of witnessing these experiences and the impacts on their parents and family participants were able to draw out valuable lessons about resilience. Secondly, participants recognised that part of the construction of their own narratives was interweaving their parents' stories. This created a strong base upon which participants as students could build their education and career aspirations.

This was an intriguing observation as I noted how similar these experiences were with my own. My intrigue was not that other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people related so intimately with their parents' stories but that the younger generation was continuing this

story weaving as a natural part of their identity formation. The awareness that participants had of their parents' lives and assigned meaning to their parents' experiences, including their personal challenges and achievements, was evidence that these conversations had occurred between parents and the participants. It is not clear from the data collection if these conversations were directly between parents and participants for the specific purpose of motivating participants to stay at school or wider family discussions for other reasons and participants decided independently of their parents to use their stories for motivation and inspiration. What was observed from the participants; however, was that these stories created a context for participants through which their own stories were being crafted.

The discussion in this section regarding the relationships between participants and parents reveals an insight into the nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent engagement in their children's education. The issue of parent engagement has been explored extensively elsewhere but will only be touched on briefly here.

It is relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and their children, as opposed to parents' relationships with teachers and schools, that guide students' participation and success with school. This point was made by a participant in a study by Lea, Wegner, McRae-Williams, Chenhall and Holmes (2011) whereby an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (exact heritage unknown) parent commented: "I'm always asking [my children] if their teachers are right with them and they say yes. Only time I get wild is when there is bullying or a fight" (p. 269). This study concluded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents across sites in the Northern Territory valued school-community engagement over school-parent engagement. This perspective challenges common education policies and priorities that equate parent engagement with student success. Lea et al. (2011) explain that

the problem with the notion of parent engagement is the inherent requirement of 'visibility' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents with teachers and in schools. This is not often reflected in the values and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents who expect and trust schools to interact appropriately with their children. Instead, parents opt for using relationships with their children to influence and participate in the schooling experience of their children.

The sharing of stories and knowledge between parents and the participants about their own experiences at school, working in various jobs and communities, tertiary study and continued aspirations, serves a number of purposes. Firstly, participants understood their family history in the specific context of education. Secondly, parents supported the participants because the nature of their relationships facilitated mutual understanding of each other's aspirations and experiences. Thirdly, participants developed resilience and self-confidence. Intimate knowledge of their parents' successes and failures made them feel determined to achieve their own education, employment and personal goals. These purposes challenge common beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent engagement in school as non-existent because it cannot be seen by the school. Lea et al. (2011) assert "[i]f participation has to be coaxed, anticipated default is non-participation" (p. 267). It is from this worldview that parent engagement in school can better be understood. These authors call for policy that supports CEC-type roles in schools instead of assuming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents are uninterested and disconnected from their children's education.

5.3.2 Participants as Parents

Two of the male participants, George and Michael, were parents themselves during the data collection period of the research. These participants identified their children as motivation to set and achieve their post-school goals.

> ***Michael***—*I'll sacrifice anything for my son. I'm trying to do as much as I can for him. I want him to grow up in a better lifestyle than what I started with. I want to give him my everything.*

> ***George***—*Yep. That's exactly how I want to raise my son. Just like that. Because, I want him be like me, as all, like, fathers want their sons to be like them. Or, mothers want their daughters to be like that. Every parent says "Ah, I don't want them to be"—no parent has ever said that "I don't want my son not to be like me", Unless, they have a "rough" background, or, what-ever. And, they just wanted them to do the right thing. Luckily for me, the way I was raised—like, education-wise and school, eventually I'll send him to the same school as me.*

There was a desire by those participants who were parents and several others to emulate the positive values and strengths they observed of their own parents with regard to education. understanding their family circumstances, Taleisha and Michael shared:

> ***Taleisha***—*I never want to struggle like we did when we were kids, so I think that's why education is key to me, I want to get an education, get a job, you know, get married and show my kids that you can do it doesn't matter where you are from.*

> ***Michael***—*I was going to drop out of uni, but I do it for my son now. I want him to see that I have made something of myself. I want him to grow up saying, I'm proud of my father. I want to be like him one day. I want to be his inspiration.*

I observed participants demonstrating an awareness that they were living the lives they would need to explain to their children at some point in the future. This made them determined to use the lessons learned from their parents to improve their own situations for the sake of future generations.

Amongst a number of factors, I observed amongst the participants who were parents was a continuation of customary child-rearing practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. That is, they were raising their children within large complex family and kinship structures. They expected others would assist in the caring, teaching and nurturing of their children. Non-parental participants also demonstrated extensive knowledge of the role of parents within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. They had reflected on their ability to assume the role as a biological parent in the future. 'Biological' parent is used here to denote that parenting roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families do not require the individual to have given birth to a child to be its parent. A person can legitimately be the parent of their siblings' children, assuming the title of 'mother' or 'father' along with the responsibility for caring, providing for and protecting the child.

Most non-parent participants, like Toni, already had parent-like roles in their families by contributing to the parenting of younger siblings, cousins and nephews and nieces. Raising children was not unfamiliar to them.

Toni—*I think mum just wants me to be around more because I'm always out doing stuff. But as long as I'm in my little sisters lives I think that she will be proud of me hopefully. I have my sisters every Friday afternoon and some Saturday nights if mums going out.*

Non-parent participants were determined to achieve their own goals before starting a family. This delayed start to establishing a family also reflected the influence of Western lifestyles, with participants indicating their desire to travel or purchase a home, for example, before settling down to raise a family.

Toni—*Probably finishing school would be one of my main ones, not having a kid when I was 18 I was pretty proud of that, I know my great-great grandmother had my nan's older sister when she was 17 and Nan had her kid when she was 17 and Mum had a kid when she was 17. So not to have a baby on my 18th; I was pretty proud of that. I didn't want to have a kid yet. I want to live my life a bit. I know my mum went through a bit of a struggle. I felt like I burdened her when I was growing up. I didn't want to have a kid think that it was burdening me with that thought in the child's mind. Knowing that I haven't put so much on someone else's shoulders so young is good for me.*

Michael and George were both young fathers of sons. Their experiences as parents were still new as their children were both under the age of one year at the time of data collection. They clearly articulated their desires for their children to be raised to value education and that they themselves will emulate the approaches their own parents and grandparents took to raise them. In order for these young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to accomplish this they will need to maintain an approach to their children's success that focuses on parent-child relationship and to ignore the widely held view that 'invisible' parents are unengaged parents. Thomas, Keogh and Hay (2014) scrutinised the notion of defining a 'good parent' as one who

is visible to their child's school and who knows and understands "the ways to be involved in schools and actively participate by sharing ideas and making sure that these ideas are listened to", whilst 'not so good parents' "neither know nor understand the possibilities of involvement in their children's schooling. Rather they 'shut up' and do as they are told" (p. 458). By understanding their own schooling experiences, both participants are likely to entrust their children to teachers who will cooperate with CECs to act as representatives of parents and community and to provide culturally specific spaces in the school environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

5.3.3 Impacts of Grandparents

The role of grandparents was evident throughout many of the stories in the interviews. These stories incorporated grandparents in either central or contributing roles to the lives of the participants. For some participants, grandparents were as significant, if not more so, than parents in terms of influence.

In the analysis of the data on grandparents and the observations of participants within their kinship and communities, three key areas of influence were identified. These areas of influence by grandparents were 1) laying the foundation of participants' Indigenous identity; 2) being a source of inspiring commitment to completing high school; and 3) offering valued career and personal advice. These three points are discussed separately below.

Grandparents provided participants with a sense of self that was grounded in Indigenous heritage. Grandparents imparted to participants a foundation of who they were and where they 'fit' into their families, kinship and communities and essentially, the world. Grandparents also encouraged participants to be confident and proud of their Indigeneity. For one participant, George, being raised by his great grandparents, who he refers to as his

‘grandparents’, meant he remained in his family instead of being placed in State care. His grandparents were his main carers and provided him with a nurtured upbringing. Jordelle and George also shred their experiences

> ***Jordelle****—[strong Indigenous identity came] from my grandparents. They say there is nothing to be embarrassed about being a different colour and whether your skin’s black or if you’re white, it doesn’t really matter, it’s who you choose to be. I personally, I love being Aboriginal, it’s just who I am so you can’t really change who you are. My grandparents were a big influence because my mum basically raised me and my brother and sisters and my grandparents were always there. My pop was basically like my dad he guided me all the way through everything until I finished so, they’ve been a big impact in my life.*
>
> ***George****—So I was born here in Rockhampton and then I went out to Woorie for three years and then, I got taken away. And then my grandparents sort of just came in and just took me under their wing. They raised me up since I was three, since I was like a toddler, pretty much. Put me in Day Care. Put me in Preschool, Year 1. Year 2, all the way up until Year 9. Did one year of High School in [rural town]—which is Year 8 and then—yeah, when I was 14 I went to boarding school.*

Grandparents also inspired their grandchildren to be committed to completing high school. Participants recognised and acknowledged the limited opportunities their grandparents had at school because of the impact or influence of past Protection policies. This inspired participants to take their educational opportunities seriously and commit to finishing high school and becoming responsible adults as George and Taliesha shared.

George—*But ... yeah ... school played a massive role to be a man. Because, if I never left Nan and Pop when I was fourteen to go to boarding school on my own—me and my cousin ... I don't think I'd be ... I think I'd still be living with my grandparents, u-know.*

Taleisha—*Yes, because in my Year 8 and 9 I was mucking around with the girls, you know and whatever we did and then my nan sat down with me and seriously asked me what I wanted to be and I didn't know and then [the CEC] came to [high school] and she had us all like what you want to do, what you want to do, you need to work out where you want to go and stuff and then I sat down and talk to my nana about it and I decided that I want to do youth work and then I was like ok I need to be serious because in senior year they don't care they just kick you out the school, so that's why I think. I always ask my nan before I do anything serious, before I sign for anything, I say nan read this, is this all right, is it legitimate and then I just take advice from different people and then just ask myself, because I am an adult now I need to do it. So like you know I take advice from the Elders and that and then go from there and hope for the best.*

In terms of advice, grandparents used their very close relationships with participants to give counsel on issues such as career pathways and personal support. Participants invited grandparents into their decision-making and sometimes deferred decisions to them. This demonstrates that grandparents held the trust of their grandchildren. This is insightful, given the vastly different eras both groups have lived through as school students and young adults: Grandparents under Protection policies pre-1965 and grandchildren under the Closing the Gap policies throughout the 21st century.

George—*When I left school my Nan and Pop they were still on my back about everything and then my dad started to play a bit of a role there too when I left school, so that was*

good. But, yeah, maybe Nan and Pop there really. Mainly Pop—he was that main one that told me to get my stuff together and get a job, move out of home and stuff.

***Taleisha**—My nana, she had a Bachelor [degree], she is a psychologist and everything like that. I think she has a Bachelor in human social behaviour or something like that, it's got a weird name but it is like psychology and I think I watched her she owns her own house and she is also independent and I always wanted to be like that.*

***Jordelle**—I guess well, for big ones [decisions] it's my mum and my grandparents they are the people I go for advice and they're there to help me. At the end of the day it's my choice but I love when they can tell me what they think and how they think it's going to affect me, so it's always good to have their input with me to be able to choose what I want for the next step.*

***Toni**—I think Paulie, Uncle Jay and Grandad if it wasn't for them I probably wouldn't have any males in my life apart from my cousins but they're more my brothers than anything else. The uncles and grandad are like my dads, I go to them when I am in trouble, then I go to mum. When I was 15, probably just my grandad because every weekend probably at one point I was just partying all the time, because mum just let me go. Then grandad he used to just come and get me every weekend and go and do stuff. So probably he didn't get up me he would just say 'oh come to do this with me', kinda stopped me from going out with everyone, from partying and be a little alcoholic like I was. Yes, he kind of tried. He didn't get up me because he knew what I was doing was bad, he knew everyone else was getting mad at me, so he just gave me alternatives I guess and worked out for the better. Yeah I didn't know what I was doing, I wouldn't be here today if I didn't grow out of it.*

The discussion about grandparents led me to observations about the nature of intergenerational familial relationships. Four participants shared in detail the impact on their lives made by their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander grandparents in the one-on-one interviews. Two of these participants and all the Yarning Circle participants confirm a distinctive relationship between participants and grandparents. These relationships are typified through regular contact, providing financial support (reciprocal), providing transport to do routine errands (i.e., grocery shopping, visiting family, going to church), representing grandparents at cultural and community activities (i.e., cultural dancing, attending funerals etc), delivering a Welcome to Country address with express permission from Elders on behalf of a grandparent.

In order to comprehend the role of grandparents in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship structures it is important to have a basic understanding of 'who' grandparents are and 'who' are parents. There are more extensive explanations elsewhere, but here is a brief description. In most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the role of grandparents includes the siblings and cousins of biological grandparents. Grandchildren can therefore, have more than four grandparents. The extension of grandparent roles at this level in the family structure in turn means 'aunties' and 'uncles' are usually the cousins of biological parents and, as previously mentioned, parents' siblings become additional 'mothers' and 'fathers'. Each member in a kinship structure has roles and responsibilities that reflect their varying positions, depending on the relationship with a particular person. Below is a brief but exploratory look at the cultural roles of grandparents in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.

Grandmothers provide nurturing and care for children, reinforcing the parenting of mothers and fathers. Grandmothers can often be the primary carer of their grandchildren. Commentary on 'grandmother' roles captured by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC, 2011) in their Practices Matrix report, explains that as primary carers, grandmothers are well positioned in kinship structures to pass on cultural knowledge directly to their grandchildren. This is critical in the continuation of ancient knowledge and practices. However, when the role of grandmothers is overused, due to extensive dependency on grandmothers as carers of children, it can be to the social and health detriment of both grandmother and grandchild. Grandmothers in wider family and communities are often seen as leaders and organisers, characterised as both passionate and compassionate.

Grandfathers have and continue to hold roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as providers, protectors and also as leaders (as do grandmothers). They often indulge their children and grandchildren, particularly daughters and granddaughters. Their relationships with sons and grandsons evolves from teasing (child stage) to teaching (men stage). Within a kinship network or a wider community, the grandfathers may hold positions as 'bosses' and authority positions (SNAICC, 2011).

The stories the participants shared, demonstrated their abilities to be resourceful in the way they created and maintained relationships with others. These relationships were required at school and post school and with others throughout the entire journey. Often-times, these relationships were means by which to access supports they required because the systems they engaged in at school could not be trusted to understand their needs and contexts as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In order to stay committed at school until the completion of Year 12, the participants used their relationship networks to access important resources. This was evident with teachers, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school support staff, with peers and with relationships outside of the school—parent, grandparents, Elders and the community. Needs were often unspoken, but the participants were able to ascertain what each group could offer them, establish relationships and access what they needed. These relationships were reciprocal in nature and this was evident in the participants' stories of sharing cultural knowledge with teachers, assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school support staff with student meetings and participation as leaders in cultural dance groups, meeting family responsibilities with parents and obligations with grandparents. There were numerous connection points and flow of interactions along relationship lines between participants and sources in their support networks.

Chapter 6. Building Resilience Capacity

6.1 Theme Four—Creating and Acquiring Cultural Capital

In their study of Maori children in New Zealand and Aboriginal children in Australia, Harker and McConnochie (1985) explain the disconnect that exists between 'home' knowledge and the 'academic' knowledge of school. Children from middle-class homes are posited to benefit the most from school systems because "curriculum embodies the same kind of knowledge considered 'worthy' by their families'" (p. 141). Harker and McConnochie (1985) extend Bordieu's view that school systems reinforce the inequities of society by arguing that school curriculum is based on the knowledge code of the dominant society. Therefore, when 'success' is defined by the dominant cultural group non-dominant cultural groups are unable to achieve equitable access or outcomes. Harker and McConnochie's position in the 1980s is that a reframing was required to understand how Indigenous knoweldges are coded and how curriculum could be re-organised to allow for Indigenous knowledges to be a part of the three stages of knowledge transmission between generations. This process includes curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. Since Harker and McConnochie's work there have been efforts to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in school curriculum as well as resources of Indigenous knoweldges to assist educators teaching all students. However, the structural changes of schools which Harker and McConnochie called for have not yet happened. For example, tests are designed to measure how much knowledge a student has attained rather than 'ways of knowing' as Indigenous cultures emphasise.

One of the most surprising and poignant themes to come from the discussion on the purpose of school and schooling, related to creating and acquiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capital. The school grounds provided a space for students to learn and share cultural

knowledge with each other which, in turn, helped to develop cultural identity, pride and resilience. With a broad mixture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending schools on Darumbal Country, students brought with them cultural assets from across Australia. These assets were used by individual students and contributed to the collective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body, to create a rich source of cultural and social capital. This creation occurred in the school grounds. Participants reflected how students could access a significant source of cultural knowledge to provide them the knowledge and cultural identity they could not access at home.

Where participants were raised by a non-Indigenous parent or by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent whose cultural identity was not particularly strong, they 'adopted' the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student body as their family. School became an important source of cultural knowledge as they developed relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from within their own community and sometimes from distant communities (distant both geographically and culturally). Participants reflected on finding their identity as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at school. Toni's story reflects how she came to develop her identity as an Aboriginal woman and how exploring this identity came together at school through the CEC who was able to ask appropriate questions and then have other Aboriginal students confirm those kinship links. Here I would argue the schoolyard was a space appropriated by Toni and her school friends that enabled the acquisition of cultural capital and identity.

> ***Toni***—*I grew up in Rocky. When I was younger my mum used to say we were Indigenous but she didn't know much about it, Nan always used to say, yeah we are but she tried to explain it but mum never really understood it. So when I got into high school and I started*

there my Indigenous Liaison Officer she sort of asked around for me and it turns out my nan's great grandmother, she went missing after she had all of her kids, she was taken from near Cairns, one of the tribes and brought down here. But they don't know where she is or what happened to her, they don't know where she came from or who our people really are or where we're from.

Here, Toni is indicating that her family was impacted by forced removals of Aboriginal populations from their traditional homelands. The impact, of which, meant a loss of connection to her family's origins and family network.

Toni – *Nan's named after her so she's always said we should trace it back and the Indigenous Liaison Officer did and she found out all this information and I gave it to Nan I don't know what Nan did with it but it was actually really good when they finally told us because we used to always claim South Sea.*

The connection to lost family was made by the Indigenous Liaison Officer and Toni and her family were able to feel a sense of 'wholeness' around their cultural identities.

Toni – *Mum used to say yeah I'm Indigenous she just didn't think about it more or research it and when they did it kind of felt like finally, not just claiming something I'm not and yeah they found out after up near Cairns out near the gorge, Mossman Gorge out near that area, that's where she was from. One of the tribes out there. And some of the boys I went to school with down here they were explaining the tribes and they looked at my nan and they said yeah she looks like one of those ladies and I was like really? And they were like yeah like the old ladies up there and that was really good. I don't know if Nan's scared to think about it but yeah that's my family.*

Understanding connection to place starts by knowing where that 'place' is and for Toni this was the beginning of knowing where her family came from and the circumstances that led them to be in Central Queensland.

> ***Toni –*** *When we had meetings at school everyone would say their name and where they were from, I never could say that. And when I finally got to say "up near Mossman" everyone looked at me and smiled and I was like "oh yay I finally feel a part of it" [part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community].*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for centuries have positioned themselves in relation to Land because it is core to identity. This practice continues and children are taught the importance of stating the place they are connected to through their ancestors. When Toni was finally able to do this not only did, she feel like she was seen as equal to her peers, they too appreciated what this knowledge meant for her. Likewise, Taleisha did not have a strong connection to her home community or Aboriginal family. The CEC was an invaluable source of cultural capital who made Taleisha feel seen and heard.

> ***Taliesha****—It [cultural identity] wasn't [strong] growing up because we grew up with [non-Indigenous] mum but when I got to high school, that's when you know I kind of ... with [the CEC] ... and I learnt a lot more though with [the CEC] than I ever did with my [Aboriginal] dad.*

Some participants had been raised in families with strong cultural identities and connections. 'Strong connections' is defined here as participants who knew and utilised kinship relationships, spoke their traditional language (or at least had access to it), understood their stories and Dreamings, practiced traditional hunting and performed cultural dances.

These participants explained how they had shared and exchanged cultural knowledge and practices at school with students from other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Participants, like Zavier, Keisha and Jamal, recognised that some of their peers wanted to be mentored in their cultural identities. This was beyond the scope of learning about 'Indigenous Australians' in class and reflected more about students learning from each other in various school spaces about what it means to be an Aboriginal person from a particular region or language group.

> ***Zavier***—*I was going to say it was a bit of yes and no [learning about Indigenous history and culture in class] because we learnt about each other's culture, but not too much really, just from everyone where their tribe is whenever we had our Indigenous meetings and yeah so. Yeah, because we pretty much learnt that everyone was from pretty much all different bits and places around Australia.*

> ***Keisha***—*Not in school, but like in boarding with the girls the mixed cultures. I like learning the Torres Strait Islanders' dancing or music. Their culture is really good to mix with the girls in boarding, but not in school and stuff. In the school we wasn't allowed to muck around, do our culture in the school unless it's on a particular day, like it was a NAIDOC or anything like those.*

> ***Jamal***—*The boys at school the teachers would always ask us about our culture so in a way we were teaching them rather than them teaching us and the rest of the Indigenous kids about our culture. I learnt a lot from the boys at boarding school about their culture, about where their tribe is, about where they come from and all that stuff, but there were a few classes in school where you'd learn a little bit about Indigenous people. So you'd learn that little bit of culture.*

An interesting dynamic existed between participants, like Zavier, Nikki and Jamal, who were strong in their cultural identities and were identified early in their high school years as 'student leaders' and their relationships with peers who were attending school from remote communities and who also were strong in their cultural identities. Zavier, Nikki and Jamal discussed these relationships as significantly beneficial as well as mutually respectful and reciprocal. For participants who had grown up in regional towns and cities, the opportunity to learn from peers from remote communities created a pool of rich information about a more traditional lifestyle very different from their upbringing. In turn, they felt they were responsible (particularly in Years 11 and 12) for developing good relationships with teachers and other school staff to ensure things went as smoothly as possible at school for students from remote areas.

> ***Zavier***—*We didn't really learn a lot about cultural or Aboriginal history [in class]. The most we did learn was, yeah, from each other around sitting around at lunch times yarning with the black kids.*

The above discussion about cultural capital acquisition that occurs in schools amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires additional contextual explanation in order to appreciate the importance of this phenomena.

In a Western school setting, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students come from a range of language groups, regions, communities, family and kinship structures. Some students come from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities where English is an additional language. Other students come from language groups where large cities are now situated. Some students come from discreet communities that were previously Aboriginal missions and reserves. These communities are populated by an amalgamation of families from various

language groups, who were forcefully removed and displaced to these communities (i.e., Woorabinda). There are those students who are, through interracial marriages and relocations by choice, no longer connected to their traditional homelands.

Understanding responsibilities and relationships is a process by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn their place in the world. Children are expected to build relationships with peers and take care of each other. They have a responsibility to ensure each other understands what the rules are and how they are supposed to behave in line with expectations set by Elders and others in the community. This requires children to know how to relate appropriately with each other and establish what information, qualities or skills they can contribute to their peer group.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's identities and knowledge are formed according to their access to their family's origins. Each family is a part of a larger language group, Nation or Island group. Some groups have experienced less impact by the Western world compared to others. The level of colonisation on a group has a direct impact on access to cultural practices, language, kinship structures and, traditional lifestyles. Other groups again, experienced colonisation more harshly and have little knowledge of elements that are key ingredients of identity. Of particular mention are the families who were devastated by the forced removal of children (i.e., Stolen Generations), many of whom do not know their Aboriginal family or have been recently united, allowing them the opportunity to (re)establish their connections to their heritage.

Traditionally, young Aboriginal people acquire knowledge through the physical movement of families between 'mobs' or areas of different clans. The static environment of high schools and the linear operation of the education system itself are implicated in the changing of the

customary relationships Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young adults have with each other. The school system interrupts and erases relationship boundaries between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and smaller clan groups. Protocols have existed for millennia to provide order to relationships and societies. However, Western school systems require young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to create relationships with peers from language groups and regions that they would not normally be permitted to or able to access.

These networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student peers also operate at the interschool level. Combined school events exposed participants to peers from their own kinship group, other communities and regions. Students learn about family connections (who is related to whom) and the location of communities (i.e., islands of the Torres Strait, Gulf and Cape York communities, North and Central Queensland towns and various discrete communities). Students gain insight into the makeup of communities—physical features of people from that region; accents, dialects and traditional languages; family names and histories.

To summarise this section, all participants had varying levels of access to cultural capital as children and young adolescents. Creating relationships with peers and accessing their cultural knowledge strengthened their own identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. School, particularly high school, offered an environment for this to occur. Where in the past this would have been achieved by visiting other families, clans, or groups, the stationary place of a school brought young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together. Students take advantage of the space school offers to develop their cultural identities. Despite challenging journeys through school, these students are able to identify what they need to develop their

sense of self and their role as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islanders to create their identities.

6.2 Theme Five—Autonomy and Interdependence

All participants indicated that throughout high school, they had experienced a gradual shift in their reliance on parents as their primary decision-makers. The types of decisions participants had made on their own during high school related to which school they attended (including schools in other towns); remaining at school until Year 12; securing after-school jobs; and deciding appropriate post-school employment and tertiary study options.

Autonomy is taught from a very young age. Children are allowed to make decisions for themselves under the watchful eyes of grandparents, parents, aunties, uncles, older siblings and cousins. These decisions may have negative repercussions, but it is expected that children will learn from these lessons and will choose to learn from observation and critical thinking instead of making mistakes themselves. If they do however, they are continually trusted with freedom to make their own choices so their resilience is built. Children and adolescents learn to appreciate deeply the knowledge they have acquired from making mistakes and from observing others.

> ***Jordelle****—I didn't think I could do any better at TAFE because it's just going up higher and you don't really get that one-on-one lesson with the teacher, so you kind of have to work independently and have to learn different things by yourself. So you're basically growing to learn it.*

I guess just being able to learn from my experience from school, so taking what I knew and trying to build on it and trying to see if I could grow upon it, to see if I could learn the ropes around here.

As a member of the community in which the participants also live, I have witnessed some of them develop interdependence as they transitioned from being children to teenagers to young adults. Their inter-dependence has evolved within very close families and community and is not separate from these structures. Because of large community networks and strong relationship and family bonds, it is almost impossible to live completely isolated from family in the local community.

In some instances, in the data, there were explicit communications and expectations to create autonomy by parents and grandparents with some of the participants. This was especially the case with participants who attended boarding schools away from their communities and families.

George*—When I was 13, they asked me if I wanted to go to boarding school, Charters Towers. My Pop just said, he pretty much said, 'look, one day you're going to have to live without us so why don't you just go to boarding school'. That's what he said and I was just like, 'oh!' Yeah—and I was just sort of like, 'oh, are you serious?' And, he was like, 'yeah, well one day you are going to be an adult and you are gunna have to like live without us, because we are not going to be around for too long'. Even though they're still alive and old people but, he was pretty much just saying, like, 'you going to have to be independent'.*

So, it was all good. Worked out alright, but, makes me independent now. Instead of being a mummy's boy, or, daddy's boy. Being at home and still being 20 years old. I could not see myself at home. I'd rather be independent. Go out on my own, work on my own, live my own life. Not depending on family, but no doubt family is still there for me, but just rather walk my own journey, instead of realising I'm not, like, family. Like relying on them too much is—I see a lot of people doing it. It's good, but having ... I want to be more free and do what I want to do, live my own life, be my own adult, pretty-much. Still, respect my Elders and that, but, just be my own adult. Walk my own life-journey, pretty-much.

There was an expectation that these participants would go to boarding school to learn to be self-reliant and responsible. In all cases these participants were male participants and were also exceptionally good sportsmen. This latter characteristic was also a reason for the separation created by their parents and grandparents. The possibility of opportunities for the young men to pursue sporting careers was a 'bonus' advantage of attending boarding schools where sports were an integral part of school life.

Timmy*—Well, probably my mates because I pretty much spent. I spent more time with them than I than I did with my family, so probably them. But, when I was in Townsville anyways, so, like, I'd see them every day. See them in the mornings and—'cause I used to live with those three other boys as well. Like, I never really had anyone there. Like, Dad always just said, like—"it was up to you and I-don't-know". And he said, like, I never—and he just said that, like, if he just sort of "chucks" his input in if he thinks it's something—Like, he'll try to say it, like, "I think this is better.." but he wouldn't say it like, ah—"this is better—do this." He just he just put everything up to me and Mum just*

never really said anything, she just said—"whatever ...", like—"whatever you want to do" So I pretty much just done whatever I really wanted when.. since I was 16—really.

Those participants described changes in their family relationships when they went home for school holidays. They described their relationships had changed whereby they were treated less like children and more as adults. They had become used to making their own choices and being responsible for their own wellbeing, such that when others tried to tell them what to do, it made them feel uncomfortable. Relationships with younger siblings were more parent-like and one participant stated that he had felt like an old man by the time he was nineteen because of how experienced he was for being responsible for himself.

The stories of the young women in the study and their autonomy was very different from the young men. Their levels of responsibility were much higher than that of their male counterparts. Toni worked an afterschool job to pay for her school fees after her mother could no longer afford to send her to the Catholic school she had attended since she started high school. Her mother had given her the option to remain at that school and pay her own fees or to attend a State school where many of her cousins attended. Toni chose to work to pay her school fees and she also took care of her much younger siblings, cousins and grandparents, she explained

Toni*—Yeah I know mum did invest a lot and towards Year 10 she couldn't do it anymore so I took on the role I paid for my school fees from Year 10 to Year 12.*

Yeah with my job with my traineeship I worked 2 jobs. I worked in traineeship and I was just a normal employee at the fish and chip shop and then I worked that on the weekends, she wouldn't let me work though during the week she was like that's for

school and towards the end of Year 12, I think she was proud or surprised that I actually did it because I didn't think I would. But my grandparents helped me a lot as well making sure I wasn't out partying, making sure I was going to work or studying, doing what I was supposed to do. It was a big investment but I think it did pay off, as much as I would have liked to have gone to a public school like [high school] I reckoned it's better I went to a private school away from all my cousins because now they don't have jobs or anything but I do have a job and know what I want to do for the rest of my life, but they're still trying to figure it out.

All female participants had taken on the care of younger siblings and contributed to the care of grandparents whilst in high school around the ages of 14 and 15 years and were continuing these roles post-school. These roles for young women are very familiar across many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and across generations, even before colonisation. It is customary practice that young women assumed caring roles in their families and this continues to happen in the modern context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives. Statements worth noting by SNAICC (2011) in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls are: "Girls remain in close relationships with their similar age 'sisters' and 'cousins' and continue to spend time with their mothers and grandmothers." (SNAICC, 2011, p. 50) and that "Girls … are resourceful, independent and tireless in carrying out useful tasks." (SNAICC, 2011, p. 50). Also, "Girls become proficient in understanding and exploring the environment and caring for others, while boys devote their energies to exploring and perfecting their physical skills." (SNAICC, 2011, p. 50).

The theme of autonomy and interdependence and how this differentiated male from female participants was an interesting dichotomy. It gave insights into another dimension of the

experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at school. This was about their home life responsibilities, which are often acknowledged informally as 'caring responsibilities' of older siblings, particularly girls, of family groups. The data showed that whilst both males and females had autonomy, the interdependence began a lot earlier for the female participants. The nature of their interdependence was centred on caring and featured parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The impact on their schooling experience was juggling multiple people who required their assistance. For male participants, autonomy weighted more heavily. This was evident in their choices and sometimes encouragement to move away from their communities to pursue schooling and sports. The impact on school was that they did not have family support networks on hand during high school.

6.3 Theme Six—Cultural Obligations and School Expectations

Cultural obligations are a fundamental element of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander responsibility for personal and collective wellbeing. It is perhaps more appropriate to define cultural obligations within the concept of relationality. Walter (2015) defines relationality as "a set of conditions, processes and practices that occur among and between elements of a particular place and across contexts that are physical, social, political, spiritual and intellectual" (p. 74). This definition of cultural obligations explains the extent to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are responsible for relatedness in complex connected realities. As stated throughout this research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people exist within an ancient and contemporary network of relationships with places, spaces, people and time—all physical and all spiritual.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students bring to school external expectations and cultural obligations every day.

> In the Aboriginal families, the major restriction on a child's individual autonomy was the adults' expectation that children modify their independent drive with nurturing and socially considerate orientation. In other words, it was hoped that the child would become self-reliant and self-regulating while also being always aware of others' needs and be able to help out when needed (SNAICC, 2011, p. 118).

As students move through the year levels, they become more aware of both of these factors. The expectations that are explained to them by school staff and teachers, the promotion of these messages by former students (such as the participants in this research) and celebrity role models, conversations in their homes and throughout their communities, the political speeches of politicians which echo through various types of media, all provide clear messages to students that they must go to school and finish Year 12 if they are to have a chance at a 'good life'. "The young people today have so many more opportunities to learn about culture too and having a good education and being able to stay at school and being a leader in their community" (SNAICC, 2011, p. 117). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students constantly self-navigate cultural obligations and school during adolescence, often without examples of parents and grandparents who did not access and participate at school to the same degree because of Government policies.

Participants in the research were aware of multiple implicit and explicit expectations placed on their attendance and completion of high school. These schooling expectations were set by schools, public and private education systems, governments and non-Indigenous Australian society. Expectations were directed to the national collective body of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander school students and influenced students' decisions to complete high school. The high-profile publicity of the 'Closing the Gap' Federal policy agenda and the Queensland State government's 'Every Day Counts' initiative was clearly communicated in schools in the design of programs that aimed to improve attendance and completion rates.

The participants were aware of and experienced a high level of pressure to attend school regularly and to fulfil the expectation to complete Year 12. However, when participants were questioned about the expectations of their academic performance and achievement, the response was primarily that these expectations were set at a low to moderate level by schools, except for Zavier who reflected that some teachers had higher expectations of him. Interestingly, the participants' expectations of themselves was high and this was the level of expectation held by their parents and families. Some teachers pushed participants to do better whilst others did not.

> ***Nikki****—They [school] had appropriate expectations for me and other students. Yeah. But then in my family I'm meant to have high expectations like I was meant to get As and stuff. They wanted me to do more with myself and career and stuff and yeah.*
>
> ***Keisha****—I think in my school it was appropriate levels [of academic expectation]. It varied from teacher to teacher. Some teachers they push you. Some of them they just lay the work out for you and then you had to go and ask them the questions rather than them providing the support straightaway. Like every teacher they'd tell you where you can get help from so, yeah, I reckon it's at the appropriate level of expectations.*
>
> ***Jamal****—I think they (teachers) just expected me to do good and do my best and if I needed a bit more push from teachers or that extra help or things like that so yeah.*

> ***Zavier***—*It'd usually depend on a teacher or maybe even sometimes the class, the subject of it, but it usually depended on myself as well whether I was being lazy or not because there was sometimes where teachers expected highly of me, or just a normal like a moderate, yeah, high or moderate. And it always just depended on the subject or the teacher. Yeah.*

To understand the expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation and completion in contemporary education systems, it is important to consider the historical implication and consequences of controlled participation in formal schooling. As explored in earlier chapters, the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in formal schooling has been transformed on a spectrum ranging from exclusion, control and restriction, to high expectation-based inclusion. For participants though, the low expectations of academic achievement offset the aspirational goals of various education strategies and plans to improve attendance and completion rates, as was the case for Michael who shared:

> ***Michael***—*Just being generalised, what society expects men and women to look like. Indigenous students are expected to be the athletic types, which I didn't mind but that was one of the biggest ones. I kept getting asked every year, "Do you want to join this, that team?" By the end of Grade 12 I said, "I don't want to join any sporting team I just want to concentrate on my education."*

Michael struggled with his school's expectations of him as a good sportsman when his own expectations were to be committed to his studies and future career plans. Michael's reflections of his schooling experience revealed the problematic and detrimental impact of positioning young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male students into stereotypes where

sporting and not academic prowess is their contribution to school life. Michael had proven his athletic talent throughout school at representative levels and instead of these achievements complimenting his academic performance, they impeded his access to support from teachers and being acknowledged and accepted as an academic achiever amongst his peers. He was pushed towards sports as his participation in school. Michael's experiences demonstrate that not only are there high expectations for attendance and completion of school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but how they participate at school is often determined for them. He further explained

> ***Michael***—*Any Indigenous student knows firsthand from friends that they're capable of achieving an OP. Mainly my English teacher telling me, "Look, if you're not going to get into university, why don't you just stop all the OP stuff." I said, "No, I'm not going to stop because it's what I want to do." You get told you can't do it very often. I was sitting down one day, I went in to calculate our OP scores and the school captain, she looked at me and she gave me this look and pointed at the board as if to say, "You have to watch what he's doing." She pretty much singled me out.*

Therefore, it could be argued that participants were influenced by an array of discourses articulated in the school environment. This demonstrates the power of stereotypes, the power of positive and negative narratives and the influence of schooling discourses.

6.3.1 Influencing the Younger Generation

Participants began using their influence to mentor younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whilst they were still in high school. They used their positions in Years 11 and 12 as senior students to encourage students in lower year levels to attend school regularly.

> Non-Aboriginal teachers often notice, some with frustration, that older siblings or Aboriginal Education Workers will complete writing and drawing tasks that have been set for their younger relations, particularly if they are struggling with the task. Yet this is part of an older sibling's responsibility, to assist with and role model an activity until the younger child is able to do it on their own. From an Indigenous perspective 'this is normal and reinforces learning by observation and team effort. (SNAICC, 2011, p. 84).

Timmy recalled participating in the ARTIE program, which was designed to encourage, track and reward school attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Timmy had noticed a young Aboriginal student who had not been attending school regularly. On one particular occasion, the young student did not receive any rewards due to his poor attendance. Timmy used the student's embarrassment (or 'shame') to encourage better attendance. He shared

> ***Timmy****—Like, my little fella in Year 8 when I was in Year 12, he was in my, like, 'care class' thing I ended up giving him my prize, 'cause that didn't worry—it was just a ... 'towel' thing and I gave it to him. I said—"Ah ... you better start being better" and he said "That's 'shame' sitting in the middle by myself". But no 'cause, they put you in lines-in your care class lines, so he was just sitting all by himself 'cause everyone else is getting prizes. And, he's like—"shame, sitting by myself". And I said like "well, you wanna start coming to school". And, the next time he was in the 'silver attendance'. But yeah—he was a funny little kid—that lad. He used to come to school, but he'd sort of come to the fence and then leave again. But then yeah he started to become a good kid then.*

At the time of data collection, nine out of the ten participants were working in jobs (some in volunteer capacities) with frequent contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

and children (i.e., youth work). They discussed that often they would use their platforms as Year 12 graduates to influence and mentor current high school students. The participants employed their recent knowledge of the school system to speak with authority on the issues and expectations faced by current students. There is an expectation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities that older children and adolescents will nurture their younger siblings and members of their communities.

> Children would be able and willing to care for each other, particularly their younger kin; that they would know how to offer physical assistance necessary to keep the very young fed, clothed, healthy and safe while also being able to offer them love, affection and emotional and spiritual support (SNAICC, 2011, p. 117).

Jamal provides a powerful account of how he managed his cultural safety in school. This included surrounding himself with other Indigenous males and subsequently feeling sage to be able to express himself without fear of repercussion. Jamal repeated the phrases 'who I am' and 'who we are' as an expression of his being as an Aboriginal person and of a collective of Aboriginal people. He understood his role as a carer for younger students and someone hey would automatically look to foe leadership and role modelling because is in a shared expectation across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

> ***Jamal****—Yeah. So and it was just really because of who I am and who I surround myself with because people who I surround myself with like we didn't really—we didn't really care what other people thought really because we just expressed ourselves every day at school. Yeah, but that was a lot to do with it. And we have a big influence on the younger generation mainly because—especially with Indigenous, mainly because of who we are, our culture, the colour of our skin and, so yeah. And, plus, we've been through all that*

experience and they listen to us because that's how they see us as people who have been through it.

***Zavier**—just as in the way like an Elder would carry themselves. They're very respectful, they have a lot of knowledge and they love to teach. That's how they've taught us. I think that's the way we'd like to carry ourselves and really put that really—the kids can see that from us. So I think that's why we have that kind of relationship with the young kids that we work with and they really take on board the things that we try to teach them and, yeah.*

6.3.2 Transitioning from High School

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families hope that their children leave high school prepared with the skills and the motivation to take on the challenges of pursing their career aspirations.

> For me, the biggest thing that I have tried to teach my kids is that they need an education, they do need to be at school … I want them to know they can achieve. These kids can be our next lawyers and doctors, whatever they want (SNAICC, 2011, p. 117).

It is also expected that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete Year 12 and seek out opportunities to be involved in the life of their own communities and to make a positive contribution to the lives of their families and their community. "Aboriginal communities hope that through education their children will be able to take over the management of all aspects of life in their communities, so that they can achieve a greater sense of political and economic independence" (SNAICC, 2011, p. 116). For example, Toni said

Toni—*Education is important to have the knowledge, that you've been through it and experience those things because a lot of my aunties only went to Year 11, I know mum had to drop out because she had me, but being the only one who went to Grade 12 it kind of felt good because I experienced it and learnt it all. Pushing to stay in school and make sure you get the proper education so you can do better after school. I think that's what they wanted most importantly because was when I was in Grade 11 looking for my traineeship my aunties said that this was really important as it is going to help you more. I didn't understand how it was going to help me. But now that I'm out of school I realize it actually has helped me it gave me that extra step.*

As stated in an earlier section (see 'Relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander School Support Staff') regarding the original intentions of the CEC roles, the primary purpose of the role was to work alongside the Guidance Counsellors to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to prepare for jobs after school. The evidence in the data collection shows that participants had little to no contact with a Guidance Officer and received little to no career advice before completing high school.

This is despite CECs being in place for over 40 years and their roles becoming more focused on academic and cultural support for students; families and communities highlighting their aspirations for their children's futures; and education policies and priorities emphasising support to increase transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into training (i.e., vocational and higher education) and employment.

Michael—*They [Indigenous students] barely get any information at all. If anything, they'll get talked to about going to TAFE. I do remember that like the Former Origin*

Greats (FOGS) set up a program for Indigenous Year 11 and 12 students to go and look at different careers after high school and it was pretty much all TAFE programs and maybe one or two universities, it [university] gets put down a lot. Get second class jobs. Just stereotyping really. You're not expected to do well in high school, so you're not expected to do well in university.

This lack of career advice in secondary schools across Australia has been stressed by many working in the education sectors. A piece written in The Conversation in 2015 reported that 50% of Australian high schools with more than 1,000 students spent less than $3 per student on career education activities each year. The profile of Career Advisers in high schools shows mostly female staff, over 45 years of age, working in dual roles as both career advisers and classroom teachers (Clarke, 2015). Because of the shortage of career advice, resources in schools and the preference for students to confide in CECs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are relying upon unqualified CECs for career advice. Schools were unable to provide culturally appropriate or enough levels of general career advice to participants. The impact of limited time and resources for school-based career advice is felt by all students in Australian schools, but especially by vulnerable groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Participants, like Timmy, relied on CECs to provide career advice to students as well as cultural, personal and family support in addition to academic liaison. He explained

Timmy—*When she [the Guidance Officer] starts talking about what you can get into at 'Uni' I had no idea what she was talking about what she was saying when she was saying all these big Uni classes ... you can do. She lost me after ... bloody ... after teaching ... Yeah ... she said jobs I never even heard of before. So, I always just think someone [needs to] be there to support you.*

Timmy talked further about his limited encounters with his school's Guidance Officer. He offered his perspective of the problems other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who were less confident to engage with mainstream student services offered at his school, experienced when required to meet with the Guidance Officer to discuss pathways out of school. The requirement to have an appointment with the Guidance Officer combined with unfamiliar terminology and lack of rapport made interactions between students and the staff member difficult for all. Timmy shared a good example of what this experience feels like.

> ***Timmy***—*Oh, you have to go and you have to go and see her [Guidance Officer] to go anywhere because she must have a big list. "Timmy has come to me about what he wants to do and he wants to be a teacher. So, this is the subjects he's done". They might go, "Joe, wants to become this, so, this is what he's doing". So, if they I guess if she [Guidance Officer] doesn't have some kid's name down as had a conversation then she must get in trouble from whoever she gets in trouble from. She goes and gets kids. No matter how nice she was, she would still get a 'mouth-full' from kids because sometimes that's a lot of kids [that] probably wouldn't want to speak to her. Indigenous kids probably didn't want to speak to her. So, when she 'rocks-up' and she's all happy the way she is happy some kids would still [say] "I'm not going with you" or they would just refuse, or they would just walk out of school and she tries to get them. She'd think she's … and then she would get sad because she thinks they hate her. Yeah I'm not too sure, because they're just not.. beside that she's 'white', that ... It could be language ... some of the words she 'chucks' at you is pretty ... some words she'd say to me, I'd always look at [the CEC] and say "what does that mean? But, I was sort of a bit more, like, open. I would ask [the CEC] what that meant. Or, I'd say to her "what does that.. what do you mean by that?" But, a lot of kids would just sit there with their hands in their lap and*

say—"yeah I want to do construction class and that. " And, then, she'd still ... she'd ask you questions, but she wouldn't push it. Especially if they was Indigenous kids, she would never question them [about] why they wanted to do that. They'd just say "I want to be a builder, so can I do this and this, this and this?" ... and she'd go "ok!" just think that maybe being able to bring your parents to one of them kind of sessions, or something at that school some kids might feel better if they had just someone with them just to help them.

These experiences highlight the issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students accessing important information at school to make decisions about future career opportunities. An assumption is made that students have a sufficient level of occupation awareness to make career decisions. Career education is critical to ensure their transition into occupation pathways is informed by accurate data and access to role models and mentors. Furthermore, it underscores the lack of culturally informed career advice that considers the extent of educational expectations, cultural obligations and relationships with family and communities which impact on the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Crabb and Vicenti (2016) explain that career advisers engaging with Native American clients need to consider factors such as:

- Building rapport with a client from a collective society (i.e., Native Americans) that is meaningful, trusting, supportive and kind;
- Understanding family and community expectations, connections and dynamics;
- Coaching clients within the society and context in which they live, as opposed to non-Indigenous societies and contexts;

- Using Holistic and Narrative Career Construction as effective career advice models; and
- Understanding the whole person as mind, body and spirit in addition to race, gender and socio economic backgrounds.

(para 1 – 6)

Education systems could consider making basic career education training available for CECs as a strategy to deal with the vacuum of specialised support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student career advice. Other education institutions such as universities and TAFEs are also positioned to be able to provide career advice to high school students. These institutions could deliver this service within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework that acknowledges the educational expectations and cultural obligations of these students. Improved support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students transitioning out of high school after completion of Year 12 is important for students like Michael:

> ***Michael***—*It was an achievement for me just to finish high school. I did need a break from any education but by the time I was done I was ready to get back into it. I said, "Look, I want to study, I want to do this [go to university]."*

The transition from high school to university is a significant change that requires preparation and guidance. Career advice that is grounded in Indigenous contexts is crucial to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to move from one level of education to the next.

6.3.3 Meeting Expectations Post School

At the time of data collection, the majority of the participants were working in jobs in community organisations and Government departments; two were studying full time and one working and studying part time. Insightful discussions were had throughout all of the

interviews in relation to the employment opportunities participants had pursued in the one to two years since they had left school.

As the Yarning Circle participants gathered to be interviewed for the second time, I observed a number of discussions and interactions between them. It was interesting to observe them as participants in my research project and not just as my usual observations of them in my role as an 'Aunty'. For example, there was a particular discussion between three of the participants which I found. They were discussing a young Aboriginal male in the community with whom they had all had contact through their work in various organisations. The discussion was about the challenges he was experiencing and how they could support the young man. The discussion ended with one of the participants stating 'whatever has the most impact on his life' and the others nodding in agreement. This informal discussion between the 19 year old participants reinforced the cultural obligations amongst them, which highlighted compassion for their fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and commitment to caring for their community. Even as teenagers, these young adults displayed a sound understanding, appreciation and commitment to their cultural obligations.

Other instances of their obligations informing their work included working with young children, school students, homeless people and others affected by substance misuse. The motivations for the work they were involved in was intrinsically based on working with 'the mob' in the community and reaffirmed their cultural identities. The evidence of cultural obligations underpinning choices for employment and further education options are clear.

> ***Timmy***—*'Cause I just wanna help people—really. That's what I like, I always wanted to help people. I didn't want to sit out in hot sun all day—But nah that doesn't worry me, but I just want to help the community and I just wanna sort of show them—Like, I just*

wanna help them know that they should not do, like, just do things they do, like drink every day at the 'riverbank'. Like, they should—I just wanna help sort of help them to get somewhere.

The value of compassion surfaced in my reflections of cultural obligations and school expectations. Participants were showing obvious signs of a deep empathic responsibility for other young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All participants reflected on the efforts they made to mentor the younger generations while they were still students at school and even as staff in their workplaces. Participants sought out work where there was a natural fit for their values, skills and aspiration. This level of responsibility to care and nurture others is supported by SNAICC (2011, p. 67) "unselfishness and compassion are highly desirable behaviours in Aboriginal society".

Nikki*—I'd like to have an impact on a lot more kids. And I'd like the kids who I've—I'd like to know that the kids who I've had an impact on, or making an impact on, the kids who come under them, the next generation, so to know that I kind of sparked a difference and a change and that change is continuing to make the community better and more knowledgeable and more culture. And it will be.*

Other discussions were about how participants were given responsibilities in their workplaces that were high level and advanced in terms of practical support for clients who were older than they and as resources of cultural knowledge. The isolation of being the 'only Indigenous person' in the workplace and particularly for a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person is challenging. There are insufficient supports for young people to practice reflexivity in their cultural ways of being. Caution must be taken to ensure responsibility of being 'spokespeople' for the community does not result in loss of integrity, commitment or courage.

Jamal—*I love who I am and I love working on Darumbal Country, but, yeah, there's a lot of responsibility. And, yeah, like [participant] said, being a Darumbal person you actually have lots of links in all different place so it opens up different opportunities and you're able to help community and you have to make sure you know what you're talking about. So it can be a bit intimidating at times because you have—when lots of people are looking to you, you do want to make sure you know what you're saying, otherwise you'll get in trouble and, yeah.*

Zavier—*At my work I'm kind of like the only Indigenous person so that's kind of challenging too when I don't have—because when you're younger you look for like that older Indigenous type of aunty/uncle who can help you out and kind of guide you along the way, so I didn't really have anyone there. So I'm just trying to figure it out myself so it's a bit of a challenge as well.*

Where once their obligations would have been restricted to kin and Country, life in a Western world has impacted, but not erased, these cultural practices and values, especially for participants who belonged to the Darumbal nation.

Jamal—*Like a lot of friends aren't Darumbal that graduated (Year 12]. They sort of—they get—they are sort of on their own. Like they do their own thing, type thing. But when you're Darumbal everyone comes looking for you.*

Beyond the community work they were currently involved in, participants also indicated that they held other aspirations. These aspirations included careers as teachers and small business owners. Participants had dreams of travel and owning their own homes as well as marrying and securing employment to provide for their families.

Toni—*I've always wanted to be a teacher, I always wanted to be a pre-school teacher … it would be so good so yeah I've always wanted to study that, but I don't think I'm really ready for that yet maybe in the near future when I've done being young, I'll go start studying but that's pretty much what I want to do. Or I want to open up my own one of this, coffee shop or something or a food shop where people can sit around, talk and relax. That's how it was when my boss was away at my old work and I enjoyed the atmosphere. I've always wanted to have that kind of place for everyone. After this traineeship I might see how I go with one of them.*

Taleisha—*I want to finish my diploma first and then you know, go traveling a little bit, I want to get my diploma and I want to keep working full time, in the meantime here and there buy a house or think about getting married and about having kids but at the moment I want to have a decent job so when I decide to do all those things I'm never going to have to worry about losing my job or anything like that.*

Michael—*It's really difficult. I want to make my own name and everyone sees me as I guess mini [family name]. A lot of friends and family they expect me, are you going to be a lawyer? Yes, I'm studying law as well, but I'm doing environmental law. I'm trying to create my own path. I want to be big and successful in my area not just what my family expectations are.*

We've all finished high school. My mum pushed all of us kids to finish high school. She hasn't pushed us to go to university, that was our own choice but she says you've just got to learn something and then you stick to it.

To me, once upon a time, really nothing. I was going to drop out of uni, but I do it for my son now. I want him to see that I have made something of myself. I want him to grow up saying, I'm proud of my father. I want to be like him one day. I want to be his inspiration.

Uni has definitely changed how I think about it all. In high school I was like, I really didn't care about my education. Then after high school I realised I've got to look after my education, it's a luxury. Not everyone can say I've been to university, I've studied this, I have a degree in that, it's really a luxury and to say I'm going it's a privilege. The same with my education, once it was paid for by the Government, I took it all for granted.

As an insider-researcher, one thing stood out for me from the discussions relating to this theme of expectations and obligations. All participants reflected on the efforts they made to mentor the younger generations both at school and in their workplace where they were in jobs that had an element of interaction with youth. Other discussions were about how participants were given responsibilities in their workplaces that were high level and advanced in terms of practical support for clients who were older than they and also as resources of cultural knowledge. What was missing from this discussion was a lack of organised employment mentorship designed to provide specific coaching support for new young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to adjust to their early career pathways. Such support could benefit the participants who often had to lean on family connections to find employment.

***Zavier**—I believe I'm in with these two [other participants] because working on your land, our land, we have a lot of connections because we have a lot of family here. And a lot of people—a lot of people know who you are because of your last name so, which*

makes it like—sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's not. Most of the time it's easier to get into things. So like because I've got my job because of dad because he's the Elder at the school so they—because they asked dad and I think they knew him and he referenced me so that's how I got mine. So I was pretty lucky really to get the job I have now. Do you know what I mean? I've actually been pretty lucky to stay on for this long.

Whilst school expectations diminish once an Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander student completes Year 12, cultural obligations continue to be a part of their lives including, but not limited to, career choices. The hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents is expressed in this quote from SNAICC (2011, p. 117):

> [i]t was important … that the children learn to stand on their own two feet from as young an age as possible; that they are able to defend themselves when threatened; and that they develop acumen that would prevent them from being exploited, to be physically and emotionally resilient, to be uncomplaining, to be able to laugh at themselves … to know what they wanted and how to get it".

In concluding this section, a statement from Timmy summarises the sentiment the participants shared about the values that informed their career choices.

Timmy*—You're not succeeding if you're not doing anything—If you're doing something you don't want to do or something that doesn't make you happy doesn't even—No point in being there if it doesn't make you happy.*

The six themes of the discussions show that the participants in this study experienced school and the transition into their early career pathway in a fashion that was inextricably linked to

their Indigenous worldview. That is, their experiences as school students and in the workplace or education institution were guided by their Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing.

As school students, the participants demonstrated skills and abilities that allowed them to successfully navigate through a Western education system whilst simultaneously developing a strong sense of self as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. Participants used spaces and processes within the school environment to express their Indigeneity. This was seen in the utilisation of safe spaces such as 'Murri Rooms', common areas of school yards and dormitories for those who attended boarding schools. As students, they learned how to cross the borders from these safe spaces into 'contact zones' of classrooms and other such spaces (MacGill & Blanch, 2013). In order to access the support they required from non-Indigenous teachers, they often employed their cultural capital, particularly Indigenous knowledge, dance and leadership. Participants recognised the value of their cultural capital to the non-Indigenous teachers who had limited understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. They could contribute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge in class for the benefit of their fellow students and or perform cultural dances at school events. Underpinning the successful navigation of school environments was the pastoral and cultural care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff. These staff were a significant and positive contribution to the student experience and success of the participants.

The early career pathways were wide and varied but all participants who were working at the time of interviews were employed by either a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation or within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program of a mainstream organisation. Participants expressed their motivations for their career choices were to 'help'

other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There was a firm commitment by all participants to foster a strong sense of Indigenous identity in others. The selection of the participants by Elders and community representatives most likely influenced the collation of young people with similar motivating factors.

The study prioritised voices that wanted to be heard and lived experiences that wanted to be known. The lives that have been lived so far by these young leaders provides insight into the trajectory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the local community on Darumbal Country by both Darumbal and non-Darumbal Indigenous peoples. Listening to the voices of these young people who ranged in age from 19–21years was an invaluable experience for myself as an insider-researcher conducting this study. Scarce are the opportunities that allow for such a concentrated focus on the voices and experiences of this particular cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our community. Figure 12 provides a visual of the six themes which emerged from the personal narratives of the participants. This model will be elaborated in the following chapter as the findings of the data analysis is presented.

The penultimate chapter follows. It draws on the six themes of discussion to address the notion of 'belonging and becoming' amongst the participants. This is not a new notion that I am proposing. Belonging and becoming is however an articulation of what the themes of discussion tell us about the living context of the participants and which can also be argued is the reality of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living on Darumbal Country.

Figure 11: Personal Narratives

Chapter 7. Findings

7.1 Answering the Research Question

7.1.1 Overview

I return to the research question to give it due consideration, based on the six themes of discussion in the previous chapters. The term 'thick description' is used extensively in qualitative research. I loan the definition of thick description from ethnographical research which states that the term "provide[s] a thick description of the cultural phenomenon under study" (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011, p. 3). Thick description was introduced by North American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in 1973 to explain observed behaviour in such a way that the description provides context, explains intentions and ascribes meaning. In relation to the interpretation of data in this study, I use thick description to focus on description of lived experiences and an interpretation that is informed as an 'insider'. This enables me to capture interpretations that occur within lived experiences. These types of statements are difficult to produce and obtain. My exploration of the cultural phenomenon that is the experience of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12, living and working and/or studying on the lands of the Darumbal people, has gathered together thick descriptions of behaviours and experiences within this research. The question posed at the start of this research was:

> ***What can be learned from the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12?***

As an Aboriginal researcher, I am using my Indigenous ontology and relational epistemology to view the themes of discussion for patterns within the narratives for the purpose of answering the research question. Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) state that the objective of

data interpretation for an Indigenist researcher is to practice reflexivity at every level and with every aspect of relationship involved in the research. Maintaining all the relationships of the research process includes the connections with self, family community and Entities (living and non-living, past, present, future). As an insider-researcher, I am responsible not only to my institution for maintaining my ethical obligations as a researcher, but I am also accountable to my family, community and Darumbal Entities to ensure my relationships with these elements allow me to properly and appropriately interpret the data. As Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) claim, data interpretation is "less to do with capturing 'truth' or drawing general conclusions, than the re-connecting of self, family, community and Entities that can be claimed and celebrated" (p. 13). From this worldview, I have considered the research question by drawing into one meta-narrative, the pattern of the discussion themes as revealed through my relationship with the research process.

On this basis, I submit that from the experiences of the participants, we can learn that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students appropriate school spaces to exercise Indigenous epistemes to live successfully in a Western world. They actively pursue places and spaces in school and workplaces that foster their Indigenous identities. Furthermore, they create relationships with others to access knowledge and advice to guide their decision-making in school about their futures and with regard to their transition through stages of maturity in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

7.2 Belonging

7.2.1 Family and Community

The pattern of the discussion themes is reinforced through responses related to questions regarding the long-term futures of individuals and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander community as a whole. This process results in the identification of the functional, cultural and social factors that describe the lived experiences and realities of the participants of the study (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2007). Qualitative researchers need to restrict interpretation of the data to eliciting the cultural meaning by which the participants of the study make sense and attribute meaning to their lived experiences (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011).

A strong sense of belonging to their families and communities was evident in the participants, as were their responsibilities for carrying forward the hopes and dreams of their Elders. For example, George's close relationship with his great grandparents was his foundation. From this foundation his goal was to be an independent man, knowing that he had the support of his family to fall back on if things did not work out for him.

> ***George****—To most Indigenous kids, like, family is everything. And, you're scared to leave the nest, you're scared to leave home, you're scared to leave your mother and father, or your Aunties and Uncles, or your grandparents like me. They're scared because they don't know what's there out there. Know what life's got for them. With me, I'm not scared at all. But, if I do get scared I know I can still turn to my family to help me out. And they will help me out because we're pretty close—my family. We all are, but, it's for me, I'd just rather be Independent—be a man. Be on my own and just be a man. But, if I 'muck-up', I know Nan and Pop are still there. Especially Pop—he's going to be still there for me.*

When Jamal reflected on what life was going to be like for him after school, he was not disappointed that he had not taken the path that he had one time planned for himself. He was satisfied to take on the opportunities he was given to be involved in programs that saw

him working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. Jamal worked closely with his Elders. He regularly took time off work to assist his Elders at events and activities. His sense of 'success' is evident in the satisfaction he derives from working in the community.

> ***Jamal***—*Everyone has a plan [about] what they're going to do after school, sort of like it doesn't—like, it sort of doesn't work out, but other doors open up for you and, yeah, things happen. So, yeah, I didn't expect life to be like this after school, to be honest.*
>
> *I reckon the most positive thing, as [participant] was saying, is the community engagement. Yeah. It empowers a lot of young Indigenous children. They sort of don't—they're sort of lost. They're lost. A lot of them are lost kids, but when you empower them they're sort of, "Yeah. I know who I am," and they become confident in themselves and then they become little leaders. So, yeah, just even the change from people who are lost becoming people who are taking the lead.*

In Nikki's case working with children in the community to learn about themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander was something she found fulfilling and gave her a sense of value.

> ***Nikki***—*I think the most positive thing that I've been involved in since leaving school was—is community I suppose and doing everything. Definitely working with the community and just like especially with the young little black fellas and when they find out more things about their culture and who they are and just seeing their faces and seeing them able to express themselves more because they've learnt a bit more about themselves.*

Discussions about school and their pathways out of school focused on participants' wellbeing. It was important for participants to engage in welcoming and inclusive environments that recognised and valued their Indigeneity. All of the participants were pursuing career aspirations and personal goals and those who were employed trusted their employers to ensure their workplaces valued cultural inclusiveness. In addition, participants recognised their responsibility to maintain the social practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. These responsibilities included caring for their family, community and Country. Other important responsibilities that participants recognised were contributing to the development of their communities and enjoying the opportunities that meaningful work could bring to them, such as travel.

7.2.2 'Belonging'—The Indestructible Influence of 'the Dreaming'

Moreton-Robinson (2003, p. 11) explains that 'belonging' in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies is based on "ontological relationship to country derived from the Dreaming" and that despite the impact that colonisation had on almost every aspect of customary life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it did not destroy that relationship. Moreton-Robinson's (2003) description of the resolute continuity of Aboriginal ontological connections to and from the Dreaming is the core of 'belonging'. Moreton-Robinson (2003) explains that land is connected to the spirit world. Therefore, Country, the spirit world and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, exist in constant relatedness irrespective of the direction or status of time. This is the essence of Indigenous 'belonging'.

The participants developed a sense of 'belonging' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies whilst at school. This was evident in their development of cultural identities by drawing on relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their

desire to increase their knowledge of 'self' as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander 'being'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in Martin's (2017) study of 'culture and identity' found that 'Indigenous identity' was the highest of priorities. This study also indicated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents were confident in passing on culture to their children. The types of knowledge that are important for parents to pass on to children are "family history, showing respect, pride in identity and knowing the country" (Martin, 2017, p. 92). The study found that parents believed that family, culture, personal traits, identity, heritage, relationships, history and land/country are the primary factors that contribute to the positive and healthy development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These findings are echoed globally by Anishinaabe youth of Canada and the United States who identified positive relationships with family and communities and cultural practices as key factors to developing strong cultural identities and to overcoming barriers to successful educational participation (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

'Belonging' is an indestructible ontological connection to country, culture and community and the core of identity for Indigenous peoples. It is little wonder then, that this 'sense' is evident in young Indigenous people during high school and becomes more apparent as they transition into adulthood, early career pathways and roles in their families and communities.

7.3 Becoming

7.3.1 Roles and Responsibilities

Participants of my research viewed their futures from positions where their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, roles and responsibilities were high priorities. Maintaining and strengthening family relationships and fulfilling family and kinship responsibilities were identified as key to becoming who they saw themselves in their future.

Nikki—*Hopefully with us guys that we'll make a change and there'll be—I'd really like to see less Indigenous children in care and I'd like to see a healthier planet, community. People putting rubbish in the bin. That's one of my things that I really dislike.*

Jamal—*I would like in 20 years' time a community that minimizes today's issues because there's—it won't completely cover all issues as there will always be people that cause problems, but a community that knows how to respond to all those problems accordingly.*

Zavier—*Since the old days it's been our duty to care for Country. So now it's still our duty, our mission to care for Country, care for our community. So it's definitely a big part of our responsibility as Darumbal people to help our community and do whatever it takes until the end of time.*

Zavier uses Elders as an inspiration and guide for his own 'becoming' as a young man. His elders provide advice to him so that he follows in their footsteps, growing in his Darumbal ways of knowing, being and doing. Zavier is committed to mentoring and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as his responsibility to his Elders.

Zavier—*I think because of—I think because of who we are and the way we've been brought up like how we've been taught from our Aunties and Uncles and Elders is the way that we like to teach other people. I don't know if that comes through as making sense, but—just as in the way like an Elder would carry themselves. They're very respectful, they have a lot of knowledge and they love to teach. That's how they've taught us. I think that's the way we'd like to carry ourselves and really put that really—the kids can see that from us. So I think that's why we have that kind of relationship with*

the young kids that we work with and they really take on board the things that we try to teach them.

My research also investigated how the experiences of participants' transition into further study and employment shaped the views of the participants' futures of themselves, family and communities. This was of particular interest in order to identify any patterns or trends between participants that could provide additional insight into the way education intersected with their lives.

Guiding the decisions about those pathways were questions about what skills and knowledge they could acquire through their participation that would benefit themselves, their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers and younger generations. The discussions about future planning were the same, as Nikki explains

Nikki*—So I definitely want us [the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community] to move forward, definitely, because I mean that's what we've been doing. I believe that's what we've been doing, or—and doing and trying to do for a very long time. And I don't want us to move back. I don't want us to move back as a community, or as a people because, I don't know, especially in 20 years. So I'm 20—I'm 20 now. I'm turning 20 this year so I can definitely say that we've moved on since I was born so I'd just like to see us just keep going. Just keep moving forward.*

At an individual level, participants shared the importance of self-confidence in achieving their aspirations. Participants felt their initial confidence levels had been developed at school and that this was both an important quality to acquire and an appropriate environment in which to develop it. They saw confidence as critical for success. According to Jamal and Zavier,

having confidence to do one's job was more indicative of success than the level of remuneration. Both Jamal and Zavier believed a successful person is confident in doing their job, asking questions and making decisions. Michael believed that interpersonal skills were valuable for success. Knowing how to talk to others and network were important skills that he had developed.

7.3.2 'Becoming'—Circuitous Knowing and Being

> Our behaviour and actions are a matter of subsequent evolvement and growth in our individual Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. We become tangible proof of our ontology and it's constructs of our Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 11).

The notion of 'becoming' is an extension of 'belonging'. It is a continuation of the ontological connection with country, culture and community and is demonstrated in Martin's encapsulation of the infinitive-ness of Knowing, Being and Doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) explained 'becoming' as evidence of one's ontology and demonstration of Knowing, one's epistemology.

I also draw on Moreton-Robinson (2013, p. 343) Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory and her critique of Eurocentric positing of 'self' as "multiple, becoming and unfixed" (p. 343). Therefore, I define 'becoming' as the 'evolvement and growth' shared by (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) and rooted in circuitous self-reflection, guided by Eldership, as also described by Moreton-Robinson (2013).

Martin and Mirraboopa (2003) describe the Quandamooka people's transition through phases of life through markers of Knowing. Children learn their relatedness to Country

through mothers and other adults. The crucial role of 'Elder' requires demonstration of maturity and responsibility and an invitation to join to contribute to the Eldership collective. This approach is practiced in similar ways across many Aboriginal groups.

7.4 Transitioning Out—bringing it all together

7.4.1 Preparing for Careers: Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and their Futures

This study indicates that the participants, who were between one to three years' post-school, were focused on learning new skills through new experiences. Most had not 'stuck' with the 'career' plan and aspirations they had imagined in high school, but were nevertheless satisfied and excited by the opportunities they were pursuing. It was important for participants, especially those in non-study pathways, to gain as much experience as possible by working throughout the community.

These experiences highlight the need to re-imagine career guidance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students. Such guidance needs to be informed by the experiences and voices of recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school graduates. For example, if career guidance in Year 11 and 12 focused on 'self-awareness' so that students could reflect on and identify their strengths, passions and interests, then their early career years would allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates to explore jobs, occupations and get a better understanding to inform their career pathways. Transforming career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is beyond the scope of this research, but it is another important element of high school education susceptible to teacher bias, negative prejudices and low expectations (Riley & Pidgeon, 2018; Sarra, 2003; 2011).

The phase of learning and exploring the world of work within the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is layered with personal aspirations, community expectations and cultural obligations. As such, it requires the understanding of all three underpinning elements to support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people appropriately, to navigate their ways to making a decision to pursue these types of career aspirations. Career guidance without relevance and effect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is challenged by the questions posed by Aboriginal education leader, Professor Lester Irrabina-Rigney:

> Have we targeted all our efforts in the here and now and forgot the need to manage for the future? Education is a key factor affecting the life chances of all Australians. What will this look like in the future for Indigenous children who have an overall lower level participation in education than non-Indigenous Australians? (Rigney, 2011, p. 16).

7.4.2 Nourishing 'Knowing, Being and Doing' Amongst Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Belonging and becoming are ontological and epistemological demonstrations. Place is central and the attachment to a tract of land or learning environment are not too dissimilar. In their study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student place-making in university environments, (Carter, Hollinsworth, Raciti, & Gilbey, 2018b) describe place-making as the extent to which an individual bonds with a particular place. This research found that the level of attachment that students feel depended on the nature and level of social relations with academics and the curriculum. Lovett (2017) found the injection of particular family and community relationships at certain stages of life fostered the child's development of resilience. Furthermore, Lovett (2017, p. 291) cites Christakis and Fowler (2013, 2018) to show

that a benefit for such high communal groups is how resilience “can spread throughout social structures via the relationships that people have with each other” (p. 291).

To this end, I offer a model of Belonging and Becoming to illustrate and summarise the findings of my research. At the centre of the model are the processes of Belonging and Becoming, representing the major findings of my research. At the second level are the six themes of the data analysis. The themes characterise the narratives of the ten participants. The outer level situates the cultural capital that participants had utilised at high school, in their workplaces and at TAFE and university. These resources nurtured the wellbeing of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Darumbal Country. Social and emotional care draws on the elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing framework, which is based in connection to an array of cultural elements (Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014). The complex relationships within family and community are a valuable source of capital, particularly in shaping young people for their roles and responsibilities. The value of culturally specified spaces where young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be together to learn, grow and navigate their way through every stage of their lives is immeasurable. Cultural expression and experiences were particularly important for the Darumbal leaders in the Yarning Circles. Language and dance were highly valued assets that they learned, practiced and taught others, including non-Darumbal people. Cultural mentors were located across the broad spectrum of spaces on Darumbal Country—within schools, workplaces and the wider community. Elders are held in very high regard by all participants and included Darumbal and non-Darumbal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

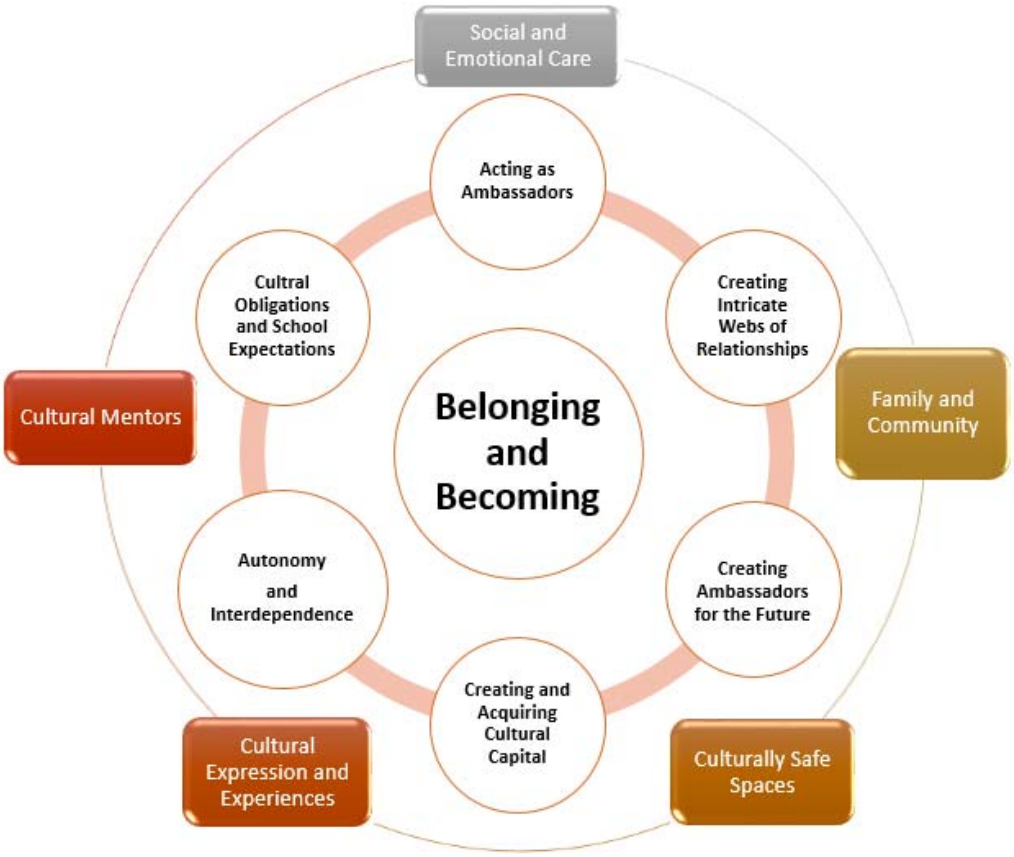

Figure 12: Model of 'Belonging and Becoming' on Darumbal Country

Chapter 8. Conclusion

8.1 Leaving the Research Ceremony

This research is a story about Darumbal *nunthi* (Country). I have had the opportunity to take a close look at a small group of the young people who live, work and study on my Country. I have attempted to do this from an Indigenous viewpoint and as a researcher who lives and works within the community being researched. The approach I have taken has been to engage in the research process authentically to my ontological and epistemological positioning as an Aboriginal researcher and to claim this space for the experiences and voices of the participants, the counsel of my research Guides and with the permission of my Elders.

Having come to this research acknowledging that it is a place of ceremony, I now prepare, in the style of Wilson (2008) to leave it with this concluding chapter. In doing so, I am reminded of a particular journey that I and other Darumbal people undertake several times each year to a remote area of our Country. There we spend time together hunting, fishing, eating, swimming and camping. Stories are shared and ceremonies are performed. The final thing we do before we leave this special place is wash in the cold freshwater creeks. Immersing ourselves in the fresh water cools our bodies in the hot humid air and washes away the stickiness of the salt and sand. It is a baptism-like experience with our 'gumbaru' (Ancestors), before we re-enter the busy-ness of Darumbal life in the Western world. Similarly, I leave this research ceremony with thoughts of my 'gumbaru' (Ancestors) and 'guibiya guihn' (Elders who have returned to the Dreaming). I immerse myself one last time into my research, to be refreshed in the connection to the place and people who have contributed to this ceremony in both small and significant ways.

8.2 The Voices and Experiences in the Research

In the first chapter, I introduced how education has been both a source of pain and promise for the five generations of my family who have lived on Darumbal Country under colonisation. The objective of this research was to make a space for voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to tell their stories of school. There exists a plethora of education research and Government reports on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; however, the question I proposed was

> ***What can be learned from the experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently completed Year 12?***

I presented a political chronology to illuminate the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and State and Federal governments. This was important for understanding that, after 2,500 generations of child-rearing practices guided by customary laws, the interjection of colonisation into family relationships has had and continues to have, consequences to the continuity of knowledge, language, cultural practices, values and beliefs and identity (Donovan, 2002). The impact of Queensland's laws to regulate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the Aboriginal Protection and the Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act (Qld) 1897 ravaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and societies. One notable feature of the laws was the regulation of the care, custody and education of Aboriginal children. Over the past four decades, the creation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1974, the establishment of ATSIC and political parties who were progressive in their policy approach by including the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts, changed the Australian political landscape. The National Indigenous Reform Agenda and the Closing the Gap policies are two approaches which have been used to improve the

educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This research acknowledges the historical injustices and the continued complexities of education in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is against this backdrop that I focus attention on the lived experiences amongst young people living on Darumbal Country of their high school experience and the transition into early careers.

My theoretical approach has been informed by several significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars: Martin and Mirraboopa (2003), Rigney (1999, 2001), Moreton-Robinson (2009, 2013) and Nakata (1998, 2004, 2007). Primarily, I have drawn on Martin's (2003) Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing as the framework for my research approach. The theoretical framework and methodology posited by Martin has been a tool that aligns with my ontological and epistemological position for exploring my research topic. This is particularly important in Indigenist research that acknowledges Aboriginal lands as a living Entity and part of the mosaic of narratives that needs to be privileged.

My Indigenist research framework required reflexivity in order for it to achieve any level of emancipation or liberation. The design of the research included self-critique and accountability to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This has required me to be reflexive in every aspect of a research process that commenced long before my candidature was confirmed and ethics application approved and it will continue long after the publication of this thesis. The responsibility of stories to create narratives requires my accountability to my community. Narratology is an essential element of my theoretical approach. By definition, narratology provides narrative perspective and privileges the voices of storytellers (Archibald, 2008; Hays & Wood, 2011). Narratology in Indigenous inquiry can

transform and create new knowledge to advance individuals, communities and disciplines (Brayboy & McKinley, 2005).

There is no shortage of literature on the topic of 'Indigenous education'. My critique in contrast was guided by four key specifications that uphold the principles of Indigenist research theory: applying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences; avoiding deficit thinking, models and approaches; preferencing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices; and telling local stories. I applied an Indigenist lens to the student experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to illustrate what we know about the daily lives of our children as they engage in school environments and transition into workplaces and tertiary institutions.

My research was designed using Indigenised narratology. I assumed a position in the research as an 'insider' of the community and cultural group who were the 'researched'. Therefore, I sought permission from my Darumbal Elders prior to seeking ethical clearance from my institution. I sought the assistance of stakeholders from across the community to identify participants for the study. The criteria for participation was: identification (including self and by community) as an Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander; Year 12 completion in the past five years; and currently studying or working and living on Darumbal Country. Stakeholders nominated participants and a total of ten took part in the two stages of qualitative data collection, using semi-structured interviews and the concept of 'yarning circles'.

Through much reflection and thoughtful consideration, I built narratives from each participant's stories and from the narratives and themes that emerged, using inductive thematic analysis, as advocated by Lankshear & Knobel (2004). These involved ambassadorship, relationships, cultural capital, autonomy and interdependence and

obligations and expectations. The themes overlapped, scaffolded and depicted school spaces and 'transitioning out' as places and times that participants appropriated for their own purposes. Participants used school spaces to develop skills and knowledge to build their capacity to be responsible young adults in the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They did this whilst also navigating their own educational success to complete Year 12 under a variety of challenging personal circumstances.

8.3 Impact of the Research

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience school in a way that is different from other student groups. The appropriation of school spaces to exercise Indigenous epistemologies is not a minor feat. It indicates a sophisticated level of functioning with high degrees of skill and abilities employed by these young people, particularly in high school. I offered a model that encapsulated 'belonging and becoming' on Darumbal Country. The model illustrates what is currently done to nourish a small group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at high school and through to starting their careers in the region.

The findings of my research could be considered for use in preservice teacher training in the Rockhampton area. The localised design of the research allows for place-based targeted teacher training, whereby preservice teachers can gain an intimate understanding of school and transition experiences of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Darumbal Country. Other types of staff that would benefit from training informed by this research could be Guidance Officers, School Chaplains and Teacher Aides. The findings could also be used in training and inducting new Community Education Counsellors and Indigenous Liaison Officers into public and private schools across the region.

These findings were able to be articulated because the framework of Indigenist research theory and narrative inquiry centred the voices and experiences of the participants and made space for them to be heard. Because of this, it is possible that the findings could be applicable to other geographical areas. However, I cautiously advise against broad assumptions that these learnings can be applied to other groups of students and young people without proper interrogation of their experiences, voice and contexts. Application elsewhere must preference the voices and experiences of the relevant Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. The approach used in my research could be used as a template to better understand other groups here on Darumbal Country and elsewhere.

I have had discussions with my Cultural Guides and it is now my aim to work with my community to share the findings of the research. They have requested that my research be kept as a reference and resource by the Traditional Owner Management Corporation and that a series of community presentations be delivered. There is interest in exploring the model presented in the section 'Nourishing 'Knowing Being and Doing' to include epistemic spaces for the cultural accountability and empowerment of the community. Furthermore, my Cultural Guides have indicated that future use of the model could initiate further development and investment in the community. For example, the findings of my research have generated interest in creating innovative strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of employment programs for Darumbal people. The model has provided my Cultural Guides with the identification of resources that young people in the community are accessing and ideas for enhancing and expanding resources for the advancement of the community. My research provides community leaders with evidence of what is working well for young people

and a structure to use and modify to target other groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in my community.

It is my hope that this research is used by my community and others to emphasise the importance of looking closely at our communities, asking our own questions and finding the answers in our local stories and storytellers. Our ability to ask different questions and consider alternative inquiries extend from the nuances of our understandings of complex histories, cultures and societies.

8.4 Reflecting on the Research

As I prepare to conclude this research I offer my reflections in this final section. It has been stated multiple times throughout the thesis that I am a part of the community in which I have conducted this research and the majority of the participants, or 'the researched', had various types of association with me prior to the study. With this being said, this research has taught me more than I ever knew about my community and the participants. My understanding of school student experiences in post-school transition in my region has been deepened by the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Here I would like to engage the circuitous nature of the reflexive practice of my research and turn back to the research agenda questions in Chapter One. These questions guide my reflection and allow me to examine the intentions I held at the beginning of my research.

Why am I doing this research?

The purpose of my research was to create a space and provide a voice for the young people who live and work in my community to speak to back to their experiences of school and their transition into their early careers. I am confident that I have achieved this through my

adherence to the principles of Indigenist research and the Guidelines for Research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AIATSIS). The use of Indigenised narratology has ensured that stories and narratives remained central throughout my research. By profiling each participant, telling their stories and creating their narratives I have concentrated much of this thesis on who they are, what their experiences have been and their verbal reflections and insights.

What are my motivations and what has lead me to this study?

The impetus for this research has been my family's experiences with the education system. As a child and young adolescent I listened to many stories about my family's history and the experience with schooling had a profound impact on the life trajectory of the three generations of my family that surround me. The opportunities I have had to work in schools across Queensland as an Indigenous Teacher Aide and Liaison Officer gave me insights to the daily impact that these roles have on the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. I hope that my research has also created awareness of the crucial role of these positions in the education system.

Who will be impacted and how will I ensure the impact is positive and enriching?

This question has remained at the fore of my research planning and decision-making from the beginning. Even prior to my confirmation of candidature and ethics approval the decision to undertake a PhD program prompted deliberation of those who would be involved and ensuring their involvement was, at all times, positive and enriching. As I reflect on this aspect of my research I take assurance from the fact that no issues or concerns have been raised by my Elders, Cultural Guides, community stakeholders, participants and my supervision team in

relation to my conduct as a researcher nor any adverse effects experienced by the researched and other contributors. Since collecting the stories from my participants I have interacted with many of them in the community. At appropriate times I have discussed with them my progress and expressed my gratitude for their participation. The honouring of their stories will continue to be my priority for the rest of my life.

What are my worldviews and how do these effect how I see the researched?

This question has been a constant cause of critical self-reflection and has been my greatest revelation as I have learned about myself as an Aboriginal woman and Aboriginal researcher. The longer I engaged in this research process the more my worldview became clearer for me. My view of the world is as a Darumbal woman living on Darumbal lands. I see the world in the context of my ties to this ancient place as the core of my ontology. It is my Darumbal-ness that has emanated strongly through this research because of the centrality of Aboriginal land and place in my study. Thus, my view of the participants, the research site and the community in all layers of historical, social and political contexts are specifically as a Darumbal woman.

Who owns this research?

As I've considered this research as a ceremony I have likened the extent of my involvement in it as the 'host' and the 'performance' has been guided by Indigenous scholars from across the world. However, the ceremony is allowed to be conducted only with the permission of the Custodians of the land on which it is performed. The knowledge I have created or at least contributed to in this study belongs to my collective group congruent with epistemic societies. As such, the ownership of this research belongs to the Darumbal people.

Finally, this research has facilitated my own evolution as a Darumbal woman and as a mother of Darumbal children. I have learned through my mistakes and challenges about who I am as a researcher and what priorities and concerns are central to my ambitions. This journey has brought me into deeper relationship with Darumbal country and the people who live here. I end this thesis with words from Grande (2010) in respect to the type of hope that grounds Indigenous epistemologies and encapsulates my presence and participation in the Indigenous research ceremony.

> This is, however, not the future-centred hope of the Western imagination but rather a hope that lives in contingency with the past—one that trusts the beliefs and understandings of our ancestors, the power of traditional knowledge and the possibilities of new understandings. (p. 250)

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Appendix A: Elders' Permission to Conduct Research on Darumbal Country

From: Darumbal Enterprises

To: Melinda Mann-Yasso

Subject: RE: Education Research Study—Rockhampton and Yeppoon sites

Date: Monday, 20 April 2015 12:25:10 PM

Attachments: image003.png

Dear Melinda,

I would just like to advise that the Directors of Darumbal Enterprises Pty Ltd and Darumbal Native Title Applicants are fully supportive of your research program and wish you every success with your endeavours in that regard.

Regards,

[redacted]

Darumbal

From: Melinda Mann-Yasso [mailto:m.mann-yasso@cqu.edu.au]
Sent: Wednesday, 8 April 2015 11:02 AM
To: [redacted]
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: Education Research Study—Rockhampton and Yeppoon sites

Gudamulli Countrymen,

I am writing to you to discuss a research project which I hope to do as part of my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program at CQU. I am asking for approval from Darumbal Traditional Owners representatives to conduct my research on these countries.

You may or may not know that I work in the education field. My research, which is not part of my work but similar to it, is about the school stories of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have completed Year 11 and/or 12 in the Rockhampton and Yeppoon areas since 2010 and who are currently working or studying at university or TAFE. My research aims to understand what their school experiences were like, what was and wasn't important to them and how they made their decisions about post-school pathways. My research uses a positive approach and will highlight the resilience and determination of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our local communities. It will also highlight the importance to education policy-makers to listen to the voices of our young people in post-school transitions.

I am committed to respecting the personal stories of participants. I will do this by checking that my interpretation of their school stories is accurate and appropriate. Only when participants feel comfortable with my interpretation will their stories be used in my research. My process to select six to eight participants will be to make contact with Indigenous stakeholders such as organisations, agencies and community representatives to nominate potential participants. This will eliminate the risk of biased selection on my part since I am part of the community that I would like to research.

Participants will be given an information sheet and I will discuss my research with them before they consent in writing to being part of the study. Participants are free to leave the study whenever they like—there is no obligation for them to continue. They will also have the option of being anonymous in which case an alias name will be used or alternatively, participants may wish to be identified to show their ownership of their story. I will need to interview each participant two to three times. My questions have been prepared and are open-ended so that it is a conversation-style interview.

I am seeking written approval (email or signed letter) from Darumbal Enterprises to conduct this research on Darumbal country. Evidence of your support is required before CQU approves my Ethics Application. I believe this research will be a positive experience for the participants that will be involved. I am happy to discuss further before your consent is given. I am also able to provide updates to you at any stage of the research as well as an overview

of the findings once the data collection and analysis are completed. I can be reached on XX or at m.mann-yasso@cqu.edu.au.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you.

Regards,

Melinda Mann

RHD Student, CQUniversity Australia

Appendix B: Research Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

Education For the Life Success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Principal Researcher:

Melinda Mann (Doctor of Philosophy Student), CQUniversity

Email: melinda.mann@cqumail.com

Dr Teresa Moore (supervisor), CQ University

Email: t.moore@cqu.edu.au Ph: 07) 4930 6944

Research Purpose:

This project will help to understand what it is like for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who completed Year 11 and 12 at school in or after 2010. It aims to shed light on the reality of completing high school for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The research values the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people to more fully understand the issues that affect Indigenous Australians. These stories can tell us what it is really like for this student group to experience the final years of schooling.

Participant Requirements:

Participants of the research must identify and be accepted in their community as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Participants must reside and work or studies on the lands of the Darumbal people during the time interviews are conducted. They must have completed senior phase of secondary school in or after 2010. Participants must be studying, training or employed.

Interview Procedure:

Participation involves two semi-structured interviews with the researcher and an invitation to participate in a Yarning Circle. Each interview will be approximately 60-90mins. The interviews will use open-ended questions so that participants can describe their experiences at school and their post-school pathway.

Privacy and Anonymity:

Information collected from participants may contain identifiable characteristics (eg. name, dates of enrolment etc.). It is the participant's right to be identified with all or some of their information. For example, participants may want to 'own' their story and have their real name recorded. However, coded or fictitious names can be used to protect participant anonymity. Data will be stored on a secured computer file by the primary researcher.

Right to Withdraw

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should a participant choose to withdraw from the research at any point they are free to do so. Any information collected prior to withdrawal will be used only after express permission from the participant is given.

Further Information

Please contact CQUniversity's Office of Research (Tel +61 (7) 4923 2607 Email: research-enquiries@cqu.edu.au) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project

Appendix C: Research Consent Form

Education For the Life Success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People

Conducted for the Doctor of Philosophy Program 2015, Melinda Mann—CQUniversity

I understand that:

- I have read the Information Sheet
- I have raised any questions or concerns with the researcher who has in turn provided answers to my satisfaction
- My participation is entirely voluntary
- I reserve the right for my information to be identified using my actual name or anonymous and excluded from the research report and the researcher may use a code or fictitious name to substitute my actual name
- Further, I understand the final report will be presented to CQUniversity as part of the Doctor of Philosophy Program and to the communities located on the lands of the Darumbal people through appropriate forums
- I can request a copy of the research outcomes presented in plain English
- I agree that I am providing informed consent to participate in this project

Participant Full Name:		
Participant Signature:		Date:
Researcher:	Melinda Mann	
Researcher Signature:		Date:

I wish to have a plain English statement of results and outcomes from this project.	Yes	No
Forwarding email/postal address:		

Appendix D: Interview Schedule 1

Interviewee Name:	**Date:**	**Venue:**

Step 1:

Introduction researcher and participant

Discuss the research including purpose, intention and structure of data collection

Step 2:

	Key Response Areas	**Ideas/Leads**
Question 1 Who are your 'Mob'? Where did you grow up? How are you connected to this region?		
Question 2 Do you have a particular role in your family? If so, can you describe it?		
Question 3 What role did education have in your family?		
Question 4 What does 'having an education' *mean* to you?		
Question 5 Tell me about school, what was that experience like for you?		
Question 6 What helps you make decisions about your future?		
Question 7 Besides your current job/study or training program what are other skills/knowledge important for you to learn? How and who teaches you these other skills/knowledge?		

Question 8 What does it mean for you to be employed/studying?		
Question 9 Has your job/study or training program changed the way you think about what school was like for you?		
Question 10 Has your job/study or training program changed the way you see your future?		
For post interview reflection If you could write a letter or have a conversation with your 15 yo self what would you say?		

Appendix E: Post Interview One Immediate Reflections

(to be completed within 60mins of the interview)

How did I feel this interview went?	
How comfortable did the participant engage with the questions on a scale of 0–10. (0=not engaged; 10=excellent engagement)	
What were the keywords/phrases did the participant use?	
What were the key points the participant made?	
What leads have I got the Interview 2?	
What could I have done better?	

Appendix F: Post Interview One Delayed Reflections

(to be completed within 24-48 hours of the interview)

How did I feel this interview went?	
How comfortable did the participant engage with the questions on a scale of 0–10. (0=not engaged; 10=excellent engagement)	
What were the keywords/phrases did the participant use?	
What were the key points the participant made?	
What leads have I got the Interview 2?	
What could I have done better?	

Appendix G: Interview Schedule Two

Interviewee Name:	**Date**:	**Venue**:

Step 1:

Provide overview questions and responses from Interview 1. Ask for participant's reflections on Interview One concluding question *If you could write a letter or have a conversation with your 15 yo self what would you say?*

Step 2:

	Key Response Areas	Ideas/Leads
Question 1 Why did you decide to stay at school in Years 11 and 12?		
Question 2 Would you describe completing school as a 'success'?		
Question 3 What is 'success' to you?		
Question 4 What were the biggest challenges you faced at school?		
Question 5 Did you experience any pressure from peers, teachers, family or others?		

Question 6 Who has influenced you to help you get you to where you are today?		
Question 7 How important is family to you?		
Question 8 Do you feel that your teachers understood you? If yes, why do you think this? If no, why do you think this?		
Question 9 Do you think there were any differences between your experiences in Yr 11/12 and what non-Indigenous students experienced in Yr 11/12?		
Question 10 What do you think was important for you to learn before you left school?		
Question 11 What do you think you are responsible for now in terms of your future?		

Appendix H: Post Interview Two Immediate Reflections

(to be completed within 60 mins of the interview)

How did I feel this interview went?	
How comfortable did the participant engage with the questions on a scale of 0–10. (0=not engaged; 10=excellent engagement)	
What were the keywords/phrases did the participant use?	
What were the key points the participant made?	
What leads have I got the Interview 2?	
What could I have done better?	

Appendix I: Post Interview Two Delayed Reflections

(to be completed 24-48 hours after the interview)

How do I feel about this interview?	
What did I find challenging about the interview?	
What is this particular data set saying to me?	
What are my initial thoughts about emerging themes?	

Appendix J: Yarning Circle One—Questions

1. Do you think you had a voice in decisions made about and for Indigenous students?
   - If yes, describe what those decisions were
   - If not, do you think it would have been beneficial?
2. Did you learn about Indigenous culture at school?
   - If yes, describe what you learned?
   - If no, do you think learning about Indigenous culture at school would have made for a better school experience?
3. Was there a sense of 'community' or 'family' amongst the Indigenous students at your school?
   - If yes, describe what that family/community was like and what impact it had on you?
   - If no, why wasn't there a family/community of Indigenous students? Do you think it would have improved your school experience if there were?
4. Did the Indigenous student community at your school have a visible presence? If so, did you make yourselves seen and how do you think others 'saw' you
5. Do you think Indigenous students are more independent then non-Indigenous students when it comes to taking care of themselves at home and at school? If so, why do you think that is?
6. What are the most valuable relationships you had when you were in school and who were those relationships with?
7. One of the things that came out through my research is the notion of 'hope'. It was something that other Indigenous people said was something they held on to and were motivated by. Would you agree that Indigenous students are inspired by a sense of hope? If so, how would you describe that sense of hope?
8. Do you think your school had high, low or appropriate levels of expectation of what you could achieve academically?
   - Did those expectations have any influence over your motivation to achieve academically?
   - Do those expectations have any influence over you now that you've left school?
9. What were the most valuable life skills you learned at school?
10. Reflecting as young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, can you think of any other way your life has been impacted by your experiences at school?

Appendix K: Yarning Circle Two—Questions

1. If you can reflect on what life has been like for you since you've left school, is it what you expected it to be like?
    a. If it isn't what you expected what are the noticeable differences between your expectations in high school compared to your reality now?
    b. If it is what you expected why were you able to have such realistic expectations of what life would be like for you after school?
2. Has the reality of work, study and life in general motivated you to set goals for you to achieve (career, financial, lifestyle)?
    a. Were these goals you had in high school that you are continuing to pursue?
    b. If not, why do you think you've set these goals now?
3. Can you describe some of the positive things that you have been involved in or achieved since you have been in the workforce and/or studying?
4. Have you faced any challenges since you've started working and studying? If so, can you please describe what those have been?
5. Tell me what it's like to be a young Darumbal person living and working on Darumbal country?
    a. Do you think your experiences are different compared to other Indigenous Year 12 graduates who are now working/studying? If so, how?
6. How would you describe your community? Who does it consist of?
7. What are the ingredients for a 'healthy' Indigenous community?
8. What does 'success' look like for young people in this community?