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The transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities across Western Australia

David James Mander
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The Transition Experience to Boarding School for Male Aboriginal Secondary School Students from
Regional and Remote Communities across Western Australia.

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Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

The Faculty of Community, Health and Science

School of Psychology

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)

12th July 2012

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School
Declaration of Original Authorship

I certify that this thesis to the best of my knowledge and belief does not incorporate without acknowledgement any materials previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of high education. It does not contain any previously published or written material by another author except where due reference has been made in the text.

Signature: David J Mander

Date: 12th July 2012

Acknowledgements

Foremost, I acknowledge the *Whadjuk* people who are the traditional owners and custodians of the land upon which this thesis has been written. I pay respect to their ancestors, heritage and the ongoing relationship they have with the land that Edith Cowan University is located on.

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Thank you to the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and in particular former Executive Director Mrs. Audrey Jackson and the current Executive Director Mrs. Valerie Gould. The support received during the formative stages of this research was instrumental in enabling it to come to fruition. I also acknowledge and thank Mrs. Frances van Riessen of the AISWA for her support during the early stages of this research.

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that sections of this document such as the literature review may contain reference to people who may now be deceased. Their actions, experiences, thoughts and work are important and should continue to shape the present and the future.

Abstract

The experience of transitioning to boarding schools away from home for Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities in Australia has not received the attention it deserves (Calma, 2009; Dodson, 2009). The weight of public discourse and a paucity in research provided strong testimony for undertaking the current study. Moreover, it was evident the voice of those Aboriginal students undertaking the experience was absent from this public dialogue and the literature. This qualitative research investigated from a social constructionist perspective how 32 male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities constructed meaning and understanding around the experience of studying away from home at five boarding schools located in Perth, Western Australia (WA). While students' experiences with being away at boarding school were explored, it also investigated how meaning was constructed around the experience of having a child away from home for 11 parents and the experience for 16 staff employed at boarding schools in supporting students. Congruent with the assertions of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003) this research was supported by an Aboriginal Advisory Group.

A narrative interviewing style was used to collect data from student, parent, and staff informants. Thematic analysis of the data revealed three major themes emerged for student informants, these were 1) Decision Making and the sub-themes of Choice-Less Choice and Opportunity 2) Organisational Climate and the sub-themes of School Environment and Belonging, Culture Shock, Homesickness, Identity and Rites of Passage, Code-Switching, Teachers, Academic Expectations, Residential Life, and Friendships and Peer relations, and 3) Relational Change and the sub-themes of Family Dynamics, Friendships at home, and Cultural Connectedness. For parent informants the following major themes emerged from the data 1) Access, Standards and Quality, and the sub-themes of Declining Local Schools, Opportunity, and Worldliness 2) Parental Agency and the sub-themes of Parent-School Connection, Parenting Style, Communication, and Milestones and Siblings, and 3) Cultural Heritage and the sub-theme of Maintenance and Transmission. Finally, for staff informants the following major themes were identified 1) Indigenous Education and the sub-themes of Social Responsibility and Opportunity 2) Academic and Social Determinants and the sub-themes of Culture Shock, Homesickness, Friendships and Peer Support, Literacy and Numeracy, and Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Racism 3) Relationships and

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the sub-themes of Staff-Student Relationship, Staff-Parent Relationship, and School-Community Relationship.

The key findings from each informant group are reviewed. However, to provide a wider discussion of informant's experiences and constructions of the transition experience, attention is also drawn to meta-themes that were evident across the student, parent, and staff informant groups. The findings of this research are discussed in relation to policy and practice implications pertinent to boarding schools in WA. The strengths and limitations of the current research are considered and future research directions are suggested. This research offers a unique contribution to current understandings of the transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities.

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Introduction

Difficulty accessing and making choices about secondary education pathways is itself not a new revelation for Aboriginal families living in regional and remote areas of WA. Almost thirty years ago, the 1984 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* chaired by Mr. Kim Beazley described Aboriginal children as the most disadvantaged group in the education system (Department of Education [DoE], 1984). The inquiry, which collected over 2000 individual and organisation submissions from across the State, linked this circumstance with a history of disadvantage, poor health and living conditions, cultural differences, and raised the issues of entrenched discrimination and racism within the education system. The inquiry found that undue stress and hardship was particularly experienced by Aboriginal families residing in regional and remote areas of the State because of the necessity to send their children away so they could continue their formal secondary education. The inquiry made a total of 272 recommendations and urged the State Government to take immediate action to address each. In a closing statement the inquiry committee argued that, “a bureaucratic approach will lack the confidence and support of Aboriginal people and without capitalising on the Aboriginal culture itself, changes will have little relevance” (DoE, 1984, p. 336).

Over two decades later, the largest epidemiological study conducted into the educational experiences of Aboriginal children and young people in WA - the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS), reported that an estimated 47 per cent of Aboriginal young people aged 15 to 17 years were no longer attending school. Drawing on an evidence base comprised of data gathered from 5,289 Aboriginal children and young people aged 0 to 17 years of age from 1,999 households and who attended 750 schools from across all regions of the State, the WAACHS found that residing in areas of low, high or extreme isolation in the State were correlated with being twice as likely to leave school early (Zubrick et al., 2006). The authors of the WAACHS surmised and saliently pointed out with regard to contemporary outcomes in Indigenous Education, “[the] fundamental issue is the failure over the past 30 years by education providers to improve the educational outcomes of the vast majority of Aboriginal school children” (Zubrick et al., 2006, p. vi).

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A national Indigenous Education taskforce appointed in 2001 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), noted that the transition experience from primary school to secondary school was especially difficult for those Aboriginal young people who had to leave their local community to commence their secondary education (MCEETYA, 2001). The taskforce outlined that, “not knowing what to expect, homesickness, distance from family and community support, lack of local support, poor literacy levels and shame at not succeeding [at school] lead many young Indigenous people to drop out” (MCEETYA, 2001, p. 11). A national review of Indigenous Education outcomes by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) reported that the transition from primary school to secondary school was particularly difficult for Indigenous males who had to relocate from their local community and family to attend a secondary school (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). The MCEETYA appointed taskforce and the ACER review identified that for many Aboriginal young people, the necessity to leave their community to continue their secondary education often also coincided with important cultural transitions and psychological needs during early adolescence such as developing a sense of identity, self-worth, and self-esteem (MCEETYA, 2001; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

However, the extent of Government and official understandings of the complexities of Indigenous Education both nationally and in WA has been questioned (Beresford, 2001; Beresford & Gray, 2006; Gray & Beresford, 2008). Moreover, literature has suggested that the impact of adjusting to a school away from home and family for Aboriginal young people in remote communities is greater than simply negotiating the logistics of shifting from one school to another, or than measuring school attendance, literacy and numeracy, and retention rates (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). At the individual level, a recent review of the incidence of anxiety experienced by Aboriginal young people also reported that the transition to secondary school can be particularly stressful for those from remote communities (Adermann & Campbell, 2010). The review outlined that the necessity to leave their community and family to continue their secondary education combined with being away from familiar social support structures and encountering language, social, and cultural differences, not only elevated the likelihood of experiencing anxiety but also heightened the possibility of early disengagement from school (Adermann & Campbell, 2010). Such research suggests a range of risk factors exists for Aboriginal young people as they negotiate and undertake the transition experience to schooling away from home.

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At the family level, a sense of uncertainty still remains for many Aboriginal families in regional and remote areas of WA as to how to secure an optimal secondary education and educational experience for their children (Prout, 2008, 2009). Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Dr. Tom Calma noted in the 2009 annual report for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) that access to secondary education in remote areas across Australia remained, “a subject high on rhetoric and low on funding ... [and that] there are many remote [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] communities across Australia with no reasonable access to secondary education” (HREOC, 2009, p. 142-143). In WA, the 2009-2010 annual report for the Country High School Hostels Authority (CHSHA)¹ indicated that most remote community schools in the Kimberley region of the State, “do not have the capacity to meet students’ secondary education needs” (CHSHA, 2010, p. 18). The CHSHA reported that many Aboriginal families in remote communities were inclined to utilise boarding schools outside of the Kimberley region, as they believed this was the only option available to ensure that their children completed secondary schooling. This circumstance in WA has not only made it difficult for Aboriginal families to perceive a secondary education pathway that is distant from home and located in an environment that is different to the familiarity of their local community; but also to perceive how appropriate social and cultural support, and care arrangements, will be provided to assist their children while they were away (Prout, 2008, 2009).

At an estimated 2.5 million square kilometres WA is geographically the largest State in Australia (see Figure 1), but has a small population relative to its overall size (Department of the Attorney General [DotAG], 2009). In comparison, New Zealand is estimated to be 270,000 square kilometres in total size and the United Kingdom is approximately 243,600 square kilometres. Perth, the capital city of WA, has been described as the most remote capital city in the world (Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2002) being closer to Singapore and Jakarta in Indonesia, than to its own Australian national capital city of Canberra (DotAG, 2009). Subsequently, vast distances exist between regional WA communities and Perth. For example, the flight from Kununurra in the East Kimberley to Perth takes an estimated four and a half hours. An equivalent flight from the United Kingdom’s capital city of London would get one to Athens in Greece, Berlin in Germany, and Istanbul in Turkey. Of the estimated 2.3 million people in WA over 70 per cent reside in or

¹ The State Government agency responsible for administering nine regional and one city residential colleges specifically for students residing in isolated and remote locations across the State to enable students to pursue a secondary education.

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around the metropolitan area of Perth in the south of the State (Australian Bureau of Statistics
[ABS], 2011). The different regions and districts of WA are presented in Figure 1.

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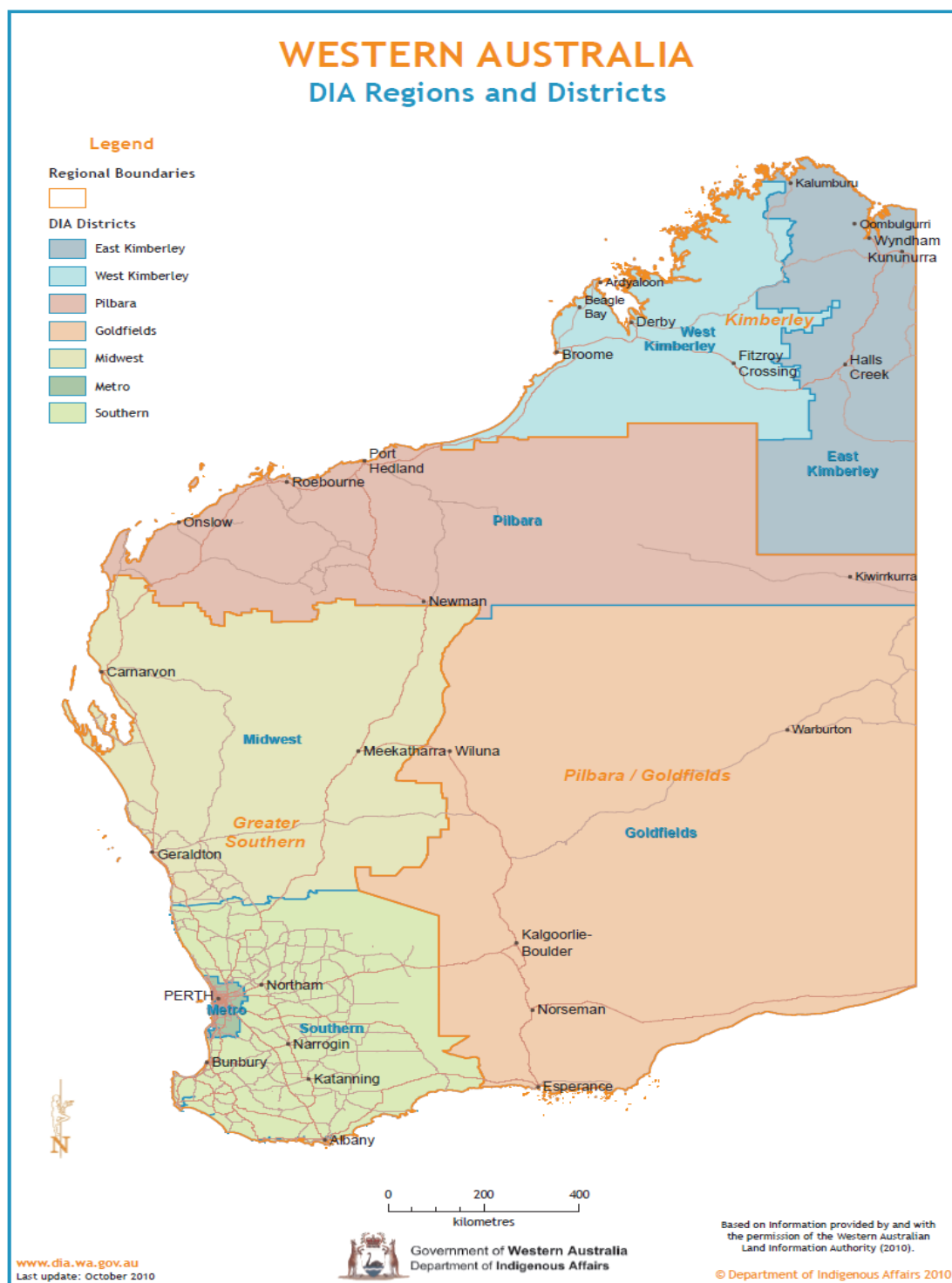


Figure 1. The Regions and Districts of Western Australia as delineated by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), Western Australia.

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Although over one-third of the estimated seventy thousand Aboriginal people in WA reside in or around Perth, 59 per cent or the majority of Aboriginal people reside outside of Perth (DIA, 2010²). In the Perth region there are an estimated 18 Aboriginal people per 1,000 persons; this contrasts sharply with the Kimberley region at 500 Aboriginal people per 1,000 persons (Department of Regional Development and Lands [DRDL], 2006). Similarly, the Midwest region at an estimated 116, Goldfields/Esperance at 117, and the Pilbara at 184 Aboriginal people per 1,000 persons, are notably higher than the estimated average for Perth (DRDL, 2006). A number of important reasons underpin the distribution pattern of Aboriginal people in WA. Foremost, a diverse number of Aboriginal tribes and language groups exist across the State rather than a single homogenous group (Collard, 2000; Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). Each Aboriginal tribe and group has a distinct sense of belonging with place and people (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010) which is closely linked with relationships to kinship and spirituality (Dudgeon, Garvey, & Pickett, 2000). A submission by the Kimberley Land Council to the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* estimated that 30 distinct Aboriginal languages existed in the Kimberley region alone (HREOC, 2000a). Hence, living close to or on traditional lands – often referred to as ‘country’ (Garvey, 2007), is regarded by many Aboriginal people as central to a positive sense of self, belonging and identity, as well as maintaining obligations to ancestors and the land (Dudgeon et al., 2010). The Aboriginal tribes and groups in WA, as reported by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, are presented in Figure 2.

² DIA figures calculated according to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census. In 2006 an estimated 77,928 Aboriginal people lived in WA, comprising 3.5% of the State’s overall population (ABS, 2006).

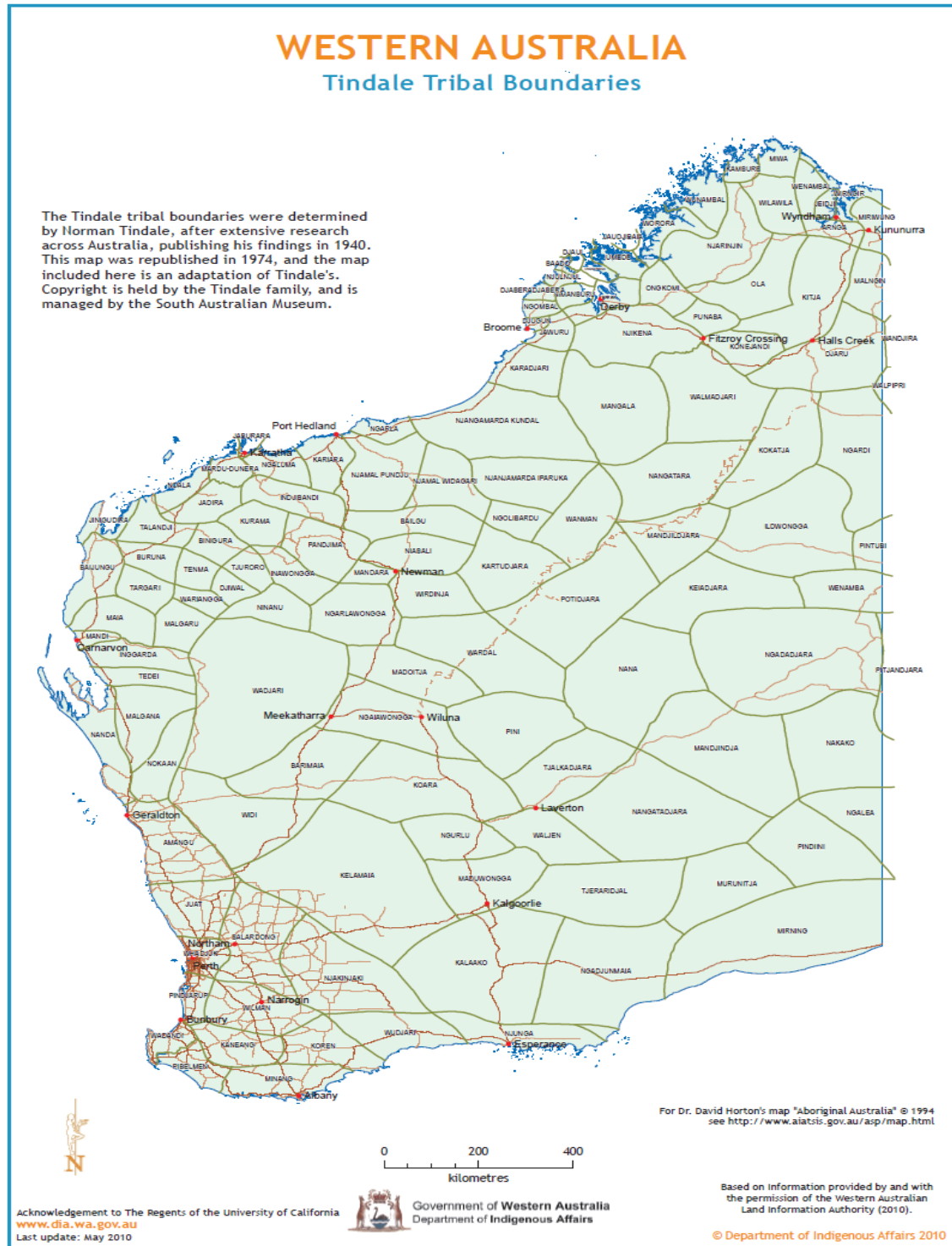


Figure 2. The Boundaries Aboriginal Tribes in Western Australia as reported by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), Western Australia.

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In addition to State Government inquiries and reviews into Indigenous education, extensive public debate has emerged over the risks and benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from remote communities completing their secondary education at boarding schools. The intensity of this public debate has heightened in recent years, in response to a surge in Federal Government and philanthropic ventures aimed at offering scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional and remote communities to attend high performing and elite boarding schools in cities (Doyle & Hill, 2008). Some of the headlines in the State and National tabloids have included:

- Escape plan of Aboriginal students (Karvelas, 2007)
- Fears for Indigenous students (Ferrari, 2008a)
- Hard road for Indigenous boarders (Hall, 2010)
- No danger of another Stolen Generation (Pearson, 2004)
- Rescue our kids from chaos (Rintoul & Robinson, 2008)
- School push totally inappropriate (Robinson & Hall, 2010)
- Schooled in denial of systemic, creeping apartheid (Caro, 2009)
- White trash let Aborigines down (Ferrari, 2008b).

As the above headlines imply, the premise of Aboriginal students attending boarding schools away from home and family has been highly contested while also linked with the assimilation policy of the 1950s to 1970s and paralleled with creating a new Stolen Generation³. Increased Federal Government funding for programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to attend a boarding schools has also been viewed as a band-aid solution that often only cherry-picks a few students, whilst failing to attend to the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in regional and remote communities (Sarra, 2008). Similarly, others have described sending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to boarding school as a social experiment (P. Dodson as cited in Browning, 2008) and raised concern over the challenge of having to cope with the high expectations that accompany schooling away from home, as well as over the impact schooling away from home for extended periods of time has on

³ The Assimilation Policy was a racially prejudiced political agenda in Australia during the 1950s-1970s responsible for enabling State and Territory Governments to forcibly take Aboriginal children away from their parents, decimating many families across in nation and conceiving a generation of Aboriginal children of which many identify as the 'Stolen Generation' (Haebich, 2008).

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young people's sense of connection with family, community, and cultural identity (P. Dodson as cited in Browning, 2008). By contrast, others have challenged the proposition that sending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to boarding school mimics assimilation policy and is akin to creating a new Stolen Generation (Pearson, 2009). Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership in Queensland Noel Pearson, has argued that in the context of social disadvantage, inequitable access and standards of secondary education available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in regional and remote communities across Australia, boarding schools instead offer an important and necessary educational pathway that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to experience hope for a better future (Pearson, 2009). To this end, Pearson has asserted that unless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in remote communities across the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland attend high-quality and high-expectation secondary boarding schools away from home, they stand little or no chance of acquiring the educational skills essential to successfully negotiating the demands of contemporary society as an adult (Pearson, 2009).

Despite the breadth of debate, as well as decades of State and Federal Government awareness to the educational needs of Aboriginal families in regional and remote communities, little research has exclusively explored the experience for Aboriginal children of studying away from home at a boarding school. A review of the scholarly literature found that no prior psychology doctoral projects have investigated the topic at hand. A number of doctoral projects have made salient contributions to Indigenous Education, for example - Gray, (2000); Scrimgeour, (2001); Gribble, (2002); Green, (2004); Sarra, (2005); Biddle (2007); Thomas, (2007); Rahman, (2010). Similarly, a number of doctoral projects have researched Australian boarding schools, for example - Cree (1991); Downs (2001); White (2004a); and also made notable contributions understanding the transition from primary to secondary school in Australia - Ganeson, (2006); Hine, (2001); Johnstone, (2011); Towns, (2011); Vaz, (2011). However, no doctoral research was found that specifically investigated the experience for Aboriginal secondary school students of studying away from home at a boarding school from a WA perspective.

The necessity to address this paucity in research was emphasised by Professor Michael Dodson⁴ during his 2009 Australian of the Year speech. Professor Dodson outlined the necessity to

⁴ Brother of Professor Patrick Dodson.

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shift beyond contesting Indigenous Education from within the narrow margins of discursive binary discourse and the repository of individuals own fears and anxieties, and instead challenge Australia as a nation to manoeuvre towards creating a shared space within a new discourse that extends the threshold of either-or scenarios (M. Dodson, 2009). In suggesting a way forward Professor Dodson urged for the problems of Indigenous Education in remote communities to move beyond debate and for all educational pathways for Indigenous children to be carefully examined. He asserted:

Some of us might think the solution lies in sending kids from remote communities to boarding schools: some that we should be teaching them, as white kids are taught in rural areas, in their own country, on their own turf. Others might think that the solution lies in building boarding schools in regional centres. Some might think we need to develop specially trained teachers to work with Indigenous children and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some might think there's a lot to be gained by recruiting more willing volunteers – by calling on the good will in the Australian community that we see on spectacular display every time there's a disaster of some kind. Good will – and expertise. I want us to carefully examine all approaches, rather than falling into the trap of imagining there's just one answer that suits every situation, or one mantra under which every problem and every community can find shelter. (M. Dodson, 2009, p. 9)

At the 2009 Dare to Lead National Conference in Adelaide, South Australia, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Dr. Calma further emphasised that Indigenous Education was at crossroads. He described both current policy and policy reform agendas as inadequate and as especially inequitable for those families that resided in remote communities. Both Professor Dodson (2009) and Dr. Calma (2009) stressed that the issue of Indigenous young people schooling away from home at boarding school to complete their secondary education necessitated greater understanding. Such statements combined with the weight of public discourse and paucity in research, provided strong testimony for undertaking the current research. In addition, although a diverse body of voices have contributed to both government and public debate, it was evident the voice of those Aboriginal young people actually undertaking the experience was absent from this dialogue. This absence suggested that few dialogic spaces existed for Aboriginal young people to not only share their experiences and perceptions, but equally speak back to adult-centric representations of boarding school and renew understandings. Hence, a need also existed for research to shift away from only viewing Aboriginal young people as the 'topic of discussion', to instead positioning them as the starting point and

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pivotal to informing how meaning and understanding was constructed about the experience of schooling away from home at boarding school.

Thesis overview.

It is important to articulate the boundaries of the present research. It was intended to neither advocate for or against boarding schools, nor to privilege boarding school above other secondary education pathways. It did not attempt to exclusively examine experiences from a single boarding school rather it brought together a number of experiences from across five boarding schools. In saying this, the intention was not to generalise the experience of boarding school but rather to offer an in-depth exploration of this social phenomenon in its complexity and entirety against the wider contexts such as history, Indigenous Education policy, and social diversity. It was not designed to be comparative research between age groups, genders, education sectors or between Aboriginal students and other ethnic student groups in Australia, although these were all aspects to which it collectively referred. The primary aim of the current research was to investigate how the meaning of this experience was constructed by male Aboriginal boarding students, as opposed to measuring the outcome of this experience for students. While students' experiences of being away at boarding school were explored, it also investigated how meaning was constructed around the experience for parents of having a child away from home at boarding school and the experience for staff in supporting students. The over arching research questions were as follows:

1. How do male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school?
2. How do parents of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of having a child studying at a boarding school?
3. How do members of staff at boarding schools construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school, of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities?

This qualitative research was monitored and supported by an Aboriginal Advisory Group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2003; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). The advisory group indicated that it was more appropriate for the

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researcher to focus on the experiences of male Aboriginal young people. A number of reasons informed this position. Foremost, Aboriginal young people place a strong sense of importance on observing cultural gender roles (Dudgeon, 2000; Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Trugden, 2000). Adherence to cultural gender roles means that “discussions of private matter... rarely occur between Aboriginal people of the opposite gender” (Westerman, 2010, p. 217). A key premise underpinning of this research was to cause no harm (NHMRC, 2003, 2005). In the context of psychological research, a lack of sensitivity and consideration given to the importance of cultural gender roles and obligations could not only risk having informants experiencing social and emotional discomfort, but effectively place informants in a position which directly conflicts with their ability to adhere to cultural gender roles and obligations (Akbar, Dudgeon, Gilchrist, & Pitt, 2000; Vicary & Bishop, 2005; Westerman, 2010). Given the nature of the phenomenon under study and the gender of the researcher being male, a consensus was reached that it was more suitable to focus on the experiences of male Aboriginal students.

A qualitative inquiry paradigm was deemed methodologically appropriate given the research aimed to investigate how meaning and understanding was constructed around an experience. Consultation with the Aboriginal Advisory Group prior to conducting the current research emphasised that a qualitative approach was appropriate as it more aligned with knowledge exchange practices preferred by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Garvey, 2007; Nakata, 2007). The focus on the meaning of experiences for individuals meant this research was ontologically congruent with phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Phenomenological research describes social phenomena as it lived and experienced by individuals rather than measuring and quantifying an abstracted explanatory account (Crotty, 1996). A social constructionist epistemology was used to generate insights into how informants interpreted and formed meaning around their experiences. Social constructionism emphasises that meaning making occurs neither within individual minds, nor outside of them, but rather emerges from the everyday social relationships between people and is framed by language and historical contexts (Gergen, 2001a, 2011). A narrative interviewing approach was used to collect data from informants as it was culturally, pragmatically, and theoretically the most appropriate way to explore each of the three over arching research questions (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai Smith, 2008; Riessman, 2008).

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The structure of this dissertation has been organised into four main sections. These are titled; Literature Review; Methodology; Findings; Implications and Future Directions. Each main section is composed of chapters which begin with an overview and conclude with a summary. A recurring motif throughout the structure of chapters in this manuscript is reference to, and the inclusion of, counsel provided by the Aboriginal Advisory Group. These contributions are clearly identified and referenced by the researcher and frequently positioned at the beginning of the chapters. The inclusion of contributions made by an advisory group may cause some to question what constitutes authentic scholarship. Ethical research in Aboriginal contexts commands the construction and maintenance of collaborative and participatory relationships throughout the whole research journey (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], 2003, 2005). Moreover, a growing body of contemporary literature advocates that to engage in constructive, ethical, and respectful research with Aboriginal communities, researchers need to deliberately disrupt and deconstruct traditional research paradigms in favour of embracing the opportunity to forge new research frameworks and relationships at the cultural interface (Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai Smith, 2008; Drew, 2006; Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Garvey, 2007; Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008; Vicary & Bishop, 2005).

The first section of this thesis, the literature review, is composed of Chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 presents the reader with a brief overview of the socio-historical context of Indigenous Education in WA – in particular it pays close attention to the role of dormitories, government hostels, and other forms of boarding facilities such as government cottages, and reformatories in shaping the experiences of Aboriginal peoples with education in WA. The contemporary implications of history for Aboriginal children and young people are also discussed. Chapter 2 presents a review of adolescence, transition, and boarding schools with particular attention given to the prior literature pertaining to Aboriginal student's experiences at boarding school, including an estimate of the prevalence of Aboriginal boarding students.

The second section of this manuscript contains the methodology and comprised Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 reviews the past relationship of psychological research with Aboriginal people and the implications for conducting research today. Orthodox Western research practices were critiqued and challenged, and attention was drawn to the concept of Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) and Indigenist research methodologies at the cultural interface. Chapter 4 describes the ontological, epistemological and methodological orientation applied as well as

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information about how student, parent, and staff informants were recruited. It also outlines how the data collected was managed, analysed, and findings validated.

The third section presents the research findings and is composed of Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Chapter 5 provides a synthesis of the data collected from interviews conducted with student informants. The three major themes of 'Decision Making', 'Organisational Climate', and 'Relational Change' are presented with evidence for accompanying sub-themes. Chapter 6 provides a synthesis of the data collected from interviews conducted with parent informants. The three major themes of 'Access, Standards and Quality', 'Parental Agency', and 'Cultural Heritage' are presented with evidence for their accompanying sub-themes. Lastly, Chapter 7 provides a synthesis of the data collected from interviews conducted with staff informants, and the three major themes of 'Indigenous Education', 'Academic and Social Determinants', and 'Relationships' are presented with their accompanying sub-themes.

The fourth and final section of this manuscript is composed of Chapter 8 and labelled Implications and Future Directions. It draws attention to meta-themes evident across the reported findings and the implications of these for policy development and educational practice. Chapter 8 summarises the key findings of the current research and discusses policy and practice implications pertinent to Aboriginal young people and families in regional and remote areas of WA, boarding schools, and Indigenous Education. It also considers the limitations of the current research and suggests possible future research directions.

Please note that throughout this manuscript multiple terms have been used to refer to Aboriginal people, including *Aboriginal*, *Indigenous*, *Natives*, *Torres Strait Islander*, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*. This circumstance is a reflection of the many socio-historical constructions of Aboriginal people in Australian society since colonisation. However, Aboriginal people belong to different tribal nations and prefer to be identified by the nation of their respective people, such as *Bardi*, *Kija*, *Whadjuk*, *Yamatji*, *Yindjibarndi* (NHMRC, 2003). Hence, throughout this manuscript when citing literature authored by another researcher, the term used by that author to refer to Aboriginal people has been used. In all other instances, the term Aboriginal people was used.

SECTION ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.0 Chapter overview.

This chapter critiques the relationship between the political and historical experiences of Aboriginal people in Western Australia (WA) with contemporary educational and social experiences had by Aboriginal children and young people today. To achieve this, the intimate relationship of Indigenous Education with welfare policy and political agendas toward Aboriginal people in WA, in particular the agendas of amalgamation, protectionism and control, biological absorption, assimilation and integration, and self-determination and self-management, are reviewed. During these agendas the role of schools for the Natives, missions, dormitories, and other forms of boarding school/residential facilities such as State Government hostels and cottage homes are investigated. This is followed by a review of contemporary Indigenous Education and presents an overview of participation, retention, and academic outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. The chapter concludes by briefly considering wider social issues and contexts that influence the lives Aboriginal families in WA.

1.1 Why is history important?

The history of Indigenous Education in Australia has not been accorded the attention that it deserves (Beresford, 2012a). Experiences such as colonisation, massacres, genocide, the forcible removal of children from families, social and cultural marginalisation, and racism have all made a contribution to the construction of the contemporary context of Indigenous Education (Beresford, 2001; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haebich, 2000, 2008; Hetherington, 2002; Zubrick et al., 2006). In addition, according to a comparative study commissioned by the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the historical legacy of boarding schools with Indigenous peoples of the world has had an intergenerational impact (Smith, 2009). Boarding schools were found to have been used as institutions of colonisation and assimilation and linked with, “cultural alienation, loss of language, disruptions in family and social structures, and increased community dysfunction” (Smith, 2009, p. 48). The study emphasised that to address the trauma caused by boarding schools it was necessary for contemporary policy-makers to be aware of the impact that colonisation has had on Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2009).

In Australia acknowledging a history of injustices experienced since colonisation is important (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997). While consulting

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with a member of the Aboriginal Advisory Group in the Pilbara town of Roebourne (see Figure 1), the importance of acknowledging history was vividly relayed to the researcher when discussing ideas about the format of the current research:

You gotta paint them [the reader] the history. What my grandfather, my great grandfather, and [name of wife] grandfather, great grandfather went through. They all fought to give us an opportunity. When they did win the right to be educated it was at a segregated school and they had to fight again to get to the next step, and so on and so forth. But they continued to fight all the way along, so we try and teach our kids all that history, all that history from the olden days. It's important for them [their children], so that they can sit down and absorb that. (M. Woodley, Personal Communication, December 26, 2009)

The above excerpt vividly illustrated the intergenerational impact of a socio-political history deeply rooted in discrimination, prejudice, and racism within one family. Moreover, the experience shared by this member of the advisory group lucidly highlighted how the past directly informed the construction of meaning in the present, and how such history was taught from one generation to the next so that it was not forgotten but carried into the future. As Collard (2000) pointed out, “we continually gaze back to contextualise the present” (p. 22). This point is especially important for psychology as a discipline which has only in the last few decades began to fully recognise the impact of Australia’s colonial history on Aboriginal people (Garvey, Dudgeon, & Kearins 2000; Rickwood, Dudgeon, & Gridley, 2010). Western accounts of the past continue to influence social constructions of Indigenous people in the present (Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008) and as the late Robert Riley emphasised:

[I]t was not possible for Aboriginal people to forget the history of dispossession and marginalisation: It is dishonest for others to argue that we should start now from a basis of equality. As with all other peoples, our past shapes our present and our future. (cited in Beresford, 2006, p. 5)

By understanding the implications of the past on people’s lives in the present, psychological systems and practitioners are better able to meet the diverse needs that exist within Australian society (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). Post-colonial theorists assert that a key strategy in moving beyond the spectre of colonisation is to acknowledge the worldview and centre the marginalised voice of those traditionally ignored and silenced (Fanon, 1965; Said, 1985). The employment of such an approach is thought to challenge and critique socio-political and historical constructions of disempowered and oppressed groups (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008), and also to recognise the interconnectedness between individual and societal

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School variables with psychological wellbeing (Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007). To this end, a particular focus in the next segment is directed at critiquing the role of schools for the Natives, missions, dormitories, and other forms of boarding school/residential facilities such as State Government hostels and cottage homes in WA.

1.2 A brief historical account of Indigenous education in Western Australia.

Prior to British settlement all Aboriginal tribes had a well established and highly developed system of transferring knowledge and skills from one generation to the next (Berndt, 1979; Broome, 2010; Trudgen, 2000). These education systems extended back over 40,000 to 70,000 years (Collard, 2000) and used a rich breadth of local technologies and real-life performance such as ceremony, dance, songs, storytelling, combined with teaching pedagogies such as observational learning, role modelling, model making and replication, to educate young learners and transmit knowledge and skills from one generation to the next (Collard, 2000; Beresford & Omaji, 1996; Bourke & Bourke, 2002; Ryan, 2001). In WA these education systems brought together intricate understandings of constellations, seasonal weather patterns, the geology of a landscape, the nutritional value of foods, and tidal cycles of the sea (Berndt, 1979; Department of Education [DoE], 2002; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007; 2008; Ryan, 2001). Such an education provided Aboriginal young people with valuable knowledge about their place and belonging in communal activities, environmental management, commerce and trade, as well as with the skills to manufacture resources such as hunting equipment and tools, and the production of medicines (Collard, 2000). These education systems were maintained for tens of thousands of years through well established kinship systems, through the efforts of parents and tribal Elders, and were delivered in accordance with strict rules set out by traditional Law (Berndt & Berndt, 1996; Bourke & Bourke, 2002; DoE, 2002; Dudgeon, Garvey, & Pickett, 2000; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007; 2008).

The education system in WA as it is recognised today can be traced back to the formative years of the Swan River Colony (Mossenson, 1972). On June 28th 1830, one year after the establishment of the Swan River Colony, the Colonial Secretary's office informed to settlers of the colony:

Notice is hereby given that a colonial school will be opened in the church on Monday morning next at nine o'clock the 5th July by Mr J. M. Cleland. Parents desirous of sending

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their children to it are requested to make application to the colonial secretary. (Cited in Haynes, Barrett, Brennan, & Brennan, 1976, p. 1)

A capitalist agenda permeated the colony (Fitch, 2003) and in assuming sovereignty Britain claimed the power of granting land tenure to settlers. Land grants were allocated in accordance to what assets settlers brought with them to the colony in terms of private enterprise, investment and capital (Russo & Schmitt, 1987). Parcels of 40 acres for every thirteen pound sterling worth of goods brought to the colony were given to settlers, with an additional 200 acres granted for each servant a settler brought with them (Russo & Schmitt, 1987). With education not yet compulsory and cheap manual labour scarce in the colony, land owners were reluctant to relinquish the labour services and economic value of their children (Hetherington, 2002). As more settlers steadily arrived from middle class backgrounds, many increasingly wanted more formalised instruction for their children. To satisfy this change in educational demand, small schools were established by independent settlers in their homes and as private business ventures for profit (Mossenson, 1972). Within this group of early private venture schools, some were described as “day, evening or boarding schools” (Hetherington, 2002, p. 47). Hence, the British practice of boarding children at a school was intimately connected with the formative years of the Swan River Colony.

While White settlers established their way of being, colonisation challenged traditional aspects of Aboriginal life. Conflict between White settlers and Aboriginal groups was ongoing. Indeed, it can be said the Swan River Colony was born out of bloody massacres that sought to disperse the local Aboriginal inhabitants and take possession of land (Collard, 2000). Within four years of settlement *Midgegooroo* and his son *Yagan* of the local *Whadjuk* tribe and reputed to have aided Captain Stirling during an earlier mapping expedition of the South-West Coastline of WA in 1827 (Millroy, 2009), were both executed by colonial authorities for protecting their traditional land from encroaching settlers (Green, 1995). In 1834 a force of private settlers, ex-soldiers and mounted police killed an estimated 70 to 80 people of the local Pinjarra *Binareb* tribe which included women and children (Statham, 2003). These early conflicts of the Swan River Colony set the tone for interactions over the coming decades between colonial authorities and Aboriginal people across WA (Green, 2008). In the Pilbara, the Flying Foam Massacre of 1868 culminated in 60 men, women and children of the *Yaburarra* tribe being killed (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation & Rijavec, 2004). Similarly, in 1897 *Jandamarra* of the *Bunuba* tribe in the Kimberley was hunted down and killed by a posse of mounted police and private settlers for

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resisting increasingly aggressive pastoralists attempting to take control over traditional *Bunuba* lands (Pedersen & Woorunmurra, 2007).

However, during the 1830s lobbyists across the British Empire actively began to challenge authorities about the slave industry and the practice by manufacturers of using children as a source of cheap manual labour (Hetherington, 2002). By 1833, their efforts turned to consider the treatment of Indigenous Peoples across the colonial territories of the Empire. Herman Merivale, the Under Secretary at the British Colonial Office increasingly recognised the negative impact colonisation had upon Indigenous populations (Broome, 2010; Reynolds, 2001). At the time, Merivale considered that only three viable options existed for Indigenous populations in the face of mass European exploration and colonisation (McNab, 1977). First was their complete extermination. Second, was to preserve Indigenous populations on protected reserves, or third to civilise Indigenous populations through their amalgamation with colonial settlements. The first two alternatives were discounted as they were incommensurate with a Christian ethos and the idea of protected reserves was dismissed given the difficulties observed in establishing reservations for Indian nations in North America (McNab, 1977). Rather, the third option of amalgamation was preferred as it not only promoted the civilising influence of colonial society but also offered the benefit of conversion to Christianity (McNab, 1977).

1.2.1 Amalgamation (1829 – 1880s).

Given the dearth of labour and capitalist grounding of the Swan River Colony, Governor John Hutt (1839-1846) encouraged local Aboriginal people to mingle with settlers, seek employment, and experience what he considered the benefits of service (Hetherington, 2002). The response of White settlers to this idea were polarised from the outset. In an anonymous letter to the Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal and entitled 'The Natives', it was argued that local Aboriginal people should be pursued and punished for killing stock of colonial settlers, and went on to describe Aboriginal people as an outrageous and obnoxious people prone to predatory habits and totally incapable of civilisation (Anonymous, 1840). Moreover, the proposal of amalgamating Aboriginal people into colonial society was described as sickening and instead it argued for the allocation of a reservation for local Aboriginal people that was away from the colony so that they could be policed more effectively by colonial authorities (Anonymous, 1840).

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Despite such views Wesleyan Reverend John Smithies lobbied for and established the Perth Native School in September 1840 (Hetherington, 2002), with the rules and regulations for the school formally published on August 14th, 1841 (Shenton, 1841). Rule and regulation number two emphasised that Aboriginal children who attended the school were “required to sleep at Mr. Armstrong’s, the Native Teacher’s House, as they have been placed under his care by their parents” (Shenton, 1841, p. 3). This arrangement involved students receiving two hours of instruction per day and separate boarding apartments being provided for Aboriginal boys and girls to sleep in (Shenton, 1841), arguably establishing the first Aboriginal boarding school in WA. Thus, the premise of Aboriginal children boarding at school has a direct connection with colonisation and a distinct place in the historical development of Indigenous education in WA.

Boarding Aboriginal children at the Perth Native School was argued to address three issues each of which had a tenuous connection with the provision of education, these were, 1) to socialise Aboriginal children with each other as a group and away from their parents, 2) to effectively separate Aboriginal children from the influence of traditional life, 3) foremost, to provide a cheap source of labour to colonial settlers and entrepreneurs (Shenton, 1841). Operational rules and regulations four, five, six, and seven for the Perth Native School all pertained to employment conditions to be provided by colonial employers, including the provision of clothing garments, the correction and improvement of Aboriginal children’s behaviour whilst employed, medical and sickness allowances whilst employed, and the granting of one day per two months employment for holiday leave (Shenton, 1841). Governor Hutt constructed the Perth Native School as a direct means by which to civilise Aboriginal children (Hetherington, 2002) and considered physical separation from their parents combined with exposure to a Christian ethos as critical to the transition from being primitive savages of little value, to fulfilling the roles of domestic servants and labour to colonial society (Green, 1995).

The period of amalgamation also brought with it the appointment of a Protector for Aborigines, a role conceived as overseeing and protecting the welfare of Aboriginal people in the colony. A year after the Perth Native School was opened, the Protector of Aborigines Charles Symmons wrote about the school in the 1841 protectors annual report, “[In] the present dearth of white labour, their [Aboriginal children] usefulness to the settler, either in domestic drudgery, or in the rural occupations of the farms, is daily becoming more apparent, and consequently more readily recognised” (Symmons, 1841). Based on the early success of the school, Protector

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Symmons supported the establishment of additional schools with dormitories and other necessary means to accommodate Aboriginal children (Hetherington, 2002). Over the following decade schools were established in Fremantle and Guildford (Chambers, 1991; Green, 1995) and settlers in the local vicinity of these schools employed Aboriginal children as a cheap source of labour during the daytime. When not working for settlers, evidence suggests that during instruction at school Aboriginal boys learnt to manufacture baskets and floor mats, whilst Aboriginal girls platted straw (Anonymous, 1841).

The provision of education to Aboriginal children, as minimal as it was, was deemed tolerable by both colonial authorities and White settlers while it offered a malleable and inexpensive workforce (Stone, 1974). However, for those Aboriginal children who attended these schools for the natives, many were often ridiculed by older members of their tribal group about their loss of freedom and for the clothing they had to wear (Green, 1995). With Governor Hutt's departure from the Swan River Colony in 1847, the Perth Native School was relocated to Wanneroo and then to York (Chambers, 1991). By 1855 the impetus for schooling Aboriginal children had dissipated, with the remaining schools for the natives disbanded and closed (Hetherington, 2002). Despite this, some Aboriginal children were still able to enrol at a school. For example, in 1846 two Spanish Benedictine monks Joseph Serra and Rosendo Salvado established a mission at New Norcia 150km to the north of the colony that offered schooling (Hetherington, 2002). Similarly, the Annesfield Native Institution located in Albany 400km to the south of the Swan River Colony was established in 1850 (Green, 1995). Both the Annesfield Native Institution and New Norcia Mission required Aboriginal children to live in dormitories on site and offered an education centred upon domestic duties for Aboriginal girls and farm work for Aboriginal boys, with basic literacy and numeracy often facilitated through religious instruction (Green, 1995; DoE, 2002; Haebich, 1988; 2000; Hetherington, 2002).

In the first 16 years of operation, it has been estimated that 55 Aboriginal children attended Annesfield Native Institution, of whom 17 died (Green, 1995). The introduction of the *Industrial Schools Act 1874* meant those Aboriginal parents who left children in the care of the New Norcia Mission so that they could seek work, often unsuspectingly also surrendered their legal guardianship of their children to the Mission (Hetherington, 2002). In 1874 an estimated 30 Aboriginal children attended the New Norcia Mission, under the new provisions of the *Industrial Schools Act 1874* and by 1895 the number had risen to 149 (Hetherington, 2002). The New Norcia

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Mission continued to have Aboriginal children boarding in dormitories and away from their families up until the 1960s (Beresford & Omaji, 1996). In 1967, even after a State Government committee in the 1950s identified that this arrangement was highly inappropriate and should no longer occur, 100 Aboriginal boys still lived at the mission in dormitory conditions which were described by a Welfare Officer for the Department of Native Affairs as appalling, depressing, neglectful, and only providing the bare necessities (Beresford & Omaji, 1996).

In the 1850s colonial newspapers constructed Aborigines of the Australian colonies as destined for natural extinction, suggesting to readers that all that could be done was to “smooth the pillow of a dying race” (cited in Inglis, 1993, p. 195). In 1859 Charles Darwin’s publication the *Origin of Species*, popularised the theory of biological evolution. Notions of superior and inferior human species started to saturate the discourse across British colonies including the Swan River Colony (HREOC, 1997). The White European was considered at the top this evolutionary hierarchy and the fittest to survive, whilst Aboriginal people were seen as at the bottom. Rhetoric across the British Empire shifted from the paradigm of amalgamation to that of protectionism for a race that would soon to die out (Inglis, 1993).

1.2.2 Protectionism (1880s – 1920s).

The concept of protectionism originally arose in 1838 from a sub-committee of the Aboriginal Protection Society in Britain (Reynolds, 1996), which petitioned for a better system of management in the treatment of Aboriginal peoples across the Empire (Korr, 1968). This agenda constructed Aboriginal people as requiring protected reservations to live on, so as to minimise contact with Europeans. Nevertheless, such reservations were to be governed in accordance with European societal norms and values to promote elements of a civilised lifestyle (Partington, 1998).

In WA, by 1890s the British House of Commons granted the Swan River Colony the right to self-governance and John Forrest was appointed as its first Premier. A few years later, in 1893 amendments to the *Elementary Education Act 1871* gave rise to the establishment of the Education Department as it is recognised today (Hetherington, 2002). Rather than the Education Department undertaking the responsibility for Indigenous education, change in legislation in 1897 formally tied Indigenous education with welfare policy and the Department for Aborigines (Beresford & Omaji, 1996; Green, 1995; Haebich, 1988; 2000; Hetherington, 2002). Hence, and under the guidance of Chief Protector for Aborigines Henry Prinsep (1897-1907), Charles Gale

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(1907-1915), and Auber Octavius Neville (1915-1936), State Government welfare administrators rather than educators, were responsible for the educational needs of Aboriginal children in WA (Beresford & Omaji, 1996).

Corresponding with the transfer of responsibility for education to the Department for Aborigines, amendments in 1893 to the 1871 *Education Act* enabled schools to establish boards that had the power to exclude those children from a school (Haebich, 2000) who were perceived as injurious to the health or welfare of other children (Hetherington, 2002). This amendment was often used by White parents to construct Aboriginal children as a health risk to the wellbeing of their own child and used as the reason to petition for Aboriginal children to be removed from school (Beresford & Partington, 2003). The evidence-base shows that at many schools in regional areas of the State Aboriginal children were excluded under this amendment, including schools in Shark Bay (1905), Beverley (1912), Quairading (1914), Mount Barker (1914), Mullewa (1915) and in many other towns and communities across WA (Haebich, 1988; 2000).

During the period prior to the Federation of Australia and the 1901 Constitution, States and Territory Governments looked to consolidate autonomous management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Hollinsworth, 1998). The *Immigration Restriction Act of 1901*, commonly referred to as the 'White Australia Policy', enabled State and Federal governments to apply of a rigid set of discriminatory immigration criteria to secure the cultural and racial purity of Australian citizens (Haebich, 2008). The White Australia Policy was constructed on the belief of the superiority of White People and the inherent inferiority of all other cultures and races, including African, Asian, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Haebich, 2008). Moreover, it became the means by which those who were perceived to represent an economic, health, moral and social threat, could be excluded from White Australian society (Hollinsworth, 1998).

In WA the 1905 *Aborigines Act* extended the influence of protectionism by enabling State Government authorities to apply strict controls over the autonomy and mobility of Aboriginal people (DIA, 2005). The 1905 Act also granted the power to authorities to remove Aboriginal children under 14 years of age with fair a complexion, and deemed of mixed heritage, from their family to relocate them at missions and Government establishments in order to transform them into domestic and manual labourers (Partington, 1998). Amendments made to the Act in 1911 further extended the power of the Chief Protector of Aborigines to remove any child under the

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School age of 16 years considered to be part-Aboriginal (Beresford & Omaji, 1996). The living conditions in dormitories at missions and Government establishments were unforgiving and rudimentary (Haebich, 1988). At the Moore River Mission located 90 kilometres north of Perth, dormitory conditions were described as prison like (Haebich, 1988). In 1934, after a spate of deaths during the previous two years at the Moore River Mission, the State Psychologist reported that Aboriginal children suffered from high incidences of delayed puberty, endocrine imbalances, hypothyroidism, malnourishment, and disorders of the alimentary system. The State Psychologist concluded that all of these conditions were preventable through the provision of adequate toilet and cleaning amenities, a well-chosen diet, and training in personal hygiene (Haebich, 1988).

1.2.3 Absorption (1930s – 1940s).

Legislative change in 1936 meant that the title of Chief Protector for Aborigines was supplanted by a new designation of Commissioner for Native Affairs. The then Chief Protector for Aborigines Neville initially continued under this new title (1936-1940). He was followed by Francis Bray (1940-1946), Stanley Middleton (1948-1962) and Frank Gare (1962-1972). During the 1920s and 1930s Aboriginal children continued to be removed from their families (HREOC, 1997), however the eugenic notion of selectively breeding out Aboriginal people by absorbing existing and subsequent generations of Aboriginal children into White society, steadily gained momentum in WA (Beresford, 2006; Dodson, 2007; DoE, 2002). This period in WA history is somewhat controversial and still debated. However, the question of whether absorption was an officially State Government policy or not, is possibly best addressed by McGregor:

Indisputably, in my view, breeding out the colour was policy, in that it was a systematic course of action endorsed and pursued by those charged with authority over Aboriginal affairs. However, it was policy initiated not by parliament or minister but by senior members of the bureaucracy. (McGregor, 2002, p. 288).

The shift in policy from protectionism to absorption laid the foundations for a traumatic trans-generational legacy of Aboriginal children being taken away from their families, and those Aboriginal people today who were forcibly taken by authorities during this time often identify with being a member of the Stolen Generation (HREOC, 1997). In WA, a residential institution called *The Children's Cottage Home* opened in 1932 but is locally referred to as *Sister Kate's* (Beresford, 2006). *Sister Kate's* initially operated under the auspices of Sister Katherine Mary Clutterbuck however it had a strong advocate in the then Chief Protector of Aborigines Auber Neville. Chief Protector Neville believed that a radical and systemised process was required (Beresford, 2006) to

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control what he infamously described as the 'Aboriginal problem' in WA (Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia [ALSWA], 1995). A primary concern for Chief Protector Neville was skin colour. Through sending Aboriginal children to establishments like Sister Kate's and exerting strict control over contact with family as well as marital arrangements, he considered that Aboriginal children of mixed descent were more likely to become like White people (Tatz, 1999). At the 1937 Commonwealth and State Native Welfare Conference held in Canberra, Chief Protector Neville heralded the benefits of removing Aboriginal children of mixed descent to residential institutions like Sister Kate's and the Moore River Mission (HREOC, 1997) and argued that the end result would justify the means employed (ALSWA, 1995).

During this time, Aboriginal children were frequently barred from attending Government schools (Haebich, 2000). A 'Survey of Native Affairs' conducted in 1948 by F. E. A. Bateman argued that two key issues impacted on Indigenous education; 1) "the native family life and our own standards are as wide apart as the poles and are completely and irrevocably incompatible" (Bateman, 1948, p. 26), and; 2) "they must be changed from a nomadic, idle and discontented race to a settled, industrious, contented section of the community" (Bateman, 1948, p. 26). Bateman asserted that vast difference existed in inherent intellectual ability between Aboriginal people and White people that a ceiling should exist for Aboriginal people in terms of access to higher education (Bateman, 1948). This perception of Aboriginal children's intellectual abilities was used to argue that they should only attend educational institutions up until the age of 16 years, of which the last two years should be devoted to vocational training (Beresford, 2001). Bateman reported:

For the boys trades such as carpentry, cabinet making, plumbing, blacksmithing, mechanics, sheet metal work, leatherwork...should be taught as soon as possible...for the girls training to include domestic science, cooking, laundry, washing, polishing, scrubbing and cleaning floors, cupboards...setting tables, care of rooms, needlework, sewing knitting. (Bateman, 1948, p. 26)

However, during the late 1940s and early 1950s international condemnation of the events in Nazi Germany during World War II underpinned a significant shift in Indigenous education policy (Dodson, 2007; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haebich, 2008). In 1948 Australia became a signatory to the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, with Article 26 stating:

- Everyone has the right to education

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- Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and
- Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (United Nations, 1948, p. 76).

The agendas of protectionism and absorption which saturated State and Federal Government discourse became unsustainable and Australia was subject to international criticism over the explicit racism, discrimination, and oppression experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Haebich, 2008). In the context of Indigenous education, the openly racist and prejudicial ideologies that perpetuated deficit attitudes and constructions of Aboriginal children as learners were no longer tenable. The agenda of absorption subsequently ended and it was replaced by an era of assimilation, with education propelled to the fore in the integration of Aboriginal people into White society (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

1.2.4 Assimilation (1950s - 1971).

In 1948, the Federal Government approved the *Commonwealth Nationality and Citizenship Act* making all Australian born people citizens of Australia (Haebich, 2008). For Aboriginal people in WA this rendered them citizens of the Commonwealth, however the continuation of *The Native (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944* in WA meant that somewhat paradoxically many Aboriginal people were not guaranteed recognition as full citizens by the State Government. In WA, *The Native (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944* decreed that for Aboriginal people to achieve full citizenship status they had to demonstrate before a magistrate that all links with cultural and traditional practices had been severed, that they were disease free, had industrious habits, and would benefit from citizenship (Tatz, 1999). In effect, up until 1971 when the act was repealed Aboriginal people in WA had to decide between their cultural heritage and identity, and recognition as a citizen by the State Government (Chesterman & Galligan, 1997). For those who endured this process, the State Government would issue an official certificate often referred to by Aboriginal people as dog-tags (Haebich, 2000). Dog-tags had to be carried like a passport to testify that a person was no longer to be considered as Aboriginal but rather as a person that had achieved a status acceptable in White society (Haebich, 2008). However, those who obtained a dog-tag could nonetheless lose their citizenship status if they were convicted twice under *The Native (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944* for swearing, being untidy, not putting rubbish in bins, wasting water, drinking alcohol, cutting down trees and not conducting themselves in a manner

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considered to be respectable and civilised (Haebich, 2008). They could also lose their citizenship for contracting syphilis, yaws, and leprosy. According to Tatz (2003) in no other society has a person been able to lose their citizenship rights for experiencing an illness.

The Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia describes the assimilation policy, amongst other things, as a “nationalistic fiction” (ALSWA, 1995, p. 18). In the minds of White State and Federal government officials, the assimilation policy intended to dissolve and sweep away cultural and racial differences to enable Aboriginal people to participate as equal members of Australian society (Haebich, 2008). However, the experience for many Aboriginal school children during the assimilation era was somewhat different. Many were taught to reject their own cultural identity and heritage, traditional beliefs, and inhibit their sense of belonging and connection with extended family, land, and spirituality (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Although access to schooling increased for Aboriginal families, parental involvement with mainstream schools was limited and the curriculum content delivered was overwhelmingly biased towards the mastery of Western cultural knowledge. Most Aboriginal children had limited prior exposure to the expectations of classroom teachers at Government schools and had to adjust to an environment where lessons were delivered in English which was not their first language but instead a second or third language of choice (Westerman, 1997). Such experiences played a significant role in making school an alienating and uncomfortable learning environment for many Aboriginal children (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

Nevertheless education and schools in WA were constructed as the primary means by which to assimilate and integrate Aboriginal people into White society. The WA Commissioner of Native Affairs Stanley Middleton argued, “[I]n education it can be said that the assimilation process is carried out to its full extent through the excellent co-operation of both the Education Department and the individual teachers throughout the State” (Middleton, 1951, p. 36). As noted earlier in this chapter, the responsibility for Indigenous Education had been transferred to the Department of Native Affairs (DNA), so prior to 1951 the Education Department in WA had no formalised Indigenous Education policy. Rather, mission schools had been the primary educators of Aboriginal children (Ryan, 2001), but these schools were increasingly besieged with operational difficulties such as inadequate funding, limited numbers of qualified staff, and deteriorating buildings, with low levels of attendance and retention common (Haebich, 2008). Moreover, many

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Aboriginal children continued to be excluded from Government schools on the basis of hygiene and health (Beresford & Partington, 2003; HREOC, 1997).

In 1951 Dr. T. L Robertson was appointed to the role of Director General of Education in WA and formed a strong relationship with Commissioner Middleton as both were committed advocates of assimilation policy (ALSWA, 1995). A year later in 1952 the DNA established two youth hostels to accommodate Aboriginal children from regional and remote communities in WA to complete their secondary education in Perth. Alvan House in Mt Lawley accommodated females and McDonald House in West Perth accommodated males (Haebich, 2008). Admittance to these hostels was stringently regulated according to behaviour, personal hygiene and performance at school with hostel managers reporting to the DNA. Although the DNA subsidised the living expenses at these hostels in Perth, parents were often pressured into sending their children as it was felt that integration in to a city context would better harness the full academic potential of these students. Over the following years many of these Aboriginal children found extended periods of separation from home and family challenging and experienced feelings of homesickness which caused several to run away (Haebich, 2008).

Although schooling had been compulsory for children in WA since 1871 (ABS, 2001), in 1954 the Education Department selected the remote Pilbara town of Roebourne to formally pilot the transition of Aboriginal children into mainstream Government schools (Middleton, 1954). At the time Roebourne was a heavily segregated community where White families dominated the town centre and Aboriginal people lived on crowded reserves around the fringe of town, or in camps near pastoral stations (Juluwarlu & Rijavec, 2004). The decision to integrate Aboriginal students received strenuous opposition from White families and Commissioner Middleton noted in the 1954 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Native Affairs* that the level of resistance meant the scheme had to be abandoned (Middleton, 1954). Instead, two segregated Government schools were established in Roebourne (Juluwarlu & Rijavec, 2004), a school for White children and a school set up in an old disused Court House for Aboriginal children (Middleton, 1954). The old Court House School experienced rapid success with the number of enrolled Aboriginal students almost doubling by 1956. During a visitor's day on October 23, 1956 the Headmaster for the Court House School recorded positive comments from twelve White visitors who were surprised by the high standard and quality of student work on display (Quealy, 1956). However, he also noted in his Headmaster's journal, "it is a pity that more people, particularly those most vocal in opposition,

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did not take up the opportunity of observing the children's capabilities and their progress"

(Quealy, 1956, p. 21).

Many Aboriginal families on isolated stations and in remote communities across the Kimberley had become accustomed to their children being sent away to mission schools with dormitory/residential facilities, such as Beagle Bay, Balgo, Lombadina, Moola Bulla, and Oombulgurri mission schools (Ryan, 2001). Whilst mission schools equipped Aboriginal children with literacy and numeracy, up until the late 1960s Aboriginal parents often had limited say in the decision-making process to send their children away to a mission school. Instead, it was an accepted practice that arrangements were instigated by station managers or by welfare officers (Ryan, 2001). To avoid causing disruption to station routines and life, station managers often requested that Aboriginal children were only returned to their family during the Christmas holidays, with many mission schools holding onto children during over the May and September school holidays (Ryan, 2001).

For Aboriginal parents and families used to being excluded from mainstream education, adjusting to the new expectations and requirements of a Western style of education during the assimilation and integration era brought about new and unfamiliar challenges. To access formal schooling Aboriginal families on stations and in remote communities still had to send their children away to enrol them in district schools in regional centres such as Broome, Derby, Kununurra, and Wyndham (HREOC, 1997; Ryan, 2001) and Aboriginal children continued to spend the majority of the school year away from their family (ALSWA, 1995; Haebich, 2008). Aboriginal children who used State Government run children's hostels or dormitory/residential facilities provided by missions would return home during the school holidays. However, if welfare authorities deemed the family home conditions as unsuitable then children were not always allowed to return home during the school holidays (ALSWA, 1995). In effect, some parents would send their children away for schooling without fully understanding that their own social disadvantage could prevent their children being able to return to them (ALSWA, 1995). A consequence of the assimilation and integration agenda was that in 1958, an estimated 25 per cent of Aboriginal children living in the Kimberley region of WA were living in dormitory/residential facilities at mission schools (HREOC, 1997) and in 1964 an estimated 25 per cent of Aboriginal school children in the south west were living in State Government institutions (Haebich, 2008).

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In WA the introduction of the *Native Welfare Act 1963* deconstructed the absolute control held by the State Commissioner for Native Affairs over guardianship matters pertaining to Aboriginal children (ALSWA, 1995). A national referendum on 27 May, 1967 was successful in instigating constitutional amendments that enabled discriminatory laws to be dissolved and for Aboriginal people to experience greater equality as citizens, such as being included in population statistics and to later gain the right to enrol and vote in elections in Australian society (HREOC, 1997). However, the Federal Liberal Government of the day was slow to instigate change and it is noteworthy that Australian Electoral Commission figures for the 1967 referendum show that in WA, a State with one of the largest Aboriginal populations and smallest non-Indigenous populations at the time, recorded the highest 'NO' vote across of all the six States in Australia (Bennett, 1999).

Despite such constitutional changes, in terms of education Aboriginal children demonstrated poor academic outcomes and experienced failure at school. Many educators rationalised this circumstance by associating it with perceived inherent deficits and faults within Aboriginal people (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Such explanations propagated the sentiment that the failure of Aboriginal children to achieve at school was a product of Aboriginality, rather than as a consequence of widespread ethnocentrism and racism entrenched within the education system (Beresford & Partington, 2003). Nevertheless, compensatory and cultural deprivation approaches to education were subsequently asserted as necessary for Aboriginal children so as to account for the shortcomings of Aboriginality (Phillips & Lampert, 2005).

1.2.5 Self-determination and self-management (1972 – 2000s).

A change in Federal Government meant that in 1972 the policy of assimilation was cast aside. In its place the Labor Whitlam government introduced the policy of self-determination which sought to recognise the equality and right of Aboriginal people in shaping their own lives and future (Hollinsworth, 1998). Gordon Bryant became the first Federal Government Minister appointed to oversee the newly formed Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). Minister Bryant encouraged Aboriginal people to take control over administrative decision making for the operation of their community (Ryan, 2001), a step seen as critical to enabling Aboriginal Islander people to negotiate the pace of their economic, legal, and social involvement with Australian society (Hollinsworth, 1998). However, a change in Federal Government in 1975 to the Fraser Liberal-Coalition government resulted in an emphasis being shifted away from Aboriginal

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people self-determining their own needs, to Aboriginal people being allowed to self-manage projects that addressed needs as determined by the Federal Government (Bennett, 1999; Fletcher, 1992; HREOC, 1997). This subtle change in policy was seen as paternalistic by Aboriginal people however subsequent Federal Governments of Hawke (1983-1991), Keating (1991-1996), and Howard (1996-2007) continued to use elements of both self-determination and self-management in policy (HREOC, 2008).

During the early stages of this phase in Federal Government policy, Aboriginal children in WA remained somewhat lost in an education system still designed around notions of middle class White society, and compensatory and cultural deprivation approaches to Indigenous education (Westerman, 1997). In addition, some White teachers continued to prohibit the use of traditional languages in the classroom (Partington, 1998). Elders and communities in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of the State became frustrated with restrictions being placed on the use of traditional language and the limited inclusion of cultural knowledge, values, and activities in the education of their younger people (Ryan, 2001). In response, a number of Aboriginal Community Schools emerged across the State from 1970s onwards (Partington, 1998), such as the Strelley Community School in the Pilbara and the *Ngalangangpum* School in the East Kimberly (Ryan, 2001). Aboriginal parents wanted a more direct voice in the type of education that their children received at school (Ryan, 2001), including participation in the construction of a curriculum which focused equally on maintaining the connection of Aboriginal children with traditional language and cultural values (Coombs, 1994). Aboriginal parents also wanted to shield their children from the racism they still observed in Government school playgrounds (Green, 2004; Ryan, 2001).

The 1975 report by the National Schools Commission represented a milestone for Indigenous Education. Seventeen Aboriginal representatives from across Australia formed a National Aboriginal Consultative Group (NACG) and contributed to the construction of the report (Partington, 1998). For the first time Aboriginal people were consulted about Indigenous Educational matters and were able to express views at a national level in relation to the educational needs of Aboriginal children (Partington, 1998). In doing so, two key issues were identified by the NACG. First, that Aboriginal people strongly felt alienated from mainstream society in Australia, and second that mainstream educators had trouble teaching Aboriginal children (Partington, 1998). The NACG recommended that fundamental to addressing these concerns was:

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Not [to] see education as a method of producing an Anglicised Aborigine, but rather as an instrument for creating an informed community with intellectual and technological skills in harmony with our own cultural values and identity. We wish to be Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia. (NACG, 1975, p. 3).

1.3 Contemporary Indigenous education policy.

It was not until 1990 that the first national *Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) Education Policy* (AEP) was endorsed by all State and Territory Governments (Commonwealth of Australia, 1989). The AEP outlined 21 goals aimed to bring about equity in education and training outcomes for Aboriginal peoples. Whilst the AEP became the backbone of Indigenous Education, a review of the AEP in 1993 found progress towards educational equity was slower than anticipated (Biddle, Hunter, & Schwab, 2004). Some improvements in access and participation were reported, however these outcomes were marginal across educational sectors, States and Territories (Biddle, Hunter, & Schwab, 2004). The response of the Council of Australia's Governments (COAG) was to establish the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which in turn instigated an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Taskforce (MCEETYA, 2000). The taskforce identified a number of alarming systemic barriers that continued to impede the achievement of educational equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the most salient amongst these have been paraphrased below:

1. Lingering perceptions and mindsets in some quarters of the Australian community that the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students was normal and that education equality for Indigenous Australians was either not achievable, or if possible, only achievable over a long period of time (i.e., decades or generations) (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 10)
2. A systematic lack of optimism and belief in educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 10)
3. Concerns that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educational workers are denied access to facilities and services that other teachers and education workers take for granted and which are covered by legislation especially those relating to occupational health and safety, equal employment opportunities and racial vilification (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 11)
4. Education of Indigenous students was often not considered as an area of core business (MCEETYA, 2000, p. 11).

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In April 2002, the COAG commissioned the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) to investigate indicators of Indigenous disadvantage and subsequently produced a series of *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* reports (e.g., SCRGSP, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009, & 2011). In the Forward of the 2005 report the Chairman of the SCRGSP emphasised that “[t]he legacy of past injustices and misguided policies presents a major challenge” (SCRGSP, 2005, p. v) and went on to state in the Overview of the same report that, “it is distressingly apparent that many years of policy effort have not delivered desired outcomes” (SCRGSP, 2005, p. xix). Others equally noted that the initial construction of schools in the 1960s to 1970s as a means to assimilate and integrate Aboriginal people into White society still has a sustained impact on Aboriginal young people to the present day (Beresford & Gray, 2008). Coinciding with the reporting period covered by the SCRGSP, the *Melbourne Declaration*⁵ was launched by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) and is the key document guiding national educational goals for the next decade (MCEECDYA, 2008). Accompanying the Melbourne Declaration is the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* for the 2010 to 2014 period (MCEECDYA, 2011). It identifies the need for improvement in the key areas of enrolment, attendance, participation, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion (MCEECDYA, 2008). However, at the heart of the action plan is a commitment to the ‘close-the-gap’ strategy which is intended to convey a government commitment to halving the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous children with non-Indigenous children in reading, writing, and numeracy by 2018 (MCEECDYA, 2011).

Each year across Australia during the month of May all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are assessed in terms of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy through the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Whilst critics have drawn attention to elements of its design and implementation, data from the 2010 NAPLAN indicated that across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 Indigenous children in remote and very remote locations of WA were substantially less likely to attain minimum national literacy and numeracy standards as their non-Indigenous counterparts and that this difference increased the geographically further Indigenous students were from metropolitan areas. The 2010 NAPLAN report suggested that metropolitan schooling enabled more Indigenous children to achieve minimum national literacy

⁵ The Melbourne Declaration superseded the 1999 Adelaide Declaration and the 1989 Hobart Declaration (MCEECDYA, 2008).

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and numeracy benchmarks in contrast to remote and very remote schooling (Australian
Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA, 2010). Table 1 provides data which has
been extrapolated from the National NAPLAN report for 2010 to exhibits these trends in WA.

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Table 1

The Percentage (%) of Indigenous (I) and non-Indigenous (n-I) Students in WA by School Location and by Year Cohort at or above National Minimum Standards in Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation (Gram & Punct), and Numeracy in 2010

Year Cohort	School Location	Reading (%)		Writing (%)		Spelling (%)		Gram & Punct (%)		Numeracy (%)	
		I	n-I	I	n-I	I	n-I	I	n-I	I	n-I
Year 3	Metro	76.2	94.3	81.7	96.9	69.5	91.6	67.0	92.4	82.0	95.5
	Provincial	70.0	93.0	79.0	96.5	62.8	88.0	58.5	89.5	76.8	94.7
	Remote	63.7	92.4	66.4	96.8	53.9	86.6	53.1	89.7	72.5	95.3
	Very Remote	54.7	91.0	47.8	95.6	37.8	84.9	40.5	88.5	59.9	93.8
Year 5	Metro	66.9	92.7	73.7	94.7	73.2	93.4	65.2	93.8	75.1	95.2
	Provincial	60.3	89.9	68.6	92.4	68.0	89.6	58.0	90.9	67.2	93.1
	Remote	48.6	88.9	54.1	91.3	55.6	88.5	44.3	89.8	57.1	93.3
	Very Remote	34.0	88.1	34.7	87.5	42.5	84.9	29.2	87.0	40.8	91.9
Year 7	Metro	80.0	96.0	69.7	94.5	78.4	94.7	65.2	93.5	82.6	96.4
	Provincial	78.8	96.1	71.0	94.0	77.3	93.0	60.8	92.2	81.4	96.7
	Remote	69.1	95.8	58.5	93.7	67.6	91.6	50.0	91.8	70.9	96.0
	Very Remote	47.4	94.3	36.0	93.4	47.0	89.9	26.6	88.6	49.1	94.3
Year 9	Metro	63.5	92.1	59.4	89.7	68.8	90.4	61.6	92.5	74.2	94.2
	Provincial	58.5	90.7	51.4	85.6	62.7	86.4	55.8	90.1	68.3	93.4
	Remote	53.5	88.5	45.9	82.1	55.2	83.6	47.6	87.4	55.9	90.0
	Very Remote	30.9	86.5	29.5	82.7	38.6	85.4	25.3	85.2	43.2	91.7

Note. Indigenous students (I) and non-Indigenous students (n-I). Data extrapolated from Tables 3R6; 3R7;3W6; 3W7; 3S6; 3S7; 3G6; 3G7;3N6; 3N7; 5R6; 5R7; 5W6; 5W7; 5S6; 5S7; 5G6; 5G7;5N6; 5N7; 7R6; 7R7; 7W6; 7W7; 7S6; 7S7; 7G6; 7G7;7N6; 7N7; 9R6; 9R7; 9W6; 9W7; 9S6; 9S7; 9G6; 9G7;9N6; 9N7; in the NAPLAN National Report for 2010 (ACARA, 2010).

1.4 The contemporary social context.

A consequence of a history deeply rooted in colonisation, discriminatory legislation, oppression, segregation and forced dislocation, is that the social problems experienced by some Aboriginal people and communities in WA have been exacerbated (DIA, 2005). The 2002 *Putting the Picture Together: Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* chaired by former Magistrate Sue Gordon,

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found that instances of family violence and child abuse were so prevalent in some Aboriginal communities in WA that they were perceived as epidemic (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henrey, 2002). The report linked family violence and child abuse with a history of inter-generational marginalisation of Aboriginal people, the dislocation from and loss of traditional lands, the exclusion from education systems and schools, the suppression of cultural identity and spirituality, and with a legacy of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families (Gordon et al., 2002). Magistrate Gordon emphasised the endemic nature of family violence and child abuse was tearing Aboriginal families and communities apart in WA and warned that unless these two issues were addressed, “the future for Aboriginal children will only lie in higher statistics of Aboriginal youth suicide or higher Aboriginal imprisonment rates” (Gordon et al., 2002, p. xviii).

The 2005 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* published by the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) emphasised within the first few pages of its Introduction that exposure to unsupportive school environments and experiencing issues such as bullying and racism, were linked with social issues like alcohol and drug use, crime and violence, depression and stress, and suicide in Aboriginal communities. The report outlined that a history deeply rooted in racially tainted legislation and policy had caused Aboriginal people to be the most disadvantaged population in WA (DIA, 2005). A list of key messages was identified which are paraphrased below:

- The life-expectancy of Aboriginal people in WA is typically 15 to 20 years less than that of a non-Indigenous person (DIA, 2005, p.45)
- WA has the second highest mortality rate for Aboriginal people in Australia (DIA, 2005, p. 45)
- Remoteness has an impact on the number of Aboriginal people completing post-secondary studies (DIA, 2005, p.53)
- A relatively low proportion of Aboriginal people are engaged in employment (DIA, 2005, p. 59)
- The rate of suicide and self-harm amongst Aboriginal males was double that for non-Indigenous males (DIA, 2005, p.71)
- Aboriginal people in WA are over 15 times more likely to be homicide victims (DIA, 2005, p. 77)

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- An estimated 38 per cent of all prisoners in WA are Aboriginal people, despite constituting only 3.5 per cent of the State's overall population (DIA, 2005, p. 84).

The link between social disadvantage and the experiences of Aboriginal children and young people with education was lucidly outlined by the *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey* (WAACHS) conducted by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and the Kulunga Research Network. The WAACHS remains the largest and most comprehensive epidemiological investigation into the health, social and emotional wellbeing, education, and socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal children and young people in WA. The WAACHS was published in four volumes entitled:

1. The Health of Aboriginal Children and Young People (Zubrick et al., 2004)
2. The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People (Zubrick et al., 2005)
3. Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal Children and Young People (Zubrick et al., 2006)
4. Strengthening the Capacity of Aboriginal Children, Families and Communities (Silburn, et al., 2006).

The WAACHS brings together data drawn from 5,289 Aboriginal children and young people aged 0 to 17 years of age, from 1,999 households and who attended 750 schools from across all regions of the State (Zubrick, et al., 2006). From the breadth of findings reported by the WAACHS some of the more pertinent were that, Aboriginal babies are more likely to be born with a low birth weight and that 49 per cent of mothers had either smoked or chewed tobacco during pregnancy (Zubrick et al., 2004). Although 97 per cent of primary carers⁶ reported attending school, only 27 per cent indicated they went on to complete Years 11 or 12 (Zubrick et al., 2004). These primary carers were less healthy than other Australians were and they experienced a greater incidence of respiratory problems, recurring infections, renal and cardiac difficulties, and had more financial strain to contend with while providing that support, as they were less likely to be employed (Zubrick et al., 2006).

The WAACHS reported that 22 per cent of children and young people surveyed were living in households where seven or more major life stress events (e.g., death of a family member) had

⁶ Primary carer was defined as an individual that spent the most time with a child and regarded as knowing the most about a child – often the mother (Zubrick et al., 2004).

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occurred over the preceding 12 months (Zubrick et al., 2005). The WAACHS found 35 per cent of children surveyed, lived in a household where one or more primary or secondary carers⁷ had been forcibly separated from their natural family or forcibly relocated from their traditional lands by government officials or mission workers. For example, an estimated 58 per cent of children and young people the West Kimberley town of Broome reported residing in households where one adult had been forcibly separated from their natural family or forcibly relocated from traditional lands (Zubrick et al., 2004). The level of alcohol and drug use by the children and young people of primary or secondary carers who were forcibly taken away from their natural family or separated from traditional lands, was found to be nearly double that of children and young people whose primary or secondary carer had not had this happen to them (Zubrick et al., 2005).

Although the WAACHS found primary carers valued education, the children and young people of primary carers who left school before Year 10 were significantly more likely to be absent from school and miss at least 26 full days of school per year (Zubrick et al., 2006). Children and young people who experienced 7 to 14 life stress events over the previous six months (e.g., death of a family member) were more likely to be absent for 26 days or more. Similarly, those primary carers who themselves experienced a poor connection with education as children were less likely to be involved with the schooling experience of their own children. Primary carers also had a tendency to over-estimate how well their children were doing at school and often associating just attending school as an achievement in its own right. Children and young people who had a primary carer who identified as of Aboriginal heritage were over one and half times more likely to exhibit poor academic achievement at school (Zubrick et al., 2006).

The WAACHS posited that, "Poor school performances are being passed down generationally. In population terms so few Aboriginal children are succeeding at school that little or no effect is likely to be readily observed for several generations" (Zubrick et al., 2006, p. 2). At school, 58 per cent of children and young people aged between 4 and 16 years were rated by their classroom Teacher as demonstrating low academic performance. Children and young people that lived in areas of high to extreme geographical isolation were equally twice as likely to demonstrate poor academic outcomes (Zubrick et al., 2006). Males were found to be nearly twice as likely as females to exhibit poor academic outcomes. For young people aged 15 and 17 years, 47 per cent

⁷ Secondary carer was defined as an individual involved in a child's upbringing - often the father, but sometimes a grandparent or other relative (Zubrick et al., 2004).

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were described by their primary carer as no longer attending school and for those who lived in areas of the State rated as extremely isolated, they were twice as likely to not be at school (Zubrick et al., 2006).

A recent address to the School of Justice at Queensland University of Technology by retired Chief Justice of Western Australia Wayne Martin reported that the rate of Indigenous incarceration in WA was 4,300 per 100,000 people, for non-Indigenous people it was 280 per 100,000 people (Martin, 2010). He detailed how for adult Indigenous males this ratio increases to 8,000 per 100,000 people and estimated that each night in WA, “one in every twelve and a half adult men will spend tonight in prison” (Martin, 2010, p. 9). In terms of Indigenous youth, Martin reported they were 45 times more likely to be placed into custody than non-Indigenous youth and that the detention rate of Indigenous youth in WA was the highest in Australia (Martin, 2010). Martin concluded that experience and the evidence suggests that currently for those youth with the most intersections with the criminal justice system in WA, the most likely outcome was, “[to] graduate into the adult criminal justice system” (Martin, 2010, p. 11).

1.5 Chapter summary.

This chapter reviewed the historical constructions and experiences of Aboriginal people since colonisation and linkages with the complex contemporary social fabric of Indigenous Education in WA today. In order to understand the impact of three different types of Government – the British Empire, State Government and Federal Government, the respective policies and legislation of each were critiqued under the headings of amalgamation; protectionism; absorption; assimilation; self-determination and self-management. An inarguable history of discrimination, prejudice, and racism and of marginalising the involvement of Aboriginal parents and families with the education of their children was outlined. Interwoven throughout was reference to the role of schools for the Natives, missions, dormitories, and other forms of boarding school/residential facilities such as State Government hostels and cottage homes. The implications of past Indigenous Education policy on the constructions of Aboriginal children and young people as learners were discussed, as were contemporary educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in regional WA. The Chapter concluded by giving brief consideration to present-day social determinants that impact on the lives of Aboriginal young people and families in WA. Chapter 2 will next review the topics of adolescence, boarding schools and transition experiences.

2.0 Chapter overview.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides a brief description of adolescence followed by a multi-systemic perspective understanding of adolescence as a phase in human development, including physical, neurological, cognitive, psychological, familial, and social determinants. This is followed by a review of adolescence in relation to Aboriginal young people in Western Australia (WA) with consideration given to child-rearing and socialisation practices, sense of self and identity, rites of passage, as well as social and emotional wellbeing. The second section provides a description of boarding schools and the education system in WA followed by a review of the literature to address transition experiences at boarding schools in Australia. An estimation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding student numbers in Australia and WA is provided. Finally, the chapter concludes by critiquing previous literature that has discussed aspects of the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal secondary school students.

2.1 Adolescence

Adolescence directly coincides with the beginning of secondary school for young people in WA. Adolescence has been described as a social construction associated with the commencement of puberty (Esposito, 2000; Rutter, 2007) and as a stage in human development typically linked with the change from childhood to adulthood and characterised by multiple transitions (Leather, 2009). The judicial system in WA, for example, would suggest that adolescence comprises a period of legal transition where individuals reach the age of criminal responsibility but equally acquire the right to consume alcohol, operate a motor vehicle, marry, seek medical care, and vote in elections, without parental consent. However, demarcating the specific age span covered by adolescence has been problematic, as the age at which puberty physically begins in young people has altered over the last century (Harms, 2005). For the purposes of this research, the beginning of adolescence was considered to be between 11 to 14 years of age, middle adolescence from 15 to 17 years of age, and late adolescence from 18 to 20 years of age (Harms, 2005).

A number of theorists have constructed models aimed at understanding human development across the life span and in turn determine the key underlying features of adolescence. Freud's five-step psychosexual theory of human development located adolescence in the genital phase and posited that this time was characterised by sexual maturation in which

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young people tried to solve latent psycho-sexual impulses and needs (O'Connell, O'Connell, & Kuntz, 2005). In 1904, Stanley Hall first proposed adolescence as a distinct construct for study and as a stage in human development (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Hall argued that adolescence was an inevitable and universal time of storm-and-stress characterised by conflict, emotional upheaval, as well as a rebellious temperament and impulsive risk taking (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). Although still a popular construction of adolescence in Australia (Harms, 2005), the universal and inevitable premise of Hall's storm-and-stress description has gradually been discarded. Rather, the evidence-base has demonstrated that many young people from different socio-cultural backgrounds have negotiated this period in life with little or no conflict (Arnett, 1999; Buchanan & Hughes, 2009; Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995; Hutton, 2007). Research has also shown that adolescents are effective at appraising the risk associated with behaviour and the choices that they make in life (Casey, Jones, & Todd, 2008; Dustin & Steinberg, 2011).

More recently, ecological theorists have suggested that rather than a sequential and universal experience, human development is a distinctly imprecise and multi-dimensional experience shaped over time by the intersection of interrelated nested systems within the environment that an individual lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As the developing individual engages with and restructures the environment, the dynamic nature of this intersection has been argued to progressively transform both the individual and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Contemporary approaches to understanding and conceptualising the complexities of adolescence have steadily embraced ecological theory (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004) and to working with young people during this phase in human development (Harms, 2005; Laser & Nicotera, 2011; Rutter, 2007). Hence, it is in this vein that a multi-systemic approach is used to review some of the linkages between physical, neurological, cognitive, psychological, familial, and socio-cultural determinants with adolescence.

2.1.1 A multi-systemic perspective of adolescence.

Physical determinants. Physical developments synonymous with adolescence are rapid growth spurts, maturation of reproductive organs and an increased production of hormones (Harms, 2005). For young males, such changes have been linked with visible alterations in body size and structure, as well as with an increase in sexual drive, muscular capacity and strength (Rutter, 2007). Both early and late maturation in physical appearance has been associated with changes in the perception that other people hold of young people. Equally, adolescence has been

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connected with changes in the perception that young people hold of themselves (Rutter, 2007).

For example, quantitative research investigating body image dissatisfaction during adolescence for 239 (46% male) Irish secondary school students aged 12 to 18 years, found that despite females reporting a higher incidence of body dissatisfaction, over half of the male participants reported a desire to alter their body shape or size in some way (Lawler & Nixon, 2011). There is also cross-cultural evidence that ethnicity and cultural identity play a role in the perception that adolescent males construct of their ideal body image. Qualitative research using semi-structured interviews with adolescent males aged 13 to 18 years from Australia ($n=24$, European heritage), Fiji ($n=24$), and Tonga ($n=24$), found that both Fijian and Tongan participants reported experiencing a high socio-cultural focus on their body image and feeling pressured to achieve a large and muscular body physique. In contrast, few of the Australian participants reported being aware of socio-cultural messages about their body image and shape (McCabe et al., 2011). The study concluded that strong socio-cultural messages were transmitted to both Fijian and Tongan males about body image and demonstrating the influence of ethnicity and cultural identity on constructions of self by young people.

Neurological determinants. Despite the neurological data being complex, contrary to earlier understandings that suggested brain development was largely completed by late childhood, evidence has shown that change continues to occur in the structure and neurological functioning of the brain during adolescence (Casey, Jones, & Todd, 2008; Romeo & McEwen, 2006). Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) has measured significant growth in the interconnectedness of neurons between different regions of the brain (Dustin & Steinberg, 2011). Similarly, an increase in synaptic pruning of dormant connections between neurons takes place during adolescence, meaning that the total volume of grey matter actually decreases in contrast to childhood (Rutter, 2007). As such, synaptic pruning and neurological plasticity are argued to correspond with brain maturation and to be important to the regulation of emotion as well as linked with rapid intellectual and social development during adolescence (Ernst & Mueller, 2008). Longitudinal research suggests that for adolescent males it takes longer to reach peak brain size in comparison to females (Lenroot & Giedd, 2009). Thus, such research suggests that in addition to physical maturation, young males continue to develop neurologically during adolescence.

Cognitive determinants. Piaget's four-stage developmental theory of cognition, proposed that growth of the mind followed sequential logical operations which mediated knowledge

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between the individual and the world (Bruner, 1997). A shift from concrete thinking to formal operational thought processes was asserted to typify adolescence, evidenced by the acquisition of abstract and deductive reasoning and the emergence of complex problem solving skills (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Similarly, Kohlberg's sequential three-step theory of moral development first published in 1963, postulated that adolescence was characterised by the maturation of post-conventional moral decision-making and suggested that thinking was shaped by considerations such as acting in the benefit of society and the greater good (Kohlberg, 1984).

It is still reported in the literature that males tend to perform better at spatial reasoning tasks, math and word problems whereas females tend to perform better at verbal tasks (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). North American research has highlighted the role of executive functioning in academic achievement by adolescent males. Executive functioning has been described as an umbrella term that encompasses a number of complex higher-order cognitive processes used in everyday life, including decision-making, judgement, planning, organising and sequencing information from multiple sources, resist distraction, and understanding complex social situations (Latzman, Elkovitch Young, & Clark, 2010).

Notwithstanding such findings, critics have drawn attention to incongruence in Piaget's conceptualisation of cognitive development. Foremost amongst these, are the limited sensitivity to age variations in developmental achievement and impoverished consideration given to the influence of environmental, cultural, and socialisation factors (Meadows, 1993). In contrast, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development emphasised the role of social determinants and immediate relational contexts on cognitive development and the performance of cognitive tasks (Bruner, 1997). In addition to internal individual motivation, Vygotsky proposed the notion of the zone of proximal development which strived to draw attention to the influence of siblings, peers, and parents, and the contribution of these interactions to enabling a child to conceptualise and internalise understanding. That is, it alerted research in human development to the centrality of socialisation practices and culturally patterned dialogue in aiding cognitive growth in children and young people (Bruner, 1997). Hence, substantial ambiguity still remains in regard to cognitive functioning, as well as with the neurological functioning between different structures of the adolescent brain (Rutter, 2007).

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Psychological determinants. Arguably, the key developmental task during adolescence is the acquisition and articulation of a sense of self and identity formation (Harms, 2005; O'Connell, O'Connell, & Kuntz, 2005; Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001). Both a sense of self and identity are prevalent constructs linked with adolescence in the literature; however contemporary psychological research has progressively separated the study of the self from identity, with identity increasingly explored in relation to social categories (Schwartz, 2008). For example, social identity has been described as being formed when one becomes aware of belonging to a particular social group(s) that membership of has value and significance to the individual (Tajfel, 1982). By contrast, ethnic identity has been described as a multi-dimensional construct that entails a positive sense of ethnic pride and secure membership and commitment to an ethnic group (Phinney & Alipura, 1996), whereas racial identity has been described as an identity that is imposed by society and constructed in relation to one's birth (Germain, 2004). A sense of self has been described as being a state of cognitive appraisal that is entwined within the continuum of self awareness and self evaluation (Hattie, 1992).

The sequential eight phase psychosocial theory of human developmental described by Erikson (1968) suggested adolescence was characterised by the conflict of identity achievement and identity confusion. Those who achieved identity were argued to have successfully integrated relevant aspects of prior identities into a new unique self, whereas those identity confused individuals were argued to have not committed to consolidating a single new self (Erikson, 1968). In order to discover which identity to commit to Erikson (1968) posited that some individuals may experience an identity crisis, where they feel uncertain about their character, origins, and future aspirations but nonetheless a process described as assisting in the development of a healthy adult identity. Marcia (1966) reconceptualised Erikson's theory into the identity status paradigm which suggested that identity formation was constructed by the interaction of the two key variables of exploration and commitment. Prior to making a decision about which beliefs, values, and ambitions to pursue in life, it was argued that exploration allowed adolescents to actively sample and evaluate possible identity alternatives, and engaging in activities congruent with a selected identity was asserted to be evidence of commitment to that identity (Marcia, 1966). Four identity formation styles, or statuses, were posited as occurring during adolescence, 1) achievement characterised by high commitment and high exploration 2) foreclosure characterised by high commitment, low exploration, 3) moratorium characterised by low commitment, high exploration,

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and 4) diffusion characterised by low commitment, low exploration. Marcia (1996) suggested there was no sequence to these statuses but rather an individual simply experienced one of the four.

Research has since investigated the work of Erikson and Marcia (Schwartz, 2008). More recently, a meta-analysis of 565 studies that involved Marcia's identity status paradigm found that whilst many young people explored their identity, large fluctuations existed in how this was achieved during adolescence, and that large proportions of young people in late adolescence and early adulthood did not complete the identity formation process (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). A range of possible individual and contextual reasons were proposed to explain this outcome, including factors such as personality, ego strength, openness to new experiences and level of resilience. At the contextual level, factors such as life-style and access to environmental supports that optimised identity formation were also proposed (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). However, an acknowledged limitation of the study was an inability of a meta-analytic approach to distil the influences of ethnicity, school settings, and socio-economic status on the identity formation process.

International research suggests that the task of identity formation can be especially difficult for adolescents of ethnic minority groups. Various factors are argued to underpin this finding. Foremost, adolescents from ethnic minority groups are required to take into account a broader range of social norms and values including those of the dominant or host culture as well as those provided by their own family and culture (Mistry & Wu, 2010). Recent Dutch research reported that the necessity to continuously negotiate multiple cultural norms, values, and cultural systems, made it more challenging for migrant Italian adolescents to explore different identity alternatives and define their identity in adulthood (Crocetti, Fermani, & Pojaghi, 2011). The short-term distress of this experience was also linked with the internalisation and externalisation of problem behaviours. However, the study notably concluded that migrant adolescents of ethnic minority groups spent substantially more time considering their identity alternatives and were at an increased risk of experiencing identity instability and crisis (Crocetti, Fermani, & Pojaghi, 2011).

Whilst adolescence might be a time of change and transition this does not inevitably translate into adolescents psychologically coping with change (Rutter, 2007). Coping has been described as "the cognitive and affective responses used by an individual to deal with problems

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In Australia, Associate Professor Erica Frydenberg and Professor Ramon Lewis have both investigated coping during adolescence. Through a series of studies spanning over a 20 year period, they have shown that adolescents favour certain coping strategies and styles. In an early quantitative study utilising an 80-item survey, Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) investigated the relationship of age, gender and ethnicity with adolescent coping for 673 students (51% female and 49% male) in Years 7 to 11 at five secondary schools in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria. Using analysis of variance (ANOVA), the study found that female adolescents tended to manage problems by using more passive and social based coping strategies such as talking with friends, accessing spiritual guidance, and actively seeking emotion-focussed support. In contrast, male adolescents were found to be more private, keep problems to themselves, use humour, and were found to apply more physical strategies such as participate in organised sport and recreation to cope with perceived problems (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993).

A later study investigated the psychological experience of coping and coping styles in more than 1200 students in Years 7 to 11 (ages 11 to 17 years) at schools again located in Melbourne, Victoria (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996). It sought to validate the development of the long and short form of the Adolescent Coping Scale and identified 18 distinct coping strategies (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996). Importantly, it established that three distinct coping styles were used by adolescents. These were a ‘productive coping style’ that was described as actively attempting to solve a problem whilst remaining physically fit and socially connected; a ‘referring to others coping style’ which was described as actively seeking support from peers and friends in an effort to manage a perceived concern or problem; a ‘non-productive coping style’ which was described as engaging in avoidant behaviour and linked with an inability to cope (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996).

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More recently, Frydenberg et al., (2009) surveyed 536 Year 8 students (295 female and 241 male) at nine schools in Melbourne and found that student wellbeing had a positive association with productive coping strategies. Students who applied productive coping strategies reported a better sense of school connectedness and those students who utilised non-productive coping strategies reported a lower sense of school connectedness and sense of wellbeing (Frydenberg et al., 2009). In a similar study, using the Adolescent Coping Scale – Short Form and the Reynolds’ State of Being scale with 870 students in Years 7 to 9 at eight schools in Melbourne, Frydenberg and Lewis (2009) found that a higher level of reported wellbeing correlated with the use of active coping strategies. The study argued that wellbeing and psychological health during adolescence could be improved if avoidant coping strategies were minimised and active coping strategies were promoted (Frydenberg & Lewis, 2009).

Contemporary literature has connected psychopathology during adolescence with mental health and wellbeing in adulthood. Linkages have been made with the onset of anxiety disorders (Rapee, Schniering, & Hudson, 2009); depression (Kosterman et al., 2010); and personality disorders (Morey, 2010). A recent inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in WA estimated that one in six young people aged between four and 17 years experienced a mental health issue – anxiety, depression, conduct disorders, eating disorders, psychosis, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and substance use disorders (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011). A key barrier identified as impeding the effective intervention and treatment of mental health issues with children and young people in WA, was a predisposition by adults and health systems to too readily dismiss their concerns as “just going through a stage” (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011, p. 2). The inquiry concluded that the longer intervention was delayed the less likely a positive treatment outcome could be achieved (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011).

Social determinants. A number of unique social challenges mark adolescence. A desire for autonomy, changes in self-concept, heightened sense of importance placed on social acceptance and greater self-consciousness are some of the more prominent nuances (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Peer, friend, and love relationships also become more intense during adolescence (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial theory of human developmental suggested this phenomenon represented a need for intimacy with another person and a desire to avoid social

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isolation. The successful achievement of which was argued to culminate in the capacity to love.

While it is well evidenced that awareness of sexuality and sexual orientation develops (Harms, 2005), there remains a dearth in longitudinal research exploring the influence of intimate adolescent relationships on the formation of relationships in adulthood (Rutter, 2007). A recent review of romantic relationships for adolescents aged between 10 and 20 years by Collins, Welsh, and Furman (2009), found that the significance of romantic relationships for adolescents depended on four key factors. There were the duration and timing of a relationship, the characteristics of a partner(s), the content and quality of interactions with a partner and the emotional and cognitive processes linked with a relationship. The review outlined that the multidimensionality of adolescent romantic relationships was often underestimated by others and the significance of a romantic relationship to young people was more likely multifaceted rather than one-dimensional (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009).

The tendency to spend increasing amounts of time with friends has underpinned a large volume of research directed at clarifying the influence of the peer group on the development of individual young people (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). Evidence suggests that female adolescents are more likely to construct their social relationships around closeness, intimacy, and self-disclosure with another person. By contrast, males tend to build social networks through friendly competition, recreational and physical activities that hold risk rather than through sharing inner feelings with friends (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). As adolescent social relations steadily shift from predominantly single-sex to mixed-sex contexts, variables such as group size and public versus private situations have been shown to mediate interactions within social relationships. For example, when adolescent males are aware are being observed by a female, a higher likelihood exists that they will engage in overtly daring and gallant behaviours (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Although adolescent males are more likely to see themselves as assertive within social relationships, they are also prone to exhibit both physical and verbal aggression towards same-sex individuals, whereas females tend to first consider the consequences of aggressive behaviour (Perry & Pauletti, 2011).

Adolescents who are considered popular by their peer groups have been described as athletic, daring, defiant, humorous, and as wearing fashionable clothing; yet whilst popular individuals are perceived as highly socially competent, the literature suggests they are not necessarily rated as likeable by their peers (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). However, the evidence-base

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links socially alienated, excluded, or disconnected adolescents with a greater vulnerability to internalising emotional stressors and being more likely to develop psychological problems such as anxiety, depression (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Susceptibility to the influence of peer groups increases during early adolescence but then steadily declines in middle adolescence (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007). In spite of this, literature suggests that adolescents find it difficult negotiating social situations that involve strong peer pressure to conform (Rutter, 2007). Positive peer relationships have been found to act as a protective factor and buffer from participation in anti-social and risk taking behaviours (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). Nevertheless, a rise in recreational alcohol and drug use has been found to be commensurate with increased access to money and other financial resources during adolescence. Similarly, a rise in the incidence of overt anti-social and criminal behaviour has also been linked with adolescence (Rutter, 2007).

Familial determinants. Adolescence has often been constructed as a time of difficult and turbulent adjustment for families, with increased parent-child conflict occurring during early adolescence, the propensity for estrangement to develop in the child-parent relationship, and changes in the dynamic of sibling relationships (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). To understand how families managed such issues, qualitative research using semi-structured interviews by Beth Spring, Rosen, and Matheson (2002) explored how 15 parents from 10 families managed the transition of their children to adolescence. The study reported that in response to unanticipated problems experienced by their children, parents often demonstrated empathy and utilised cognitive strategies such as reinforcing personal strengths in an effort to support their child. Notably, the study reported that parents tended to allocate the positive achievements of their children to innate internal attributes, whereas they assigned negative experiences to external, transient, and socio-cultural causes (Beth Spring et al., 2002).

More recently, it has been argued that the need to exert autonomy during adolescence has been overstated (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Literature suggests that adolescents value guidance from parents, particularly in relation to future-orientated ambitions and topics such as career advice, educational pathways, and financial decision-making (Laser & Nicotera, 2011). Similarly, adolescents are reported to be most resilient when at least one adult caregiver is connected and involved with a young person's everyday life (Harms, 2005). Gurian (2006) highlighted that pressure often exists too early for young males to depart the care of the family system and instead emphasised that to develop optimally during late adolescence males require ongoing community,

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family and mentoring support. By leaving early, Gurian (2006) suggested developing young males forego receiving important social and emotional information from an experienced adult. Instead, this information is argued to be haphazardly gained through support received from peers but who themselves often lack this knowledge and are equally faced with negotiating their own developmental pathway (Gurian, 2006).

2.1.2 Adolescence and Aboriginal young people.

Aboriginal young people share the same developmental tasks as all young people during adolescence (Adermann & Campbell, 2007, 2010; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). However, the premise of adolescence as a concept is an Anglo and Western construction of human development (Esposito, 2000). In broad terms, the developmental trajectory for Aboriginal and young people is infancy to childhood to adulthood, with the transition from childhood to adulthood beginning in close proximity with the onset of puberty (Dudgeon, Garvey, & Pickett, 2000). Contemporary psychological, health and wellbeing, and educational literature has linked Aboriginal contexts with the construct of adolescence (Akbar, Dudgeon, Gilchrist, & Pitt, 2000; Atkinson, Nelson, & Atkinson, 2010; Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011; Lette, Wright, & Collard, 2000; Mohajer, Bessarab, & Earnest, 2009; Parker, 2010; Wanganeen, 2010; Williamson et al., 2010; Zubrick et al., 2005; Zubrick et al., 2010). In these contexts, the authors have used terms such as children, youth or young people interchangeably with adolescence in an effort to not only acknowledge the prolonged period of time it covers but to also be inclusive of cultural understandings of developmental transition points across the lifecycle.

Child-rearing and socialisation practices. Aboriginal parents tend to use fewer verbal instructions and more non-verbal strategies during early childhood years such as approving or disapproving eye contact (Kearins, 2000). Similarly, the freedom to actively interact and autonomously explore the social world away from parental supervision is often extended to young children by parents (Penman, 2006). From late childhood to early adolescence young people are encouraged to prioritise and value the collective wellbeing and functioning of the family (Nelson & Allison, 2000). This may include performing tasks like supervising and caring for younger siblings, helping with food preparation, and undertaking other domestic duties as needed (Gollan & Malin, 2012). Encouraging autonomy, self-reliance, decision-making, and problem-solving are perceived as key skills to growing well adjusted children (Gollan & Malin, 2012), achieving a sense of mastery of the world, and heightening the likelihood that a child will successfully transition into adulthood

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(Enembaru, 2000; Kearins, 2000; Penman, 2006). These child-rearing and socialisation practices mean that Aboriginal young people have a strong sense of obligation and responsibility to immediate and extended family as well as to other people in their respective kinship system and community (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010).

Sense of self, self-concept, and identity. Cultural identity is fundamental to positive mental health and wellbeing for Aboriginal adolescents (Department of Indigenous Affairs [DIA], 2005). However the historical spectre of colonialism and Western ethnocentrism has meant that the construct of identity has been and remains a highly contested matter (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1990; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). As highlighted in Chapter 1, Aboriginal people in WA have historically have been coaxed into internalising imposed Western constructions and expectations of what constituted authentic Aboriginality and at other times forcibly denied by State policy recognition of their cultural identity (Dudgeon, 2000b). It is pivotal to distinguish that both an individual sense of self and identity are rarely considered in terms of discrete individual attributes or achievements by Aboriginal people (Parker, 2010). Rather, a sense of self and identity are linked with membership and a sense of belonging to the collective tribe and to kinship/familial relations within that respective tribe (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010).

A sense of self and identity are also connected with ancestry, traditional lands, and Dreaming (Garvey, 2007). The term Dreaming is an English language term used in an umbrella fashion to refer to a diverse and complex socio-cultural creationist belief (Department of Education [DoE], 2002). For example, for the *Yindjibarndi* people of the Pilbara region of WA, the Dreaming refers to a period in time when the earth was soft and spiritual beings took form to create the land. During this time all living and non-living entities on it were created leaving behind culture, language, and the Lore for people to follow including strict rules governing marriage arrangements and how people related to each other (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008).

Purdie, Tripocony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, and Gunstone (2000) explored the complex and dynamic nature of identity in relation to adolescence and education for Aboriginal young people. After conducting a detailed review of the literature and extensive consultation with a wide breadth of Aboriginal Education Workers, students, parents, teachers and principals located in urban, regional and remote areas of Australia, the study indicated history, kinship, language,

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participation in customary practices, and place were important aspects of self-identity. The study reported that when Indigenous young people were not supported to learn ways to negotiate marked differences between the values of home and the values of other social contexts such as schools, the tension of this experience may serve to impede both functioning and self-identity within one or both contexts (Purdie et al., 2000). The authors described that for schools to be places that promote positive self-identity and places in which Indigenous young people believed their identities were valued all aspects that construct the identity of Indigenous young people needed to be valued. The study concluded that in addition to the important role of family, teachers, principals, and in particular the “climate” (p. 10) of schools and school systems played a critical role in ensuring positive identities were formed by Indigenous students (Purdie et al., 2000).

Pedersen and Walker (2000) conducted quantitative research into the self-concept of Aboriginal Australian ($n=60$) and Anglo Australian ($n=60$) children aged 6 to 12 years at three primary schools in metropolitan Perth. Using an adapted self-concept scale consisting of 10 questions scored from 1 to 4, the study found that Aboriginal children and Anglo Australian children both had positive self-concepts, despite Aboriginal children receiving less favourable evaluations by classroom teachers. In addition, although it was reported that Aboriginal children were aware of negative social stereotypes towards Aboriginality in wider society, the study found that they did not necessarily internalise these stereotypes into their individual sense of self. This finding was argued to support the premise that for Aboriginal children, Aboriginal people were more likely to represent significant others that influenced their lives. Therefore, unfavourable evaluations by teachers and negative stereotypes in wider society were not internalised, as they were not necessarily associated by Aboriginal children as being significant other people. The study suggested that family and the Aboriginal community served as a protective factor to Aboriginal children’s sense of self by providing a positive social context that simultaneously deemphasised wider negative societal stereotypes (Pedersen & Walker, 2000).

Recent qualitative research conducted by Kickett-Tucker (2009) explored the racial identity of young Aboriginal children ($n=35$) aged 8 to 12 years and Aboriginal youth ($n=120$) aged 13 to 17 years at 10 primary and secondary schools located in metropolitan Perth, WA. Data was collected using conversational interviews in a focus group format, with thematic analysis later applied to distil components of racial identity. The study reported that for younger children and

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older youth culture, family, language and physical appearance were central to their sense of racial identity (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Interestingly, the younger children group reported culture as the most salient element of their racial identity, whereas the older youth group conveyed that a strong sense of self was the most important contributor to their racial identity (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). Within the theme of sense of self for the older youth group, a number of sub-themes were identified including, pride about self, shame, appraisals from others, security and safety, confidence and strength, comfort, self-esteem, cooperation, and integrity. Notably, the study reported that older youth believed they had to constantly reinforce and express their racial identity for it to be acknowledged by wider society (Kickett-Tucker, 2009).

In contrast to Pedersen and Walker (2000), the study by Kickett-Tucker (2009) raised concern over the discovery that both younger Aboriginal children and older youth had internalised prejudice and negative social constructions of Aboriginal people found in wider society. The study found for some participants their understanding of Aboriginality was linked by the darkness of an individual's skin, with some perceiving that the darker a person was the more Aboriginal blood they had (Kickett-Tucker, 2009). The study argued that discrimination, racism, and stereotyping continued to have a significant influence on the racial identity that Aboriginal young people constructed about themselves. Consequently, it was posited that the development of strong sense of self and racial identity in Aboriginal young people was central to a positive sense of cultural security and belonging as well as coping capacity for dealing with prejudice and racism as they transitioned into adulthood (Kickett-Tucker, 2009).

Rites of passage. For Aboriginal young people the onset of puberty may be accompanied by increased participation in cultural activities, rituals and ceremonies (Dudgeon, Garvey, & Pickett, 2000). For some young Aboriginal males this may include participation in initiation rites, sometimes referred to in English language contexts as, men's business, customary or traditional Law, Lore time or as Lore (Collard, 2000; Garvey, 2007; Wettinger & Westerman, 1998; Westerman, 2010; Zubrick et al., 2005). In regional areas of WA such as the Goldfields, Kimberley, and Pilbara, male initiation rites continue to be closely linked with consolidating a sense of belonging with family and kinship systems, as well as to enunciate connectedness with land and Dreaming (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007; 2008; Roe, 2000, 2010; Ryan, 2001; Somerville, Somerville, & Wyld, 2010).

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Each Aboriginal tribe has their own unique cultural practices and formal ceremonies that must be observed to correctly initiate young males into adulthood (Ryan, 2001). Initiation rites are not prescriptive and not all young Aboriginal males in WA go through this experience. Rather, participation depends on multiple factors such as the discretion and support of family, and/or the perceived suitability and readiness of a young person by Elders. Those young males at the beginning of this process are viewed as uninitiated boys and as in a special transitional phase between boyhood and manhood (Bourke, & Bourke, 2002). To progress from this phase young males may spend several weeks up to a couple of months at a bush Law ground in the care of Elders and physically separated from their family (Wettinger & Westerman, 1998). Young males are expected to learn and carry knowledge about ancestry, astrology, language, obligations and responsibilities to kinship and people, totems and spirituality, permanent waterholes and underground waterways, hunting and cooking protocols appropriate for each animal and plant, as well as weather, tidal and other seasonal patterns (Berndt & Berndt, 1996; Bourke & Bourke, 2002; Collard, 2000; Garvey, 2007; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Ryan, 2001).

A wide range of teaching and learning strategies are used during this time. These may include, learning by adorning elaborate body paint, dance, drawings, music, painting, song, rock art and engravings; but may also include spending time at special and sacred sites to learn from the landscape intricate matters of culture and the interconnectedness of people with nature, land, and the Dreaming (DoE, 2002; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008). Teaching pedagogies may include direct instruction, observation, trial and error, demonstration and performance, as well as role modelling (DoE, 2002). However, oral traditions and in particular storytelling play a significant role in binding young people with learning about their cultural identity (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Ryan, 2001; Somerville, Somerville, & Wyld, 2010). Stories and storytelling are used to relay from one generation to the next detailed accounts of personal and communal experiences, to ensure the ongoing recording and retelling of history, and to pass on Dreaming (Collard, 2000; Garvey, 2007; Ryan, 2001). The telling of Dreaming stories are often site specific and may only be told at certain times, by certain people who are the recognised custodians of those stories (DoE, 2002). Hence, the ability of young people to listen, resist distraction and sustain focus when stories are shared represent attributes expected by Elders during ceremonial activities (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation & Rijavec, 2004).

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At the successful completion of initiation rites, young males are reintegrated into the tribe as men. Different tribes have their own word to describe this important transition in the cultural development of their respective young males into manhood. In the Pilbara, the *Yindjibarndi* people refer to newly initiated men as *Nyuju* and hold ceremonies to welcome them back into the community (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2008). In attaining this status they are expected to carry the custodianship of traditional Law (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation & Rijavec, 2004) and to uphold cultural, familial, kinship and spiritual obligations and responsibilities associated with manhood (Berndt & Berndt, 1996; Bourke & Bourke, 2002). Young males committed to carrying the Lore return each Lore season to perform ceremonies and to ensure the wellbeing of the land, spirits, and all things connected with their respective Dreaming (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation & Rijavec, 2004).

Social and emotional wellbeing. The *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey* (WAACHS) reported that Aboriginal children and young people of a primary or secondary carer who themselves had been forcibly taken away from their natural family and separated from traditional lands as a child, were significantly more likely to experience emotional or behavioural difficulties (Zubrick et al., 2005). Notwithstanding this, the WAACHS estimated that 26 per cent of all Aboriginal children surveyed between four and 11 years of age were at a high risk of developing clinically significant emotional and behavioural difficulties (Zubrick et al., 2005). For Aboriginal young people aged between 12 and 17 years, 21 per cent were at high risk of developing difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and self-harming behaviour (Zubrick et al., 2005). In addition, more than one in every six Aboriginal young people aged 12 and 17 years reported giving serious consideration to ending their own life (Zubrick et al., 2005).

Despite only limited research progress made into youth suicide, and suicidal behaviour, it remains an area of great concern in WA. The 2011 State inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of all children and young people in WA emphasised that mental health issues were particularly acute for Aboriginal children and young people who lived in regional and remote areas of WA (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011). It noted young Aboriginal males were at significantly greater risk of engaging in suicidal behaviours. A submission to the inquiry by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre stressed the considerable concern in the region about the high level of Aboriginal young suicides in the Kimberley region of the State (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011). Recent work to

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establish a youth and community wellbeing program in the remote East Kimberley community of Oombulgurri (see Figure 1) described Aboriginal youth suicide as endemic (Morgan & Drew, 2010). The program founders argued that conventional intervention and prevention strategies were unable to “stem the rising tide of youth suicide in the region” (Morgan & Drew, 2010, p. 253). Oombulgurri has since been closed by the State Government through the withdrawal of medical, police and school services, due to concern over the viability of the community and the wellbeing of the residents.

In spite of the distinguished contribution made by Associate Professor Frydenberg and Professor Lewis to understanding the coping strategies and styles of Australian adolescents, a dearth of research exists investigating the coping strategies and styles used by Aboriginal young people. Recent research involving 111 Aboriginal youth aged 13 to 17 years from both urban ($n=48$) and rural/remote ($n=63$) locations from across WA, has begun to address this paucity (Westerman, 2010). Reporting on the development of a culturally appropriate model to engage Aboriginal youth with mental health services, the study highlighted the significant influence of cultural identity and customary socialisation practices on problem solving strategies used by Aboriginal youth (Westerman, 2010). The results emphasised that in trying to resolve a mental health problem, Aboriginal youth first explored cultural explanations before considering any other possible explanations. This problem-solving hierarchy included consideration of cultural obligations and spiritual belief systems prior to consideration of medical possibilities (Westerman, 2010). Such research findings indicate that it is imperative for mental health practitioners and researchers to have a strong conceptual understanding of such a hierarchy to problem solving used by Aboriginal young people in WA.

In sum, the first half of this chapter presented a multi-systemic perspective of adolescence and a number of meta-themes emerged from the literature. Foremost, as a phase in human development adolescence covers a large age span that encompasses a wide variety of changes and transitions – physical, neurological, psychological, social, and familial. Although early constructions of adolescence such as Hall’s storm-and-stress and universal theories of human development such as posited by Erikson and Piaget provided valuable contributions, contemporary evidence suggests that alone they are inadequate to account for individual variations and socio-cultural differences (Harms, 2005; Laser & Nicotera, 2011; Rutter, 2007; Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). It was in this vein that developmental factors pertinent to adolescence and Aboriginal young people were explored,

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with particular attention drawn to child-rearing and socialisation practices, sense of self and identity, rites of passage, as well as social and emotional wellbeing. The second half of this chapter critiques the literature relating to boarding schools and transition in Australia.

2.2 Boarding schools and the education system in Western Australia.

Others have provided a historical synthesis of boarding schools in Australia⁸. It is valuable, nevertheless, to provide a brief synopsis of boarding schools in Australia today. Boarding schools vary in their age, organisational structure and size, and each has its own unique cultural, religious, and social nuances (Independent Schools Council of Australia [ISCA], 2010). Several studies point to the distal influence of the English Public School system and a tendency in some Australian boarding schools to emulate the traditions of the former (Synott & Symes, 1995; White, 2004a, 2004b). Saltmarsh (2007, 2008) suggests within the smaller sub-group of boys only boarding schools there exists, “a longstanding tradition of education for the sons of the colony’s elite and middle classes modelled on the English public schools” (p. 337). Former Australian Prime Ministers such as Fraser, Gorton, Holt, Menzies, Rudd, and Whitlam were all boarding students, as were business entrepreneurs such as Rupert Murdoch (Cree, 1991). Hence, private boys only boarding schools are often perceived in Australia as the domain of the wealthy and as places of power (Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

Weinberg (1968) suggested that for the term boarding school to be applied to an institution within the English Public school system, the boarding student population needed to comprise at least 75 per cent of the overall student population for a school. An analysis of boarding schools in Israel, Britain and North America by Kahane (1988), posited that they were residential agencies of socialisation and characterised by a live-in student population and a curriculum that encompassed all aspects of school life. More recently, North American research has defined boarding schools as constituting those institutions which have 80 to 90 per cent of the overall student population living on campus in dormitory-style residential halls for the duration of the schooling year (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009). The concept of boarding school in Australia has historically been linked with a variety of institutions ranging from, boarding schools, hostels, boarding houses, and home-stays (Mason, 1997; Johnstone, 2001; White, 2004a; Whyte & Boylan, 2008). Moreover, research has asserted that the Australian boarding schools are a different type

⁸ See Cree (1991, 2000); Trimingham Jack (1997); and White (2004a).

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of educational institution compared to their overseas counterparts (Cree, 1991). Instead of an emphasis placed on the ratio of boarding students to the overall student population of a school, the concept of boarding school in Australia has been argued to be more of an educational philosophy (Cree, 1991). An educational philosophy in WA that some have further asserted seeks to overcome the tyranny of vast geographical distances and sparsely populated regional areas (Carrigg, 1994).

The Australian Constitution⁹ delineates that the legal responsibility for the administration and delivery of education is the responsibility of the State Governments (Carney, 2006), which includes early childhood, primary, and secondary schooling (see Figure 3). The education system in WA is highly centralised around administration and policy delivered from Perth (Beresford, 2001) and divided into three sectors, 1) the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), 2) the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA), and 3) the Department of Education in Western Australia (DoE). The AISWA and the CECWA are frequently grouped together by State and Federal Governments and categorised as non-government schools, or commonly referred to in the wider community as private schools. However, schools in the non-government sector are also regularly described by their religious affiliation, for example, as Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Uniting Church schools.

⁹ The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia came into effect on 1 January 1901 and is often referred to as 'the Constitution' (Parkin, Summers, & Woodward, 2010).

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Grade	Western Australian Schooling Structure
Year 12 ^c	Secondary Schooling
Year 11	
Year 10	
Year 9	
Year 8	
Year 7 ^b	Primary Schooling
Year 6	
Year 5	
Year 4	
Year 3	
Year 2	
Year 1	
Pre-Year 1 ^a	Pre-Primary Schooling - Kindergarten

Figure 3. The Educational Journey for Western Australian Children.

Note. Adapted from Schools Australia (ABS, 2010).

^a By 2013 pre-primary will become the first year of compulsory schooling for all children.

^b By 2015 Year 7 will become the first year of secondary schooling for all students in Government and non-Government schools.

^c In 2008 the leaving age was raised to 17 years of age.

An estimated 17,097 boarding students attended 154 boarding schools across Australia (ISCA, 2010). Although the State Government operates residential facilities in metropolitan and regional areas of the State, boarding schools are largely members of the non-government education system in WA. In WA 24 non-government schools identified as offering boys only, girls only, or co-educational boarding services (Department of Education Services, DES, 2010), of which all but one¹⁰ were members of the AISWA. Seven boarding schools identified as a boys only boarding school and all of these are located in metropolitan Perth (DES, 2010). With this in mind, contemporary boarding schools in WA can be described as predominantly non-government secondary schools that have residential facilities and a live-in residential student community on

¹⁰ Clontarf Aboriginal College offers boarding facilities to male students Years 7 to 12 and is a member of the CECWA, but not the AISWA.

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campus for the duration of the school year. It is noteworthy that by 2015 all children in WA will begin secondary school in Year 7, whereas in previous years this transition has taken place at the beginning of Year 8. This change in the commencement of secondary school has meant that boarding schools in WA are now required to prepare for a new cohort and a younger boarding student population. Across both government and non-government education sectors in 2010 there was an estimated 358,396 full time students, of whom 22,815 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full time students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2010).

A key element of phenomenological research is to empathise with the context experienced by an individual through written description (Moustakas, 1994) and to converge on the relationship between different parts of the context experienced by an individual and the construction of meaning that subtend it (Wertz, 2005). Similarly, the actor-network theory (ANT) proposed by Latour emphasised the influence of non-human actors and other non-human artefacts on the construction of meaning and knowledge (Latour, 2005). In consideration of literature that has emphasised the influence of school environments in mediating students academic motivation, social and emotional wellbeing, and sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993; Osterman, 2000; Purdie et al., 2000) and given the paucity of scholarly accounts of boarding school environments in contemporary WA, a brief description of the organisational and social structures of the boarding schools involved with the current research seemed appropriate. The following description has been drawn from information provided in the prospectus for each school.

Each of the five boarding schools involved with the current research have been described in the wider community as elite/private boys' schools. All emphasise the culture of their school community as constituting the very social fabric and essence of their educational philosophy. An architectural focus has taken significant prominence across the five schools. Each school is designed around multi-storied red-brick or sandstone buildings restored from their foundational years with several having enclosed grassed or paved quadrangles surrounded by cloister-ways at their centre. The mixture of older buildings and contemporary designs often contain educational facilities that are referred to as 'cutting edge' and are intended to promote an atmosphere of a well established school that foremost honours scholarly achievement. For example, School B promotes how it has twelve state of the art science laboratories, modern collaborative learning areas for students, a separate music school, art studio, drama theatre, and information technology

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buildings, as well as an Olympic-sized heated swimming pool, grass and artificial cricket nets and a rowing shed.

The residential facilities and dining hall for boarding students are centrally located within the grounds of each school. All have recently refurnished and redeveloped their boarding house facilities and each reflects a contemporary design with communal living, social, and study spaces. Sleeping arrangements vary and depend on the operational structure endorsed by each school. In general, each school tends to have younger students (e.g., Years 7-10) in shared rooms in a separate boarding house from the senior secondary students, with their own private storage space and desk and student numbers in rooms ranging from two to six students per room. Students in Years 11 and 12 are often provided with their own private room. Although schedules vary between each of the five schools, all boarding students follow highly structured and supervised daily, weekly and term schedules. Table 2 provides a typical example of a daily routine for a boarding student and has been extrapolated from the 2011 boarding handbook for School B.

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Table 2

Daily and Weekly Routine for Boarding Students at School B

Monday to Friday Routine	
7:00am	Wake up, shower, dress, tidy bed area
7:20 – 8:00am	Breakfast in Dining Hall in school uniform
8:20 - 8:25am	Boys leave boarding house and uniform check by senior boys
8:30am	Boys are to be in their tutorial rooms
8:30am (Thursdays)	Headmaster's assembly in the Chapel
	Day School – students follow individual timetables and attend lessons
10:45-11:00am	Recess – morning tea served in dining hall
	Day School – students follow individual timetables and attend lessons
12:45-1:15pm	Lunchtime – lunch served in dining hall
	Day School – students follow individual timetables and attend lessons
3:05pm	End of Formal Day School
3:30 – 5:00pm	Students have school sports training to attend twice per week, if not a sports day then this becomes recreational time including the option to take afternoon leave.
5:00 -5:30pm	Showers and tidy up
5:45 -6:15pm	Dinner in the dining hall
6:30pm	Prep for all boys – homework, study, tutoring
8:00pm	Supper in the Housemother's room
8:30 – 9:30pm	Second prep for students in years 10 to 12
9:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 7 and 8
9:30pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 9
10:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 10
10:00 – 10:30pm	Years 11 to 12 study break and prepare for bed
10:30pm	Years 11 to 12 boys study or read in own rooms
11:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 11 and 12
Saturday Routine	
7:00am	Wake up for boys in Year 10-12
7:30am	Breakfast in dining hall
7:15am – 12:00pm	Year 10 to 12 students have school sport commitments
12:00pm– 1:00pm	Return to Boarding house
1:00pm onwards	Supervised free time, leisure activities, afternoon leave or weekend leave
11:00pm	Lights out and bedtime
Sunday Routine	
8:30am	Wake up
9:00am	Supervised free time, organised recreational activities, study time, day leave
7:00pm-8:30pm	All boys asked to remain in their rooms and prep for the coming week ahead – school work, clothing, and tidy room
8:30pm	Students on weekend leave are expected to have returned unless another arrangement has been made with the Head of the Residential Community
9:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 7 and 8
9:30pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 9
10:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 10
11:00pm	Lights out and bedtime for students in Years 11 and 12

Note. At the end of day school on Fridays boarding students may sign-out on weekend leave to stay with a member of family or with a family registered as a host-family.

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Each of the five schools is constructed in a way that they are able to make their own unique claim to being at the forefront of educating boys. All maintain that they modify their curriculum and teaching pedagogy to augment boy's learning styles. Notions of endeavouring to seek excellence in education often coalesce with statements referring to harnessing the potential in each individual boy while also nurturing a sense of community. For example, School A promotes the provision of an education for boys centred on their own development so that they have the opportunity to become good men, ready to take their place in society and to make a contribution to the lives of others. While School D lists excellence as a core value and describes itself as striving to be leaders in boys' education and to obtain excellence in all that we do.

Being non-government schools, each of the five schools employs an extensive number of staff. Professions range from administrators, accountants, archivists, bursars, chaplains, community relation officers, event and venue managers, grounds people, human resource officers, personal assistants, publicists, librarians, nurses, psychologists, security guards, teachers, and teacher assistants. It is commonplace in each school and often stipulated as a teacher's condition of employment, for staff to be responsible for multiple co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The experience and expertise of staff means they undertake other roles such as boarding supervisor, tutor, year co-ordinator, head of house, and head of learning area. Hierarchies are important across each of the five schools. This is observable in the allocation of staff titles and roles, with the Headmaster at the top of this structure. It is common for the Headmaster and senior staff to wear a full suit and tie on a daily basis and the appropriate attire of slacks and polo-shirt adorned with the school crest when attending interschool or social events. All students are expected to address staff with the use of terms such as Sir, Mr, Ms, Miss or Mrs followed by the last name of the staff member. Students are expected to immediately comply with direction and instruction given by a teacher.

The house system is a prominent organisational strategy used across each of the five schools. The house system commonly involves students of different ages coming together as a single socialisation unit and routinely competing in both academic and non-academic events with students in other houses throughout the school year. The house system is managed in a formalised way by senior teachers such as the Housemaster or Head of House. They are also often informally managed by senior students such as House Captain and House Prefects. Each school has a unique pastoral care and discipline system. Often the premise underpinning the pastoral care

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system within each school is aligned with the school motto, values and mission statement and is delivered through the house system. Several pastoral care systems are constructed to promote a relationships focus, for example School E explains that encouraging and affirming relationships lies at the heart of effective learning and a holistic wellbeing focus for example, School D describes its pastoral care system as a 'total climate of care', based on the premise that each individual student feels that he belongs to the school community and has the fullest possibility for personal, social, academic and spiritual growth.

2.2.1 Transition and sense of belonging.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines transition as the passage or change from one position, state, or stage to another (2003). An extensive body of international literature has documented a notable dip in the academic motivation and performance coinciding with the transition from primary to secondary school for students (Gottfried, Flemming, & Gottfried, 2001; Urdan & Midgley, 2003). Researchers have discussed this trend in conjunction with developmental changes experienced during early adolescence such as the onset of puberty (Duchesne & Larose, 2007). However, models such as the person-environment fit theory have provided a lens that suggests adolescents' experiences at school are more closely linked with the relationship students have with a learning environment and the social roles school environments afford to them (Eccles et al., 1993). The person-environment theory posits that academic motivation and performance, social and emotional wellbeing, and behaviour at school are influenced by the fit between individual attributes and the school environment as well as the fit with attributes of the school environment and the individual (Eccles, & Midgely, 1989). If discord exists between these elements, the person-environment theory suggests a decline in motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and belonging can eventuate (Eccles, & Midgely, 1989).

It has also been well established that some students view the transition from primary to secondary school as an exciting period of change and opportunity, whereas other students approach it with a sense of apprehension and uncertainty (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Lawson, Wyra, Skrzypiec, & Askell-Williams, 2008). In WA, a qualitative study by Stumpers, Breen, Pooley, Cohen, and Pike (2005) critically explored the school context for younger students (non-Indigenous) prior to the transition to secondary school in metropolitan Perth. Using semi-structured interviews with 15 students in Year 7 (8 male and 7 female) primary school students, thematic analysis revealed that during the pre-transition phase students anticipated both positive

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and negative outcomes as a consequence of going to secondary school. Several participants reported that they recognised the transition would be challenging in terms of adjusting to new teachers, and some revealed feeling nervous about the workload in class being harder (Stumpers et al., 2005). A number of participants were concerned about bullying and being the smallest and youngest students at school. The study also revealed that not all students constructed the pending transition as a negative experience but rather as an important developmental step towards adulthood, with several recognising that learning to re-negotiate roles was an important part of growing-up (Stumpers et al., 2005).

Qualitative research by Pereira and Pooley (2007) investigated the transitional experience for older students in Years 11 and 12 who moved from two small rural schools in the Southwest of WA to a larger regional high school to complete their secondary education. Using semi-structured interviews with ten students (three males and nine females, non-Indigenous) thematic analysis revealed two main themes characterised the transition experience for these older students. The first theme was social relationships and described the experience of adjusting to a new peer group and teacher expectations. Students reported worrying about making friends, fitting in with the wider social context of the school, and experiencing prejudice and stereotyping because they were from a different town (Pereira & Pooley, 2007). They also reported experiencing a sense of loss in regard to previous teacher-student interactions at their former school which were relationship orientated, after encountering more formal and academic focussed teacher-student interactions at their new school. The second major theme was labelled school issues and comprised the two sub-themes of academic issues and structural issues. The competitive academic environment of the high school accompanied by an increased workload was a significant adjustment for students, as was adjusting to stricter assignment and homework due dates, and undertaking autonomous and independent study. Structural issues included catching the correct bus to school and navigating a new school campus, however these were identified as only short-term issues (Pereira & Pooley, 2007).

In discussing the implications of transition experiences on younger and older students in WA, both Stumpers et al. (2005) and Pereira and Pooley (2007) converged on the importance of further research into understanding student's sense of belonging and membership within school contexts. Sense of belonging has been described as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment"

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(Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). A positive sense of belonging has been linked with a wide range of beneficial outcomes, such as improved academic achievement and motivation, and with better social skills (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Contextual and situational factors such as the quality of social relationships and the culture of a school have been acknowledged as influencing student' sense of belonging (Faircloth, 2009), as well as with a greater likelihood of successfully transitioning from middle school to high school (Anderman, 2002). By contrast, a low sense of belonging at school has been linked with poor attendance and retention rates, and a lower academic achievement and effort (Faircloth, 2009). Evidence suggests that the level to which students can be expected to optimally function academically and psychologically depends upon the sense of belonging they construct at school (Goodenow, 1993; Kabir & Rickards, 2006).

Longitudinal qualitative research by Nelson and Hay (2010) explored the experience of moving to a new day school for 14 Indigenous students (eight female and six male) aged 11-15 years in Queensland. Interviewed seven times over a two and a half year period, the study found that the opportunity to exert agency such as to make different choices, have prior knowledge and experiences recognised, and being able to contribute to the classroom curriculum, was perceived by students as supporting the transition experience to a new school environment. The study also reported that whilst finding negotiating different behavioural management approaches required a period of adjustment for students, it was relationships with school staff and specifically teachers, which significantly influenced a student's perception of the transition experience and sense of connection with school. The study concluded that to avoid marginalising Indigenous students during periods of transition it was important for school processes to be inclusive of the socio-complexity and heterogeneity of their life-worlds, while ensuring the cultural capital and learning experiences that student arrived with was valued (Nelson & Hay, 2010).

A growing body of research has argued that a sense of belonging represents a key antecedent to understanding the degree to which young people feel alienated or connected with education (Osterman, 2000; Pooley, Breen, Pike, Cohen, & Drew, 2008; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Congruent with international literature (Eccles et al., 1993), a salient conclusion of the Western Australian study by Stumpers et al. (2005) into younger students prior to their transition to secondary school was that, "the types of roles available to and created by students within their school in order to exercise influence and participate in a meaningful way, have a powerful affect in shaping the types of experiences they have at school" (p. 264). The opportunity to create and

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establish relationships with peers and teachers, exercise control and power, and to express self-determination and identity, were perceived by students as empowering them to make worthwhile and valued contributions at school (Stumpers et al., 2005). Hence, school organisation and the roles made available to students within schools represent important factors linked with mediating a sense of belonging and minimising the negative implications of alienation, social isolation, and school rejection (Stumpers et al., 2005).

Teachers play a significant role in fostering students sense of belonging (Goodenow, 1993). Research has demonstrated that teachers who are inclusive of all students during classroom activities, equitable with their treatment of students, and avoid favouritism, had a greater likelihood of assisting students to feel like valued members of a school (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). Similarly, teachers who have attributes such as having a good sense of humour, being respectful, showing warmth and care, are motivating, and acknowledge students identity and culture, have been linked with facilitating a sense of belonging (Faircloth, 2009; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Osterman, 2000). By contrast, attributes such as inconsistency in the application of classroom rules, a minimal tolerance threshold, and having low expectations have been associated with impeding the development of belonging and a sense of valued membership in students while at school (Booker, 2004).

Godfey, Partington, Harslett, and Richer (2001) investigated the perception of schooling for 473 Aboriginal students in Years 5 to 10 (46 per cent male, 54 per cent female) at 22 metropolitan and rural schools across in WA. Using a questionnaire containing 73 items, students rated variables such as teacher attitude, school atmosphere, and social aspects of schooling, on a four-point Likert scale. Analysis revealed that the majority of students held a positive attitude towards schooling and reported feeling welcome and respected at school. Of the students surveyed 84 per cent reported they hoped to stay at school until the end of Year 12 and 85 per cent indicated they believed they had the ability to remain at school. The study found 94 per cent wanted to get as much education as they could and that 98 per cent believed their family wanted them to get a good education (Godfey et al., 2001). Although 82 per cent of students indicated that respected their teacher, a significant concern for 34 per cent of students was the low expectations held by their teachers about the educational aspirations they had for them. Indeed, 39 per cent of students perceived that their teacher did not care about them (Godfey et al., 2001).

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The study suggested that an implication of these findings was that Aboriginal students were highly aware of teacher expectations and argued that negative attributions made by teachers acted as a motivational barrier that limited Aboriginal students educational aspirations. Notably, it acknowledged that while the Aboriginal students valued schooling, only 57 per cent believed that their respective school context made them feel important (Godfey et al., 2001).

Despite 84 per cent of Aboriginal students surveyed by Godfey et al. (2001) reporting having an aspiration to stay at school to complete Year 12, and 85 per cent indicating they believed they had the ability to remain at school, the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to Year 12 remains low (ABS, 2010). Table 3 provides a comparison of national Indigenous and non-Indigenous students' retention rates from Year 7/8 to Year 12 in 2000 and 2010.

Table 3

National Retention Rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Full-time Students in the Years 2000 and 2010

Retention Rate From Year 7/8		2000 (%)	2010 (%)
To Year 9	Indigenous Students	95.5	100.8
	Non-Indigenous Students	99.8	100.7
	Percentage Point Difference	-4.3	0.2
To Year 10	Indigenous Students	83.0	95.8
	Non-Indigenous Students	98.0	101.0
	Percentage Point Difference	-15.0	-5.2
To Year 11	Indigenous Students	53.6	72.1
	Non-Indigenous Students	86.2	93.1
	Percentage Point Difference	-32.6	-20.9
To Year 12	Indigenous Students	36.4	47.2
	Non-Indigenous Students	73.3	79.4
	Percentage Point Difference	-36.9	-32.2

Note. Data extrapolated from Table 15, Schools Australia (ABS, 2010).

Whilst statistical data can only quantify trends, Table 3 shows that in 2010 the national retention rate of non-Indigenous students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 was reported to be 79.4 per

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cent, by contrast for Indigenous students it was 47.2 per cent, a difference of 32.2 percentage points (ABS, 2010). Table 3 indicates that although the majority of Indigenous students transition from primary to secondary school, progression into upper secondary school years declines substantially. Arguably, although the focus of concern is frequently on academic performance, attendance, and retention statistics, the consistent trend illustrated by Table 3 suggest that further attention should be directed to considering the environment and organisation of secondary school contexts. In particular, towards understanding how Indigenous students are able to avoid developing feelings of alienation while at school (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Gray & Beresford, 2006) and how secondary schools are better able to satisfy the need to belong for Indigenous students.

The is further evidence that suggests an urgent need exists across Australia for secondary schools to satisfy Aboriginal students need to belong. Research by Craven et al. (2005) investigated the aspirations, dreams, self-perception, and realities of Year 11 and 12 Aboriginal students in New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia. Using survey questionnaires ($n=517$) and focus groups ($n=79$), the study found that although many Year 11 and 12 Aboriginal students reported highly valuing school and being able to visualise their educational aspirations, many perceived that racism at school and in the broader community would impede their ability to achieving their aspirations (Craven et al., 2005). Factors such as conflict within the home community, family obligations, peer pressure, and violence were also reported as barriers. The investigation reported that despite Aboriginal students dreaming of a future in which they achieved their educational aspirations, their self-perception of what was actually achievable in reality was strongly influenced by the ability of others to equally imagine the same future (Craven et al., 2005).

2.2.2 Transition and boarding school.

A number of American and European studies that have investigated experiences at boarding school for students (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Cookson & Persell, 1985; Fisher, Frazer, & Murray, 1984, 1986; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009; Kahane, 1988). Arguably, given the similarities between population demographics, geographical size, political, social, and historical interactions between White settlers and Indigenous peoples (Gray & Beresford, 2008), Canadian studies offer the most comparable experiences in the area of Indigenous education and boarding school. For example, Canadian research has highlighted how residential schools were historically derived to

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separate Aboriginal children from their parents and denigrate traditional languages, cultural and spiritual practices (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006). In addition, although keen to support their children while they were at boarding school, Aboriginal parents in Canada were often dissuaded from participating in the care and education of their children and correspondence during school terms between children and parents was censored or prohibited (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006). While education policy and practices have significantly progressed in Canada, the legacy of negative attitudes, exposure to racism and maltreatment, and restricted access to traditional languages, experienced at boarding schools by Aboriginal students has underpinned a lower sense of self-esteem, poor educational achievement, and limited engagement with employment after the completion of school (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006).

Much of the literature investigating Australian students' experiences at boarding school have focused on the effect of boarding school on students (Baills & Rossi, 2001; Downs, 2001; Mason, 1997; Patrick, Bramston, & Wakefield, 2004; Poynting, & Donaldson, 2005; Salthmarsh, 2007, 2008; White, 2004b; Yeo, 2010), rather than exploring the meaning that students construct about going to boarding school. Furthermore, much of the remaining literature has focussed on reporting the perspective of adult educational practitioners employed by boarding schools (Kelly, 1991; Lynch, 1998; Mathias, 1998; Switzer, 2001; Tudor, 1998). However, a few pertinent studies provide an insight into the meaning and transition experience for Australian students at boarding school.

Bramston and Patrick (2007) used a mixed-method approach comprised of focus groups and a battery of survey questionnaires including the Life Events Scale and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, to investigate the level of distress experienced by 36 non-Indigenous students in Years 6 to 12 during the transition from a small rural town to one of six urban based boarding schools in Queensland. The study found no difference in level of dissonance experienced by those students who became fulltime boarding students that lived on campus, with the dissonance experienced by students who became day students at a boarding school (Bramston & Patrick, 2007). The study reported that the transition to boarding school was generally perceived as a positive experience, with the majority of students reporting that they felt like they coped with the transition. Although 60 per cent of students reported experiencing homesickness, none of the 36 students considered it a serious issue. Rather, they reported that homesickness was a temporary feeling which was part-and-parcel of boarding school life and required getting used to (Bramston

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& Patrick, 2007). The study also identified that males believed boarding school opened doors to the real-world through increased opportunity to develop new skills. In contrast, females linked boarding school with increasing their social network (Bramston & Patrick, 2007). Both male and female students identified talking with peers, staff and friends, and keeping busy through participation in activities and events organised by the boarding school, as key strategies that helped them to manage being away from home. Some students indicated a buddy system that enabled older and more established boarding students to mentor new or younger boarding students also assisted with the adjustment to daily routines of boarding school life (Bramston & Patrick, 2007).

Similarly Whyte and Boylan (2008) used a battery of survey questionnaires combined with focus group and individual interviews, to explore the experience for 89 primary school students aged 12 to 14 years (44 male and 45 female) as they transitioned into four non-government boarding schools – three located in rural New South Wales (NSW) and one in Southern Queensland. Thematic analysis revealed three key issues which characterised the transition experience for these students, these were, homesickness, adjusting to communal living, and experiencing feelings of apprehension (Whyte & Boylan, 2008). Similar to the findings reported by Bramston and Patrick (2007), 64 per cent of students reported experiencing homesickness. Challenges linked with adjusting to communal living included limited privacy, strict daily and/or weekly rules and routines, and interpersonal relationships with boarding house supervisors and other boarding students. A feeling of apprehension was reported by 26 per cent of students and described as experiencing a mixture of excitement and nervousness at the same time (Whyte & Boylan, 2008). Three key coping strategies used by students identified by the study were, talking with people, trying to remain busy or occupied, and building friendships. Although the transition experience was reported as challenging by students, the study found that no significant difference existed between boarding students and day students sense of self-concept. Rather, boarding student's self-concept was found to remain relatively stable during the transitional experience (Whyte & Boylan, 2008).

2.2.3 Transition, boarding school, and Aboriginal young people.

It is difficult to precisely determine the number of Aboriginal young people from remote communities attending a boarding school away from home in Australia. Such information is not readily extrapolated from current data collection frameworks used by State, Territory, and Federal

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Government Departments, or from data collection methods by non-government bodies. Hughes and Hughes (2009) reported that Aboriginal parents in remote communities were increasingly choosing to send their children to non-government boarding schools in major urban centres. In quantifying this statement, they estimated that 2000 Aboriginal children from remote areas across Australia were accessing mainstream boarding schools located in urban centres through scholarship programs (Hughes & Hughes, 2009). In a review of school attendance and retention, Purdie and Buckley (2010) estimated that over the last decade hundreds of Aboriginal students from remote communities had attended schools away from home. Similarly, the 2010 annual report for the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) indicated that it had supported a total of 227 Indigenous boarding students in Years 7 to 12 (AIEF, 2010).

Arguably, under these circumstances, the estimated number of Aboriginal students from remote communities attending boarding school has to be inferred. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) administered by Centrelink, is a means-tested scheme that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families living in remote areas of Australia assistance with residential and tuition fees at boarding schools (ABSTUDY, 2010). As of August 2010, Centrelink databases recorded that nationally 4,165 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students had accessed the ABSTUDY Schools Fees Allowance (Boarding) supplement (A. Davila, personal communication, October 11, 2010¹¹). In WA, 793 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students had accessed the Schools Fees Allowance (Boarding) supplement during 2010 (A. Davila, personal communication, October 11, 2010). These estimates do not account for students who were ineligible for the Schools Fees Allowance (Boarding) supplement but still attended a boarding school or for a full-fee paying family. However, in contrast to prior estimations in the literature, the figures provided by the current research suggest that the prevalence of this social phenomenon is notably higher than previously acknowledged.

As mentioned, a paucity exists in research specifically exploring the transition experience to boarding school contexts for Aboriginal students. Early research by Sommerlad and Bellingham (1972) investigated cooperative and competitive behaviours exhibited by Aboriginal students ($n=64$) and non-Aboriginal students ($n=32$) aged 12 to 14 years attending a residential school in

¹¹ See Appendix B for a copy of official communication from A. Davila, Centrelink.

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Darwin, Northern Territory. The study required students to work collaboratively under time limited conditions to solve set problems. It found that cooperative behaviours were displayed significantly more often by Aboriginal students than their non-Aboriginal counter-parts. Aboriginal students were also found to offer more encouragement and support to each other during problem solving trials, as well as deliberately seeking to ensure that those who had not had the opportunity to go first in a preceding trial, had the chance to go start the next trial. In contrast, only a few non-Aboriginal students were observed encouraging others to work collaboratively as a team and did not rotate the starting person. The study argued that unless Aboriginal students learnt to embrace competitiveness and egocentricity, they would remain disadvantaged in Western society (Sommerlad & Bellingham, 1972).

Research by Duncan (1990) investigated the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary and secondary students at two non-Government boarding schools in Queensland. Supported by a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and in collaboration with the Association of Independent Schools Queensland and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission, the research had two key aims:

1. To determine why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, both male and female, primary and secondary, experienced problems with life in boarding schools in Queensland
2. To provide possible solutions to these problems. Although the solutions might be of either a short-term or long-term nature, they had to be realistic, able to be implemented within a reasonable time structure and financial constraints, and not excessively disruptive to the existing administrative structure (Duncan, 1990, p. 1).

Using a mixed method approach of survey questionnaires and focus groups, data was collected from 54 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 8 to 12¹² as well as from 29 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students who had previously attended a boarding school (13 male and 16 female). In addition, 12 administrators and teachers and five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students who had not attended a boarding school for their secondary schooling (2 male and 3 female) also participated in the study. Questions used with focus groups and in the survey questionnaire were structured around eight preconceived problem

¹² The gender distribution of the 54 Years 8 to 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was not provided by the study.

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areas, these were, 1) family 2) personal 3) culture 4) social 5) academics 6) language 7)

stereotyping/negative attitudes, and 8) health (Duncan, 1990). The survey questionnaire asked informants to rate each of the eight problem areas using a four point scale ranging from, 1) a very major problem 2) a major problem 3) a minor problem, and 4) no problem. They were then asked to suggest possible solutions to perceived problems in each of the eight identified areas and were also asked to identify policy and programme initiatives that had been successful and unsuccessful in supporting their boarding experience (Duncan, 1990).

The analysis process was not clearly delineated in the study, however findings revealed that similarities and differences existed between how the Year 8 to 12 students and administrators and teachers rated the importance of the eight identified areas (Duncan, 1990). For example, the 54 Year 8 to 12 students reported family, stereotyping/negative attitudes, and personal issues such as loneliness as the three main problems, whereas the 12 administrators and teachers reported family, academics, and culture as the three main problems experienced by students. Indeed, the 29 former boarding students reported health, family, with culture and stereotyping/negative attitudes in equal third. The study also reported that the length of school terms combined with separation from family caused the majority of Year 8 to 12 students to experience homesickness. Further to this, the length of absence from home was reported to have traumatised many families (Duncan, 1990). Similar to the findings of Sommerlad and Bellingham (1972), support by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was identified as a key strategy in coping with boarding school life. However, out of the 29 former boarding students, nine males and six females revealed running away from their respective boarding school on more than one occasion. These students reported that the distress of being away from home, family, and traditional aspects of community life underpinned the reasons why they ran away from boarding school (Duncan, 1990).

In contrast to administrators and teachers, both current and former boarding students reported encountering stereotyping/negative attitudes. Former boarding students indicated that cultural stereotyping and negative attitudes were prevalent with staff and non-Indigenous students, particularly in relation to the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve high academic outcomes and the likelihood of successfully transitioning into post-school destinations such as employment or further study (Duncan, 1990). The study also revealed that 20 of the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students and 22 of the former

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boarding students encountered explicit instances of racism by classroom teachers, it was noted, “blatantly open racism – both verbally and physically – was constantly displayed by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander administrators, teachers, boarding supervisors, support staff, students, parents of students, and members of the local community” (Duncan, 1990, p. 10). In addition, former boarding students described how initiation ceremonies at boarding school were, “serious and dangerous acts of thuggery, bastardisation, and damage to personal property occurred” (Duncan, 1990, p. 10). By contrast, 21 of the former boarding students strongly endorsed community run schooling that emphasised traditional elements of culture and learning styles through the development of specialised teaching programmes and school curriculum. All former boarding students strongly supported the premise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should not be forced to attend boarding school. One former male boarding student stated, “Those who are there should want to be there” (Duncan, 1990, p. 10).

In recommending a way forward for boarding schools in Queensland, Duncan (1990) emphasised that they needed to incorporate into their school philosophy, policy, and practices, the desire to provide a learning experience that had meaning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. A learning experience that embraced cultural maintenance through building a positive sense of belonging so that boarding students, “discover for themselves the heritage rightly theirs, and be proud of race and identity” (Duncan, 1990, p. 15). However, two barriers were identified which hindered the effectiveness of this recommendation. First was that boarding schools tended to address problems in an ad-hoc and piecemeal fashion and second was “the refusal or inability of non-Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to listen, think-about, or act upon the demands that Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders were making for their formal education and life in boarding schools” (Duncan, 1990, p. 17). The study encouraged Queensland boarding schools to foster better relationships with the parents and home community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students. Salient amongst this encouragement was the necessity to for boarding schools to make contact with parents, build parent’s confidence in their child’s school, and provide a point of contact in each boarding school who parents were comfortable talking to about problems relating to their child’s education. In addition, the study asserted that boarding schools needed to better explain school policy, reports and course options to parents, as well as conduct home visits to discuss samples of a student’s school work with parents. It was also recommended that boarding schools make a video or photograph album of life as a boarding

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student so that parents could see what their children experience while away from home, and outlined that boarding school staff should be aware that parental attitudes to education might be guided by their own childhood experiences with school which for some parents this required overcoming significant feelings of fear and distrust (Duncan, 1990).

A number of limitations impacted on Duncan's (1990) study. He acknowledged that the necessity for student participants to submit written explanations as a part of the survey questionnaire significantly limited the depth and richness of the data collected and it was emphasised that future research should completely disregard written survey questionnaires. In addition, no explicit delineation was made in terms of how the criteria were established for investigating the eight identified problem areas. Despite being the only listed author, Duncan (1990) revealed he had only visited a few boarding schools in Queensland that had enrolled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Instead, he reported findings that depended on observations conducted by a co-researcher, Mr. Robinson (Duncan, 1990). The lack of proximity to the research topic by the primary author leaves the reader to somewhat speculate over his familiarity and understanding of wider socio-cultural contexts.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) conducted extensive hearings, meetings, and collected submissions from many different regional and remote communities and towns across WA and culminated in the publication of the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (HREOC, 2000a). A wide range of issues was raised at community meetings and hearings as directly impacting on Aboriginal children and families experiences with boarding school. At a meeting held in Billiluna, a small community located on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert, ABSTUDY criteria was reported to the inquiry as inhibiting parents from sending their children to boarding school earlier. At the time, ABSTUDY assistance subsidised the cost of boarding school but was only available after a student turned 16 years of age (HREOC, 1999). At a public hearing held in the East Kimberley town of Kununurra (see Figure 1) it was reported to the inquiry that although many parents wanted their children to go to boarding school, ABSTUDY delays in organising transport was directly impacting on the transition from primary to secondary school for students. In addition, it was reported to the inquiry that those students who went away to boarding school often only lasted one year and then returned to unemployment (HREOC, 1999). At a public meeting held in the East Kimberley town of Halls Creek (see Figure 1), it was reported to the inquiry that students who went to Perth for boarding school

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often experienced culture shock and argued that it to help overcome this it was better to send students in Year 8 rather than in Year 10, as it was perceived that older students found it harder to meet boarding school expectations (HREOC, 1999). At a community meeting held in Fitzroy Crossing (see Figure 1) in the West Kimberley, it was reported to the inquiry that most of the Aboriginal young people considered as academically focussed subsequently schooled away from home at boarding schools in Perth (HREOC, 1999). However, it was also noted a salient problem for these students was culture shock, and that most needed to repeat Year 11 before being able to complete Year 12. Lastly, a submission to the inquiry by the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) at a hearing in Broome described the impact of culture shock:

They [children] are away from their families and their culture, the language is different. At times they are inclined to only stay down in Perth about three months or so and then they come back and they don't want to go back [to Perth] because they are away from their families. (HREOC, 2000a, p. 54-55)

The National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education posited that where boarding school was seen as the only secondary school alternative for Aboriginal children in remote communities across the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia, it was seldom a successful transition (HREOC, 2000b). As previously mentioned, a National Indigenous Education taskforce appointed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), reported that the transition experience from primary school to secondary school was especially difficult for those Aboriginal children who had to leave their community to commence their secondary education (MCEETYA, 2001). The taskforce outlined that for Aboriginal secondary school students, studying away from home and family was often an experience fraught with multiple problems including “not knowing what to expect, homesickness, distance from family and community support, lack of local support, poor literacy levels and shame at not succeeding [at school] lead many young Indigenous people to drop out” (MCEETYA, 2001, p. 11).

Unpublished doctoral research by Hatchell (2003) investigated masculinity and whiteness and the influence of both on shaping adolescent males subjectivities at a private boys only boarding school in metropolitan Perth, WA. The study included one student who identified as of Indigenous heritage. In describing the context and organisational structure of the boarding school, Hatchell (2003) reported that the school culture was “greatly influenced by a white Eurocentric middle class model” (p. 2) and that it diminished the equivalence of values and worldviews held by minority groups, while reinforcing the superiority of white values and cultural norms. Hatchell

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(2003) also grappled with investigating a school curriculum which was described as constructed around a hidden narrative grounded in ethnocentric perceptions of Indigenous Australians whilst simultaneously limiting the opportunity for Indigenous students to access and explore their history and culture through the school curriculum (Hatchell, 2003).

In addition, Hatchell (2003) reported the boarding school rarely created a space within its school culture or in classroom settings that enabled Indigenous students to explore their identity in conjunction with their education. Similarly, little opportunity was reported to exist for counter-stories that contextualised negative social stereotypes and perceptions of Indigenous people. Rather, Hatchell (2003) noted, “Indigenous Australians also need to deal with issues of racism that effectively position Indigenous males and females as the Other” (p. 44-45). This observation was evidenced by quoting the single Indigenous participant in the study, given pseudo name of Kevin. Kevin shared how his experience as a boarding student required having to continually (re)negotiate the influence of cultural hegemony, he reported:

Sometimes you’re not given the opportunity to say what you want to say. Again when we were talking about Aboriginals and where kids would come up with things like well they’re all bludgers and they drink and there’s sort of not a chance to discuss that more. Being the only black person in the class, and being a Torres Strait Islander, I wasn’t able to say some stuff but I was cut short. And again, you know, that sort of thing wasn’t resolved, that issue. People go away with negative feelings and thoughts and that kind of thing and they’re not making an educated decision based on what information that they received, like both sides of the argument not just one. And in the end, in that class, that feeling was still there because it had not yet been resolved and I still feel a bit funny when I talk about it. I feel a bit sad about how people feel and at not being able to discuss it more and stuff like that (Kevin cited in Hatchell, 2003, p. 234-235).

Hatchell (2003) argued that given the unchecked cycle of self-perpetuating ethnocentric constructions of Indigenous people, the school culture at that particular boarding school made little accommodation for the equivalency of multiple socio-cultural realities. However, it was also reported that although Kevin felt marginalised, he still felt like he was able to maintain a sense of self despite having to negotiate a school context that he believed provided him with few rights to express his cultural identity (Hatchell, 2003).

2.3 Chapter summary.

Chapter 2 has brought together a wide breadth of literature linked with a number of different elements relevant to the present research. It reviewed adolescence as a developmental

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stage in human development from a multi-systemic perspective. Child-rearing and socialisation practices, sense of self and identity, rites of passage ceremonies particular to male Aboriginal young people were discussed. This was followed by an outline of the education system in WA and boarding schools. The literature on transition from primary to secondary school, transition and sense of belonging, as well as the transition experience to boarding school was reviewed. Particular focus was given to critiquing Duncan's (1990) research which explored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's experiences at two boarding schools in Queensland, as well as the findings of the 2000 National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (HREOC, 2000a, 2000b). The chapter concluded with the research of Hatchell (2003) and the experiences of Kevin at a boys' only private boarding school in WA.

The overall purpose of the literature review was to draw the attention to the complex, multilayered, and historically grounded, but socially constructed, context linked with contemporary Indigenous education in WA. By reviewing the current literature, it sought to highlight the necessity to address an identified paucity in research conducted into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's experiences at boarding school (Calma, 2009; Dodson, 2009). The next section outlines the rationale for the methodology (Chapter 3) and then describes the ontological, epistemological, and methodological orientation (Chapter 4) applied in this study.

SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview.

This chapter outlines the rationale for the methodology. It achieves this in two ways. Initially, it highlights some of the dilemmas linked with the uncritical application of orthodox Western research paradigms to social inquiry in Aboriginal contexts. It critiques the relationship of psychology as a discipline with Aboriginal people. The underpinnings of Indigenist and Indigenous methodologies are reviewed, followed by a description of the distinctive epistemological, axiological, and ontological features of Indigenous methodologies. The theoretical constructs of the Cultural Interface and the Third Space of enunciation are introduced. The second half of this chapter more precisely discusses the conceptual and theoretical approach of the researcher to conducting research. In doing so, the Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) paradigm is introduced and then a description is provided regarding how the ATR was adapted and operationalised in practice by the researcher. Attention is then drawn to the premise of a Third Space of enunciation to critique the authority of Western knowledge systems by highlighting the hybridity of knowledge. The formation and centrality of the Aboriginal Advisory Group are discussed followed by the importance of listening as a protocol to effective research practice within Aboriginal contexts. Reflection and critical reflective practice at the cultural interface are discussed and the chapter concludes by summarising the research journey in an explanatory figure.

3.1 Western research, psychology, and Aboriginal contexts.

Selecting an appropriate methodology to address the research question is a demanding task in itself for many researchers (Laimputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This process is arguably more challenging for researchers alert to the need for research to be constructed and undertaken in a way that prioritises the equivalency of Indigenous knowledge systems while questioning the authority of Western knowledge and academic systems (Brown, 2010; Drew, 2006; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010; Stewart, 2007). Clarifying how one negotiated this circumstance while investigating the research questions at hand, enables others to ascertain the appropriateness of the methodology applied and the meaningfulness of findings reported by research (Laimputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Hence, relaying the experience and implications of this journey for the present researcher formed an important component of establishing the overall methodological integrity of this study (Garvey, 2007; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999).

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After a decade of research emphasising the importance of Indigenous methodologies, academic institutions and non-Indigenous researchers have yet to fully appreciate the necessity to decolonise, deconstruct and dismantle Western research practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a; Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008). In Australia, since colonisation the value and worthiness of Aboriginal culture, customs, and knowledge systems have been judged against the norms of Western culture (National Health and Medical Research Guidelines, NHMRC, 2003). Western researchers from churches, governments, universities, and other Western institutions of knowledge, have vigorously sought to deconstruct the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal knowledge (NHMRC, 2003). In doing so, the legitimacy of Aboriginal knowledge systems have been dismissed and reinscribed in a deficit-orientated discourse according the colonial roots of these institutions (Nakata, 2002). This knowledge was constructed as an inherently obsolete, under-developed, or even as an unspoiled version of humanity (Dodson, 1994). Well established knowledge transferral traditions were re-categorised as exotic, primitive, and inferior (Nakata, 2002) and creationist stories were re-constructed as myths and the Dreaming treated like a fable (Christie, 2006). As Dodson emphasised:

Far from being recognised in our difference, in our own terms, we are always defined in terms of the colonising or defining culture. One could well ask, what is it about genuine difference which is so threatening that it must always be translated and sanitised into more of the same? One answer may be that our difference and our independence would threaten the boundaries of identity, knowledge and absolute truth, which give the subject a sense of power and control. If we are reclassified into the established categories we are brought back into check. (1994, p. 15-16)

More recently, Aboriginal people have been constructed as “intellectual fringe dwellers” (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006, p. 397). Nakata (2002, 2007), for example, astutely pointed out that academic and scientific institutions across Australia continue to refer to a cluster of notions such as cultural awareness, cultural appropriateness, and culturally responsive pedagogy, but rarely do they stress the equivalency of Indigenous knowledge. He argued this was typified by the practice of the guest Indigenous speaker who remains simply that, a guest invited as a visitor to the centre of legitimate knowledge production but who’s brief arrival is quickly followed by an exit from the topic at hand so as to not disrupt the order and sovereignty of Western knowledge sensibilities (Nakata, 2002). The paucity of recognition given to the ongoing legacy of colonisation (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008), combined with the continued marginalisation of Aboriginal people in society, form a dynamic nexus which continues to position Indigenous knowledge systems as problematic

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School while sustaining the hegemony of Western knowledge systems (Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2010; Rigney, 1997).

Psychology as a discipline has been complicit in the colonisation of Indigenous knowledge systems in Australia (Rickwood, Dudgeon, & Gridley, 2010). The article *Australian Psychology has a Black History* by Garvey, Dudgeon, and Kearins (2000) tells of a history where Indigenous people were treated as objects of study by Western researchers searching for evolutionary links with prehistoric man. The article outlined how culturally inappropriate and biased cognitive assessments were used to emphasise the intellectual inadequacies of Indigenous children. Moreover, how psychology has contributed to the social construction of Aboriginal people as intellectually naive and perpetuated a cycle of ongoing prejudice and racism (Garvey, Dudgeon, & Kearins, 2000). Yet, psychology in contemporary Australia has continued to avoid addressing these issues and ethical concerns over Western universalisms applied in psychological practice across diverse ethnic groups (Riggs, 2004). A recent conclusion reached by Rickwood, Dudgeon, and Gridley (2010) after exploring the history of psychological practice in relation to Indigenous mental health, was the necessity for vigilance towards the Western theories and methodologies that inform professional practice.

The risk linked with psychological research originating from a Western institution of knowledge cannot be overemphasised. As Collard (2000) poignantly stressed with regards to psychology and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, “[t]he moment you mention the word psychology, it means that I must be mad, and I am going to an asylum” (p. 25). Similarly, the suggestion of research can also represent a loaded concept, as the uncritical application of Western research practices to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts has served to expose many individuals and their respective communities to both exploitative and harmful experiences (NHMRC, 2003). For this reason, the proposition to participate in research continues to be greeted with a high degree of caution and suspicion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Felder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000).

The extent of caution and suspicion towards research was highlighted to the current researcher on two separate occasions whilst with two different members of the Aboriginal Advisory Group affiliated with this study. The first occasion was during the formative stages of this research at a meeting held in the Pilbara town of Roebourne. While discussing culturally

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appropriate consultative practices, this member of the Aboriginal Advisory Group emphasised his frustration with the assumed right by previous researchers that they are entitled to conduct research within his community. Moreover, that the research projects approved by universities did not necessarily reflect research agendas seen as a priority by people within his community. A sense of the intrusiveness over the lack of reciprocity in consultative processes was relayed when he stated:

I've always had the attitude that I don't believe in the White man's system. If they put these things in front of me then I totally ignore them. Its bullshit you know and that's not having any offence to any White people. I just don't believe in that system. Your system has limited my people from succeeding so I don't believe in that shit. Take that shit away from me you know. Take it away I don't want it, and don't come here and ask for things and then take our things away from us [knowledges, artefacts, stories], or we are going to fight you. If you come here and you respect us, then I'm not going to put up any barriers and we'll work on things together. Then we're going to succeed, you'll have got the blackfellas' support. But if you come here and you giving us this crap here, then just fuck off. I have locked people out of this office before and I tell them to piss-off. They come up here and I lock the fucking door, I tell them you're not coming in here. I chase them down the fucking street these bastards, ahhh I get fed up with it (M. Woodley, personal communication, December 26, 2008).

The second occasion took place while co-presenting a paper with another member of the Aboriginal Advisory Group at the 2009 Trans-Tasman Community Psychologists Conference in Fremantle, Western Australia (Collard, Mander, Cohen, & Pooley, 2009). The presentation discussed the importance of Aboriginal advisory groups, panels, and steering committees to post-graduate research involving Aboriginal contexts. At the end of the presentation, a question was asked which implied that irrespective of advisory groups, panels or steering committees ultimately all knowledge generated by a university research was subject to university copyright and ownership. In response, this member of the advisory group stated, "the days of researchers just coming into our communities and doing research on us and our families are over, we're sick of it, those days are over" (K. Collard, Personal Communication, July 15, 2009). Collard went on to explain that the way research is initially broached and supervised was a highly sensitive matter for Aboriginal people. Collard concluded by positing that for socially responsible research to take place, from his perspective, a fundamental shift in power was required whereby all research began from the point of equal partnership over the full research process, which included shared rights and access to the knowledge it produced (K. Collard, Personal Communication, July 15, 2009).

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Acknowledgment of the dominance and reliance on Western knowledge systems has come late to psychology in Australia (Davidson, Sanson, & Gridley, 2000; Garvey, Dudgeon, & Kearins 2000; Rickwood, Dudgeon, & Gridley, 2010). As a discipline it has traditionally privileged quantitative and positivist research practices and theories (Riggs, 2004) and been slow to recognise the repercussion of power imbalances in research practice and the necessity for Indigenous knowledge and methodologies to be positioned at the heart of research (Christie, 2006; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). The current researcher was wary of adding a body of psychological research that only served to further entrench an inequitable status quo (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). Critical theorists have emphasised that in order to redress power imbalances and encourage emancipation and empowerment for minority and marginalised groups, researchers need to unashamedly declare their partisanship and alignment with the struggle for the “oppressed and colonised persons living in post-colonial situations of injustice” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. X). With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter outlines the efforts taken to shift power imbalances in the current research whilst negotiating the academic prerequisites to complete a post-graduate research degree. It begins this by reviewing Indigenous methodologies.

3.2 The (post)colonial research context and Indigenous methodologies.

Maori academic and cultural theorist Linda Tuhiwai-Smith outlined in her pivotal text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), that Western ontology, epistemology, and axiology were seen as colonial tools of oppression by Indigenous people. This text notably coined the statement, “the word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Tuhiwai-Smith, p. 1, 1999) and called for contemporary researchers to take cognisance of taken-for-granted research assumptions that continue to (re)inscribe the colonial relationship and the dominance of Western subjectivities. In order to be liberated from the oppressive force of such issues, Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) argued that it was critical for researchers to operate in ways that not only emphasised the de-colonisation of academic practices but in ways that attempt to reposition Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies to the centre of research involving Indigenous contexts.

In Australia, the conceptualisation of an Indigenist methodology by Rigney (1997) was pivotal in challenging the dominance of Western methods of research. Indigenist research was described as structured around three interdependent principles of resistance, political integrity, and privileging Indigenous voices (Rigney, 1997). These core tenets not only linked Indigenist

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research frameworks with a political desire for self-determination, but also with a historical struggle for liberation from oppression and the need to reclaim power by challenging the continued construction of Aboriginal people via hegemonic colonial discourses, images, and worldviews (Rigney, 1997). Other Indigenist theorists and methodologists questioned the reactive groundings that underpinned Rigney's Indigenist framework (Martin, 2003). Instead, they argued that Indigenist methodologies should not be constructed in response to the dominance Western methods of research, but rather they ought to sit "alongside and among Western worldviews and realities" (Martin, 2003, p. 205) and be defined by their equivalence. Martin (2003) purported that four key principles, which have been paraphrased and presented below, were linked with achieving this conceptual shift:

- 1) Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledge and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival
- 2) Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people
- 3) Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures, and
- 4) Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal Lands, (Martin, 2003, p. 203).

More recently, Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) reminded researchers of the diversity of descriptions given to Indigenist research and Indigenous methodologies. It was precisely this characteristic which they suggested constituted one of the defining features of Indigenous methodologies. That of being a global and divergent field but critically one in which Indigenous people from around the world were actively and vigorously directing their focus towards reshaping the role of social research methodologies and the production of scholarly knowledge and understanding about Indigenous people (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). For example, Canadian research by Evens, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, and Sookraj (2009) in partnership with Aboriginal communities of Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, describe Indigenous methodologies relatively broadly and proposed it was, "research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions of those peoples" (p. 894). They emphasised that the positivist, reductionist, and objectivist traditions of Western research are not only irrelevant but to Indigenous people they continued to carry with them the spectre of

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colonisation (Evens et al., 2009). Similarly, others have asserted that social inquiry with Indigenous people must serve as a platform to decolonise Western epistemologies and methodologies, and reclaim, restore, and revitalise Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). From this perspective, three dimensions were seen as central for a research framework to achieve this:

- 1) It must be ethical, performative, healing, transformative, decolonising, and participatory
 - 2) It must be committed to dialogue, community, self-determination, and cultural autonomy
 - 3) It must meet people's perceived needs, and
 - 4) It must be unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity
- (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b, p. 2).

Taking the multidimensionality of such definitions into account, Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) identified and proposed the following three features of Indigenous methodologies in Australia:

- 1) They typically construct all knowledge as being socially situated
 - 2) They are more likely to be partial and grounded in subjectivities, and
 - 3) They incorporate contextual and situational experiences linked with everyday life,
- (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009, p. 2).

Rather than reacting to dominant Western traditions, Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) asserted that, "Indigenous methodologies reflect our epistemologies (ways of knowing), our axiologies (ways of doing) and our ontologies (ways of being)" (p. 2). Critically, they emphasised that Indigenous methodologies were distinguished by the presence of those facets of understanding about self and the world which were perceived as relevant and meaningful by Indigenous people. Table 4 presents a description of the distinctive epistemological, axiological, and ontological differences and similarities between Indigenous and Western methodologies as identified by Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009).

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Table 4

The Distinctive Features of Indigenous and Western Research Methodologies

Indigenous Methodologies	Western Methodologies
Epistemology: Our way of knowing	Epistemology: Theories of knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legitimacy is based in connectivity, physical and spiritual nature of life, knowledge and existence. ▪ Connectivity is integral to knowledge production- knowledge cannot exist outside of social relations to country. ▪ To be connected is to know and knowing is embodied and connected to country. ▪ Knowledge is revealed and belongs to the group. It can be used, shared but not owned. ▪ Knowledge status is context, place, and relationship-specific and earned through the life cycle. ▪ Status of knower is conferred and bestowed through ritual. ▪ Traditional processes and practices underpin ritual and status around knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legitimacy is based on objectivity of rational knowledge and other ways of knowing are dismissed. ▪ Reason is the apex of the hierarchy of knowledge production and knowledge is abstract – separate from the world. ▪ To be a person of reason is to be disembodied and removed from the land and place. ▪ Knowledge is discovered/invested and owned by individual knower or pursued and gained. ▪ Status of knower is earned by formal process. ▪ Status of knower is conferred and bestowed through ritual. ▪ Traditional processes and practices underpin ritual and status around knowledge.
Axiology: Our way of doing - Indigenous value systems.	Axiology: Theory of values, extrinsic and intrinsic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observation based on being in the world is valued as this knowledge is tested and verified. ▪ Valued knowledge is communicated, generated and re-generated. ▪ Indigenous knowledge is valued because it provides connection to the world. ▪ Valued knowledge comes from many sources including dreams, the ancestors, stories and experience, and is embedded in the land. ▪ Knowledge-holding subject produces knowledge through connection. ▪ Hierarchical relationship between subject and object is relational and context-specific. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rigour established via measurement, explanation, causality, classification and differentiation is valued. ▪ Knower's of valued knowledge are experts and knowledge is owned. ▪ Knowledge is valued for itself and divided into disconnected spheres. ▪ Valued knowledge comes from disembodied theories rationally considered. ▪ Knowledge-holding subject produces knowledge through the study of the object. ▪ Hierarchical object/subject split with the subject also positioned to define the object.
Ontology: Our way of being and belonging.	Ontology: Theories related to the nature of being.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indigenous ontological framework is based on connectedness to country. ▪ Knowledge's and realities exist beyond us as humans. Both men and women are knowledge holders. ▪ Realities are predicted on being embodied and connected. Reality is not immutable and there are different layers of reality that are contextual and related to being a knowledge holder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Western ontological framework is hierarchical. ▪ Ontology predicted on hierarchical gendered and racial dichotomy of the mind-body split. ▪ White men are the disembodied creators of culture and knowledge. Others are governed by their emotions and their bodies. ▪ Reality is perceived as immutable and the Western framing of that reality is invisible to the perceiver.

Note. Adapted from “Indigenous Methodologies in Social Research” by A. Moreton-Robinson and M. Walter, 2009, *Social Research Methods*, p. 1-18, South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Table 4 outlines the holistic, contextual, localised, and relational way in which Indigenous methodologies are connected with ancestry, kinship, land, and spirituality (Moreton-Robinson &

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Walter, 2009). In an important sense, Table 4 emphasises that different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and communities may have different expectations of research and researchers. A research method deemed appropriate by one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community may not be viewed as suitable or as leading to the production of legitimate and meaningful knowledge by another group (Christie, 2006). Hence, when trying to move understandings forward of what constitutes valid academic and empirical research, it is important for post-graduate researchers to be clear about what actually occurred at the interface between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Western knowledge systems (Brown, 2010; Drew, 2006; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010; Stewart, 2007).

3.3 The cultural interface and ambivalent space of enunciation.

Professor Martin Nakata has extensively explored the interchange between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Western knowledge systems (Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010). He described the point of intersection between these knowledge domains as the Cultural Interface and according to Nakata (2007):

The cultural interface is ... a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersection of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and contesting discourse within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organization (p. 199).

Rather than cordial and harmonious intersection, Nakata (2007) proposed the cultural interface as a site linked with much struggle, tension, and contradiction, and as a site where the construction and merits of competing discourses and diverse approaches towards human agency were contested. He questioned the theoretical coherence of binary them and us knowledge domains and also argued that perseverance with the construction of two discrete knowledge domains failed to recognise the ambiguity, complexity, and lived reality of everyday life (Nakata, 2007). Such constructions discounted the intersecting worlds of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people and did not empower individuals to exert agency and express subjectivity toward how they embodied and made sense of life (Nakata, 2007). The cultural interface was asserted to be devoid of static margins and instead inhabited the place where we all live, being only circumscribed by the seamless individual and collective understandings constructed in response to the interactions of everyday life (Nakata, 2002).

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Indigenous scholars such as Langton (1993) have equally questioned the coherence and premise of viewing Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge as two discrete knowledge domains. Indeed, several theoretical and fundamental limitations of persistence with binary domains were astutely pointed out by Langton (1993), these have been paraphrased below:

- 1) It intoned that both knowledge domains are static and not dynamic
- 2) It failed to recognise that change was possible and occurs in social relationships
- 3) It suggested the intersection between different knowledge domains did not occur or remained the same
- 4) It implied that individuals situated in different knowledge domains were unable to share common knowledge and worldviews, and
- 5) The knowledge domain in which people were first positioned wholly determined what they said, did, and are (Langton, 1993).

In the same vein, Bhabha (1994) reminded us that hierarchical claims to knowledge authority, purity, or superiority were inherently flawed. All knowledge according to Bhabha (1994) is defined by intersection in the space in-between cultural domains. Although diverse cultures may present as discrete and stable domains, they are instead multi-dimensional domains that are ever-changing, making and remaking themselves through complex social transactions and cultural intersections created by the continuum of human life. Bhabha (1994) argued:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or purity of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37).

The ambivalent space of enunciation or Third Space as referred to by Bhabha (1994), provides a powerful conceptual framework by which to dismiss claims to the pre-eminence of Western knowledge processes, and instead suggested that, “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicised and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). In addition, the notion of hybridity posed by Bhabha (1994) is also problematic for post-colonial regimes that seek to legitimise the authority of Western scientific traditions, as it centres all knowledge as subject to the irreducible interconnectedness and equivalence of diverse cultural identities, knowledge systems, and social realities.

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While it was possible to understand inherent epistemological flaws, cultural biases, and racial distortions underpinning Western ways of knowing and doing research, enacting in practice strategies that decolonised and transformed dominant approaches to post-graduate research still presented a number of challenges (Brown, 2010; Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Stewart, 2007). Foremost, the ambition to develop a new or adapted methodological approach that embraced Indigenist research and Indigenous methodologies meant that few preceding frameworks exist for a researcher to follow (Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). Hence, a pragmatic methodological standpoint was required by the present research. One that respected the autonomy, equivalency, identity, and legitimacy of two diverse knowledge domains whilst at the same time moved beyond the spectre of colonialism and essentialist thinking. Especially, beyond the volatility of trying to validate the ascendancy and dominance of Western methodologies and the construction of Indigenist methodologies as research practices with diluted integrity; or both as incapable of harnessing the rich generative possibilities created by engaging in patronage at the interface of knowledge domains (Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006; Garvey, 2007; Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010).

3.4 Reconstructing research relationships at the cultural interface.

Implementing a new or adapted methodological approach has been linked with the postmodern concept of emergence, which has been described as an explicit intent to be inclusive of diverse knowledge systems, subjectivities, voices, and worldviews to inform the way in which qualitative research is undertaken and new knowledge constructed (Somerville, 2007). Developing and implementing a new methodological approach requires immersion by the researcher in spaces conceived as at the periphery and negotiating the critical eye of orthodox researchers (Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). The work of Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009); Dodson (1994); Nakata (2007); Langton (1993); Bhabha (1994); Tuhiwai-Smith (1999, 2008); Denzin and Lincoln (2008a, 2008b); Rigney (1997); Martin (2003); and Christie (2006), collectively represent more than just conceptual, theoretical and philosophical musings at the borderlands of research practice. Rather, they are critical voices that caution researchers to the risk of not de-centring the Western order of things (Nakata, 2002). Furthermore, they emphasise how the construction of new meaningful relationships should be characterised by respectfully exploring rich potentiality of research and linked by shared participation in innovative and creative ways of knowing and doing research (Garvey, 2007).

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Little literature has directly addressed how to design psychological research that embraces the interchange between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains. As a result, Oxenham (2000) developed the concept of Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) for use both as an instrument to advocate for Aboriginal realities and also as a way to configure Aboriginal knowledge at the centre of any social interaction that involved Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains (Oxenham, 2000). In a meaningful way, the ATR framework operationalised a process that connected Aboriginal aspirations, culture, experiences, and understandings, with validating and evaluating any negotiations or interactions that impacted on Aboriginal people (Oxenham, 2000). The ATR especially outlined the importance of recognising Aboriginal diversity and authority as well as acknowledging past injustices as crucial to understanding present knowledge, meanings, and values that influence Aboriginal people. Figure 4 illustrates the ATR framework and the four dimensions proposed by Oxenham (2000) of aspirations, cultural elements, experiences, and understandings.

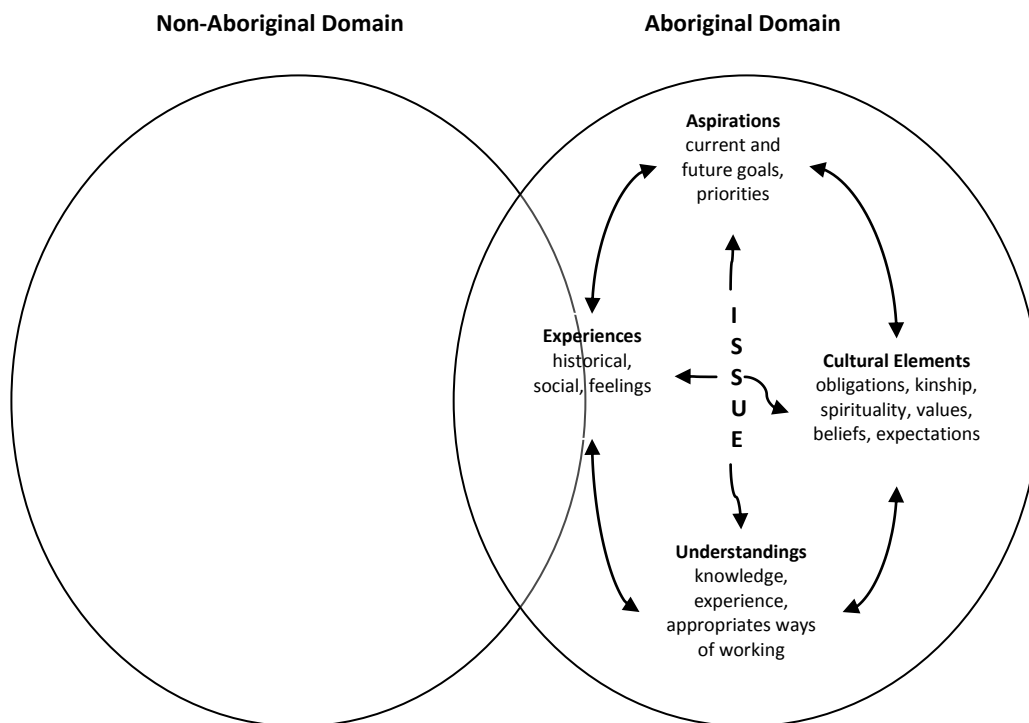


Figure 4. The Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) Conceptual Framework.

Note. Adapted from "Aboriginal terms of reference" by D. Oxenham, 2000, In P. Dudgeon, D. Garvey, & H. Pickett (Eds.), *Working with Indigenous Australians: A handbook for psychologists* (pp.109-125). Perth: Gunada Press.

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Psychological practitioners working with Indigenous people (Drew, Adams, & Walker, 2010; Garvey, 2007) and community intervention and wellbeing programs with Indigenous youth (Morgan & Drew, 2010) have applied the ATR framework. Although not prescriptive, five key elements constitute a commitment consistent with an ATR framework, these are: 1) a definition 2) a set of principles 3) a set of core values 4) a conceptual framework, and 5) a process (Oxenham, 2000). Even though the ATR framework was envisaged as a holistic concept, the five key elements were operationalised and incorporated into the research design and methodological decision-making of the current researcher in a number of different but interconnected ways.

Elements one, two, and three of the ATR framework were embraced through the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003) – see Appendix A. The NHMRC (2003) guidelines are the benchmark against which proposed research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts are reviewed at Edith Cowan University. The NHMRC (2003) guidelines aim to bring to an end the exploitative legacy of destructive research practices that have been endured by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since colonisation, and to ensure that both genuine and culturally respectful research takes place. The guidelines are underpinned by six core values which were developed through extensive consultation with many diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and representative bodies across Australia. The six core values of spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection and responsibility, are a direct reflection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's continuing concerns about a lack of consultation and communication, and infringement upon deeply held values during research due to cross-cultural insensitivity (NHMRC, 2003). Figure 5 illustrates the NHMRC (2003) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's values to research ethics.

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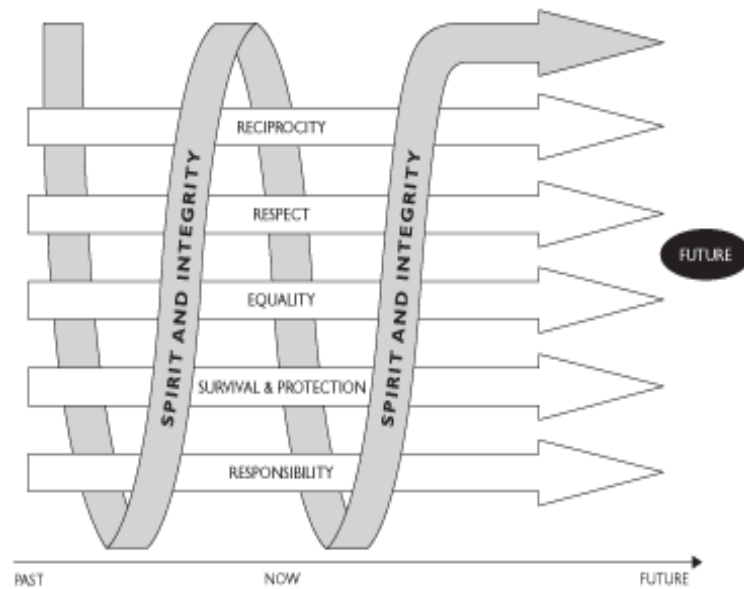


Figure 5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Values to Research Ethics.

Note. Adapted from “*The Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*” by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003). Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia p. 9.

Elements four and five of the ATR framework were embedded in the research design by:

1) the formation of an Aboriginal Advisory Group 2) the creation of a theoretical space of enunciation - Third Space 3) the prioritisation of listening as a prerequisite to effective research practice, and 4) embedding critical reflective practice into the research process used by the researcher. The remainder of the present chapter outlines how elements four and five of the ATR framework were operationalised in practice within the research design.

3.4.1 The Aboriginal advisory group.

The present research was interwoven with a personal ambition to gain further experience and training through the pursuit of post-graduate psychology studies. However, the premise of conducting this research and how to go about it was first informally canvassed across a wide breadth of professional and personal networks involving colleagues, friends, and mentors (Garvey, 2007). These interactions were further strengthened by the many formal and informal conversations with Aboriginal boarding students and their families, and having the opportunity to listen and learn from their experiences (Mander & Fieldhouse, 2009). This strategy led to colleagues supporting and vouching for the research idea and making formal and informal recommendations of appropriate people to consult with within the wider community (Vicary &

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Bishop, 2005). The concept of vouching in Aboriginal communities has been described as the conveying of positive or negative information often about a previously unknown individual and their reputation and standing within the wider community (Vicary & Westerman, 2004). Vouching represents an important process and social protocol that allows Aboriginal people to make informed decisions about the worthiness and validity of a proposition (Westerman, 2004) and the appropriateness and genuine intentions of an individual to work in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities (Walker & Sonn, 2010).

During this early stage, the researcher also consulted the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (NHMRC, 2003). It recommended that given the dearth of human ethics committees exclusively established to evaluate and monitor research proposing to involve Aboriginal people and communities, that non-Aboriginal researchers should establish “an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sub-committee or advisory group” (NHMRC, 2003, p. 24) to ensure the optimal implementation of NHMRC guidelines. To ensure the realities, worldviews, and the methodologies of Indigenous people are acknowledged other literature has equally emphasised that community involvement needed to lie at the heart of research (Christie, 2006; Garvey, 2007; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1997). Fielder, Roberts, and Abdullah (2000) proposed that:

- 1) Wherever possible, form an Indigenous steering committee or reference group to guide the formulation and direction of the research
- 2) Identify key Indigenous stakeholders for the research topic and include them throughout the research process
- 3) Wherever possible, inform all other key stakeholders involved with the research of the role of the steering committee or reference group, so that the worthiness and value of the project is confirmed and owned by Indigenous people, and
- 4) Ensure that Indigenous participants are fully acknowledged and valued for their input and cultural expertise (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000, p. 354).

Resulting from the early efforts of the researcher, five individuals agreed to participate as a member of the Aboriginal Advisory Group for the current research. Each brought with them their own agenda, priorities, worldview, and understandings towards the research topic, but nonetheless each affirmed the necessity, worthiness, and validity for the research to be conducted (Christie, 2006; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). Members of the advisory group came from a diverse range

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of communities, backgrounds, professions, and geographical locations in Western Australia, and
included:

- 1) An Indigenous Education consultant and former Principal of an Aboriginal school in Perth and who is originally from Derby in the East Kimberley
- 2) An Executive Director of a not-for-profit Aboriginal Corporation in the Pilbara that collects, documents, and records, the language, culture, and history of Aboriginal people in and around Roebourne
- 3) A youth and community worker from Broome in the West Kimberley with experience advocating for and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- 4) A practising nurse from Broome in the West Kimberley with many years experience working with Aboriginal people and communities, and
- 5) A Director of a Perth based Aboriginal consultancy which specialises in the delivery of cultural awareness and training programs, the development of reconciliation action plans, and the provision of a juvenile rehabilitation program for Indigenous youth.

At the same time, and importantly, two members of the advisory group had themselves, as a child, schooled away from home at a boarding school in Perth. Likewise, another two members of the advisory group (one a mother the other a father) were parents with children at a boarding school in Perth. Notwithstanding the collective breadth and depth of experience and knowledge across the advisory group, the ATR framework emphasised that cultural consultants need to negotiate a range of complex and often inter-related dimensions including the observance of kinship systems, knowledge traditions, family expectations and responsibilities, as well as socialisation, ceremonial, and spiritual protocols (Oxenham, 2000). Hence, the researcher was vigilant to any potential risks that existed for members of the advisory group (Garvey, 2007). To minimise risk, meetings were held providing a full brief of the aim, timeframe, and ethical dimensions of the research (NHMRC, 2003, 2005). The opportunity to think about this information was then afforded to members of the advisory group so as to provide time to reflect on the nature of the role, to ask further questions, and to consult with others about the research and/or researcher (Christie, 2006).

Expectations of the Aboriginal Advisory Group were also outlined. The role of the advisory group was to monitor, contribute and ensure that the research prioritised Indigenous realities and worldviews (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000). From the outset, the extent and type of

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involvement remained at the discretion of each member, and undulated according to availability as well as to when their respective professional and private commitments allowed (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000). Similarly, members were made aware that they could suspend or withdraw their involvement with the research at any point without explanation, questioning, or penalty (NHMRC, 2005) (see Appendix D). Given the varied geographical locations from which members of the advisory group were drawn, in addition to face-to-face meetings, telephone and email contact was maintained. Wherever possible, the researcher travelled to meet with members of the advisory group at times that were suitable to them and to locations where they were comfortable – their place of work, home, community (e.g., Broome and Roebourne), the Perth Domestic Airport during transit, and at coffee shops (Garvey, 2007).

3.4.2 Listening as a protocol of research practice.

Listening formed an essential element of this research. Listening is more than just a physiological response to auditory sensation, rather it is an intent to acknowledge, empathise, learn from, and be respectful to others when they talk and share valued information about their life-worlds (Bolton, 1996). Enacting this approach to research required letting go of the Western notion of the expert researcher (Walker & Sonn, 2010). Instead, listening to the ideas, thoughts, and suggestions of members of the advisory group was fundamental to the decolonising process (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) by honouring the equivalency of Indigenous methodologies to research practice (Moreton-Robinson & Walters, 2009). Listening was central to the construction of mutual understandings (Garvey, 2007) and nurturing a trusting dialogue that assisted the researcher to develop an appreciation for the experiences of Aboriginal people (Langton, 1993). In an important sense, however, listening not only created a space that acknowledged the expertise of members of the advisory group, but it enabled the researcher to respectfully engage with the belief and value systems, realities, spirituality, and worldviews of Indigenous people (Moreton-Robinson & Walters, 2009).

3.4.3 Embracing a space of enunciation - Third Space.

A member of the advisory group initially proposed considering Bhabha's (1994) theoretical premise of Third Space, as a constructive and pragmatic theoretical standing point from which to form the underpinning methodological framework (K. Collard, Personal Communication, February 6, 2008). Collard posited that the hybridity of the Third Space facilitated for the enunciation of diverse social realities and to provide the conceptual theoretical space by which to suspend

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knowledge hierarchies and in particular the dominance of Western research paradigms (K. Collard, Personal Communication, February 6, 2008). Indeed, Bhabha's (1994) Third Space premise opened a gateway to a methodological approach constructed, "not on exoticism ... but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (p. 38). As a theoretical construct, it diminished the focus on difference by creating a space that displaced the confines of an either-or-praxis towards epistemological decision-making and instead instigated stark discursive discussions directed at selecting the most appropriate methodological approach to investigate the topic at hand.

Although members of the advisory group vouched for the research and researcher, ameliorating the complex assumptions linked with research attached to a Western knowledge institution and with a White researcher espousing to challenge Western ways of doing research, presented as an early conundrum. Uncertainty emerged over the possibility of decolonising and disrupting the hegemony of Western research practices as a post-graduate researcher and as a researcher who had benefited from dominant power relations in society that have subjugated Aboriginal people. As a result, the initial stages of the current research involved critically exploring assumptions (Drew, 2006) and contending with the discomfort created by the realisation that one's own position and knowledge of history, people, power, politics, research, and psychology were originally constructed from within the margins of the oppressor for Aboriginal people. It is worth noting that Western research paradigms and academic institutions, especially those with logical-positivistic orientations, continue to encourage researchers to vigorously contest proposed limitations of their research (Bond & Harrell, 2006). Hence, openly acknowledging that faulty assumptions, blind spots, and at times naiveté frequented research is not only confronting for a post-graduate researcher, but a decidedly uneasy position from which to conduct research even with a supportive advisory group and academic peers (Bond & Harrell, 2006; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010).

However, the importance for researchers of embracing personal motivations (Rapaport, 2004) and connecting the private, professional and political parts of ourselves with research (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005), is increasingly emphasised as central to maintaining a positive sense of wellbeing while conducting research. The current researcher came to recognise that the discomfort he initially experienced at the beginning of this journey was the very essence of establishing a Third Space at the cultural interface (Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, that competent psychological research practice commanded attending to the legacy of colonialism and influence

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School of Whiteness in society (Walker & Sonn, 2010). Understanding both was integral to raising consciousness of the researcher to the caution required when navigating diverse cultural and knowledge domains (Garvey, 2007). This part of the research journey has been depicted in Figure 6 which highlights some of the affective states encountered whilst embodying the Third Space in practice. To negotiate the various dimensions of this experience the researcher had to foremost challenge what was presumed to be known (Walker & Sonn, 2010). Hence, although Figure 6 suggests that a linear experience took place and that the Third Space was something that could be attained through diligent and graduated effort, in reality it entailed a reiterative and cyclical experience that required challenging familiar and taken-for-granted assumptions, constructions, and meanings in everyday life, as well as negotiating and re-negotiating understandings as new relationships, dialogues, and ways of knowing and doing research were encountered.

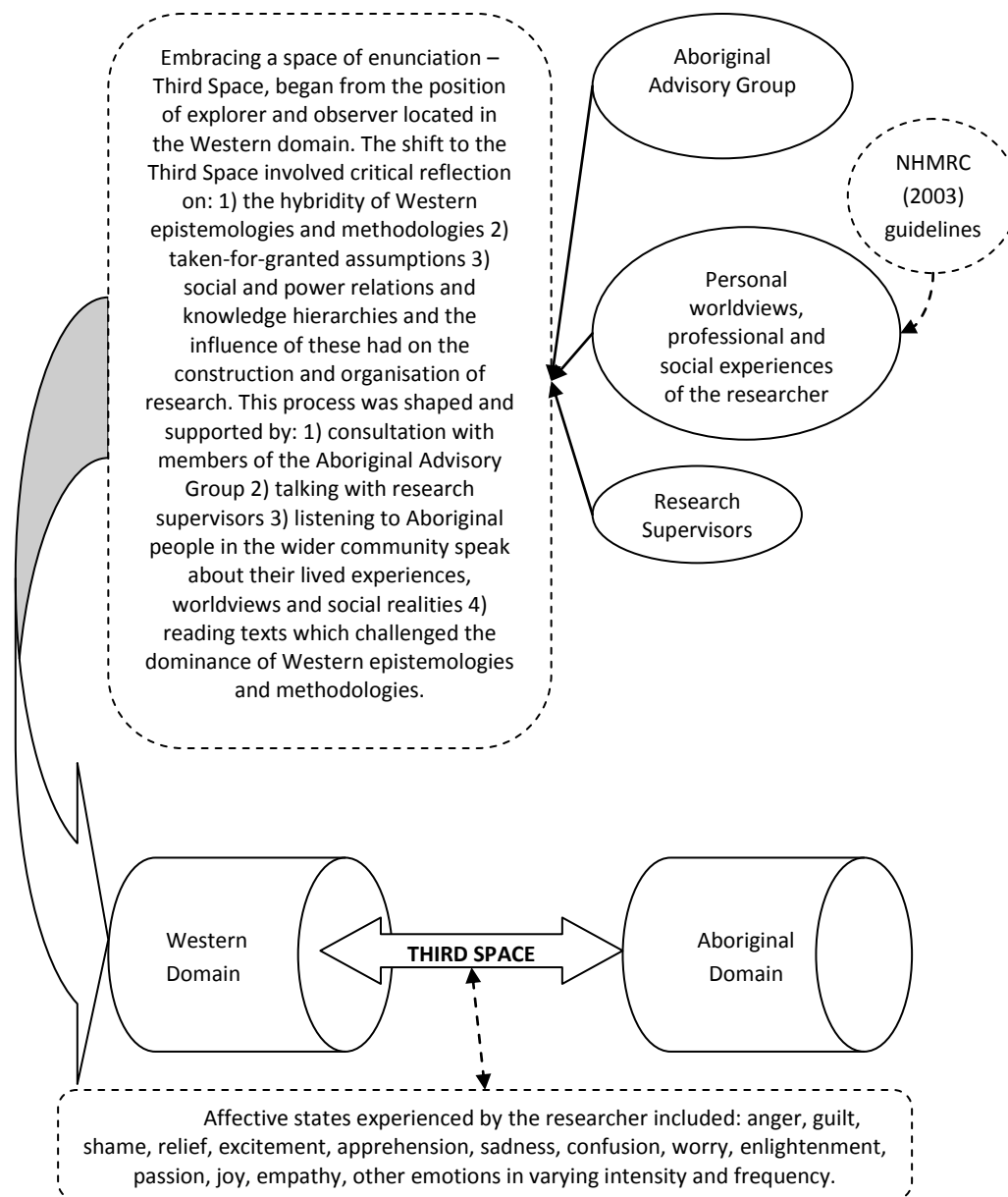


Figure 6. Researcher Experience with the Space of Enunciation - Third Space.

3.4.4 Reflection and critical reflective practice.

Figure 6 also details that critical reflection formed a key element of the decolonising process (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) and the embodiment of the ATR framework in practice. Reflection has been described as a purposeful effort to witness one's own lived experience so as to examine it more closely (Garvey, 2007). The premise of reflection presupposes an individual has the ability

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to be acutely aware of the formative building blocks of one's own life-world and ways of knowing and being (Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2002). In reality, however, some of these building blocks are so familiar, and/or we are so heavily socialised in our own worldview and ways of knowing and being, that they become almost transparent and invisible to an individual (Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2002). For meaningful understanding to occur at the cultural interface, Nakata (2002; 2007) posited that it often begins with unmasking and interrogating your individual reality before trying to appreciate the lived reality of others. Similarly, Indigenist methodologists contend that by framing research through critical reflection, a space is created to decolonise and decentre Western research practices by encouraging researchers to critique its authority (Rigney, 1997; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008). However, in an importance sense, critical reflection also points to the need to search for relatedness in addition to cognisance of your individual standing point (Martin, 2003).

The concept of critical reflective practice has been described as a multidimensional learning process that involves critically examining assumptions and knowledge that inform practice as an individual, professional, and as a discipline (Walker & Sonn, 2010). Rather than a self-indulgent exercise, critical reflective practice is pivotal to interrogating the influence of our own cultural, social, and professional identities, and the associated power and benefits we are afforded due to these identities (Walker & Sonn, 2010). From better informing decision-making in professional practice as a psychologist, to formal and informal theory development in psychology as a discipline, critical reflective practice is central to the embodiment of ethical and culturally competent practice (Walker, McPhee, & Osborne, 2000). From the outset, for the current research, members of the advisory group each have had a strong commitment to extending and enriching the worldview of the researcher. Through the interchange of candid dialogue, debate, and discursive discussions set within the seamless boundaries of the Third Space, the inter-subjective assumptions, ideologies, knowledge and understandings of the researcher were reiteratively reflected upon during the research journey.

In addition, the critical reflective process for the present researcher also entailed being prompted by other mediums of knowledge exchange (Garvey, 2007; Walker & Sonn, 2010). To supplement the critical reflective process, several advisory group members identified texts that they believed were important for the researcher to be familiar with. One recommended reading *Why Warriors Lie down and Die* by Richard Trudgen (2000). Another recommended *The Location of Culture* by Homi Bhabha (1994) and *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous*

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Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999). Yet another gifted the researcher a DVD of the documentary film *Exile and the Kingdom* produced by Frank Rijavec (1995) together with five books the titles of which were: 1) *Know the Song, Know the Country: The Ngaardangarli Story of Culture and History in Ngarlume and Yindjibarndi Country* published by Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation and Frank Rijavec (2004), 2) *Ngurra Warndurala Buluyugayi Wuyumarri - Exploring Yindjibarndi Country - Gregory Gorge* (2008), 3) *Ngurra Warndurala Buluyugayi - Exploring Yindjibarndi Country* (2007), 4) *Garruragan Yindjibarndi Fauna* (2005), and 5) *Wanggalili Yindjibarndi and Ngarlume Plants* (2003), all published by Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation respectively.

Similarly, the researcher also engaged in cultural competence training for non-Indigenous mental health practitioners facilitated by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (see Appendix I), and attended Indigenous conferences and public orations by leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers discussing contemporary issues for Aboriginal young people and families. The research independently travelled and spent time at significant sites pertinent to the research topic at hand. For example, the researcher travelled to the monastic town of New Norcia (formerly known as New Norcia Benedictine Mission) and *Mogumber* (formerly known as Moore River Mission) both north of Perth, and travelled to regional areas and remote Aboriginal communities in the State (particularly when invited by members of the advisory group). Whilst seemingly eclectic experiences, these efforts were essential to enacting a critical reflective framework that enabled the researcher to unpack the density of complex realities, social and historical constructions, political and power relations which underpin the dynamism at the interface of research involving Indigenous contexts (Garvey, 2007; Walker & Sonn, 2010).

Figure 7 is an illustration of how Oxenham's (2000) ATR framework (Oxenham, 2000) was conceptualised, adapted and operationalised by the present researcher. Figure 7 shows how a critical reflective framework in conjunction with a theoretical Third Space was embraced by the researcher and applied collectively to dispel hierarchal claims to knowledge superiority in preference for acknowledging the legitimacy and equivalency of diverse knowledge systems (Bhabha, 1994). In an important sense, however, Figure 7 emphasises the agenda of this post-graduate researcher to decolonise and decentre the authority of Western research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008), by positioning the Aboriginal Advisory Group as a focal point within the research design (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; NHMRC,

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2003) combined with enacting strategies such as listening and critical reflective practice (Drew, 2006; Walker & Sonn, 2010). As a result, Figure 7 should be seen as an effort by the researcher to clarify how the complexities of intersection at the cultural interface were negotiated (Christie, 2006; Garvey, 2007; Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010).

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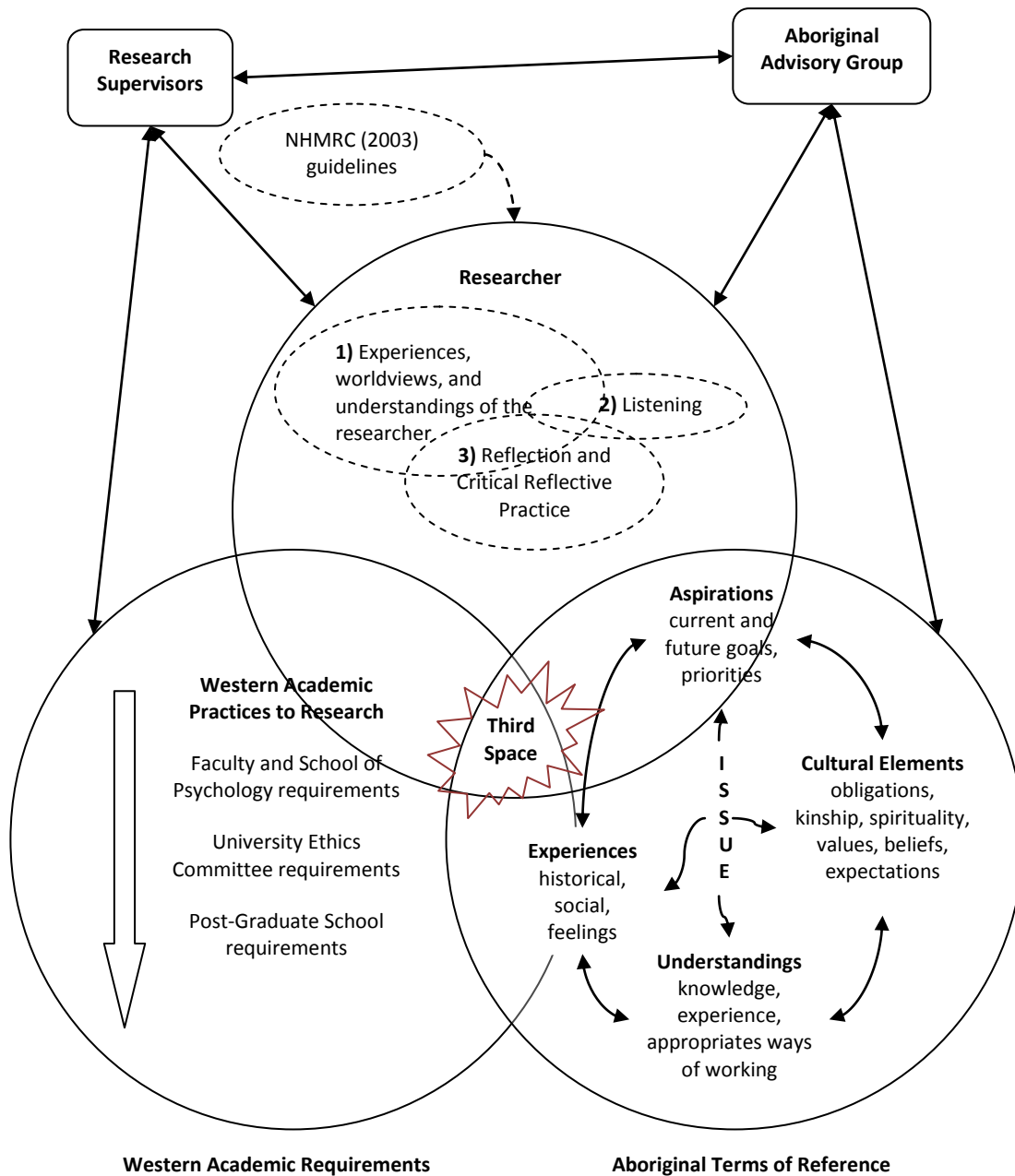


Figure 7. An Illustration of the Enactment of the ATR Framework.

Note. Adapted from "Aboriginal terms of reference" by D. Oxenham, 2000, In P. Dudgeon, D. Garvey, & H. Pickett (Eds.), *Working with Indigenous Australians: A handbook for psychologists* (pp.109-125). Perth: Gunada Press.

3.5 Chapter summary.

Chapter 3 outlined that an ongoing dialectic exists as to how Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and research epistemologies and methodologies should coalesce. This tension has been linked by Indigenous theorists and methodologists with the necessity to challenge the (post)colonial research context and for emancipatory, liberatory, and political discourses to be integrated with research. The chapter began by critiquing Western research paradigms and the impact of their use with Aboriginal people in Australia. This was followed by a review of Indigenist research and Indigenous methodologies. The Cultural Interface and theoretical space of enunciation - Third Space, were presented as concepts by which to theoretically consider what actually occurs at points of intersection between Aboriginal and Western knowledge domains. The Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) framework was introduced and a description was provided as to how it was operationalised in practice by the researcher. In particular, attention was drawn to explaining how a Third Space was embraced to challenge the dominance of Western research paradigms and privilege the equivalency of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Similarly, the importance of the Aboriginal Advisory Group, listening as a prerequisite to effective research practice, and critical reflective practice were discussed. The chapter concluded by drawing together these different dimensions of the research design and depicted them in Figure 7. Chapter 4 will describe the method used to conduct the present research.

4.0 Chapter overview.

The chapter begins by locating the field of research and restating the overarching research questions. The ontology, epistemology, and methodology are outlined along with consideration given to philosophical, theoretical, pragmatic, and ethical factors. Next, the sampling method, informant selection criteria, and the recruitment process are delineated. A description of the steps taken during the data management and data analysis is then provided. The chapter concludes by considering the criteria used to evaluate the quality of quantitative research and steps taken in the present study to foster quality in qualitative research.

4.1 Locating the field of research.

A qualitative inquiry approach was used by the present research as it represented the most appropriate way to investigate the overarching research questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Liamputtong, 2007; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). When little previous research exists and one is trying to understand the inner-experiences of individuals to learn how meaning is constructed, a qualitative approach is appropriate for inquiry located within a social setting (Creswell, 2007; Liamputtong, 2009). Consultation with members of the Aboriginal Advisory Group verified that a qualitative approach aligned with Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing and doing research (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Garvey, 2007). Importantly, members of the advisory group viewed a qualitative approach as the most appropriate way to elicit a meaningful understanding from prospective informants about their experiences at boarding school.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term used to describe a procedure of investigating and interpreting information in order to extract meaning, increase understanding, and extend knowledge (Schwandt, 2007). Qualitative inquiry blends a wide range of ontological and epistemological approaches with a variety of methodological data collection and analytic tools to capture the unique circumstances within which everyday social phenomena occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008c). In addition, qualitative inquiry is an inductive process and one in which the researcher attempts to make sense of how meanings and understandings are formed about the nature of a phenomenon through the use of rich and thick description (Creswell, 2007). The premise of the detached and purely objective researcher is refuted from a qualitative perspective

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and instead the qualitative inquirer searches to connect at an interpersonal level with individuals so as to weave together strands of meaning to understand emergent human behaviours and experiences (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008c).

What constitutes valid social research remains a topical and widely contested matter. The literature is replete with extensive texts and reviews presenting the advantages and limitations of different qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigating social phenomena (Alasuutari, Bickman, & Brannen, 2009; Bryman, 2008a; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008d; Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Patton, 2002). Hence, the intention of this chapter is not to replicate this information, instead the most pressing issue for a researcher is to provide a compelling case supporting the research method applied, and to outline the interconnectedness of the ontological, epistemological, and methodological components with the phenomena under investigation as well as with the research question(s) being explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Liamputtong & Ezzey, 2005). To achieve this, it is pertinent to restate the research questions.

4.1.1 Restating the research questions.

As outlined at the beginning of the manuscript, this research set out to investigate how male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities constructed meaning around the experience of studying away from home at a boarding school in Perth, Western Australia (WA). While students' experiences of being away at boarding school were explored, it also investigated how meaning was constructed around the experience for parents of having a child away from home at boarding school and the experience for staff in supporting students, more precisely:

- 1 How do male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school?
- 2 How do parents of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of having a child studying at a boarding school?
- 3 How do members of staff at boarding schools construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school, of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities?

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At the heart of the current research was an interest in delving into how individuals derived meaning and understanding around an experience, as well as how individuals constructed perceptions of themselves during this experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It was less concerned with applied research goals such as measuring and evaluating the overall outcome of an experience (Patton, 1990). This focus and the overarching research questions meant this research was congruent with 'basic research' and questions posed by basic research typically emphasise the exploration of 'how' social phenomena are understood (Patton, 1990).

4.2 Ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

The delineation of an ontology, epistemology, and methodology are where the echoes of colonialism resonate loudest (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008); the dominance of Western paradigmatic and philosophical notions are overlooked (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009); the marginalisation of culturally valued knowledge takes place (Nakata, 2002, 2007); and historically where the subjugation to an imposed process has begun for many Aboriginal peoples (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000). As outlined in Chapter 3 the extent to which research reflects Aboriginal peoples' realities and experiences pivots on the purposeful creation of a meaningful research space in which to listen to the stories and voices of those who have traditionally been silenced, disempowered, marginalised, and alienated (Garvey, 2007; Martin, 2003; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008). Hence, for the present study to be transformative and not transactional (Drew, 2006) it had to critically interrogate the status quo and be sceptical of conventional assumptions and practices that underpin Western research paradigms and processes.

Some have emphasised the necessity for this transformative stance to be unruly and disruptive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). Such perspectives challenge researchers and stakeholders in research, to participate in a shared critical space, where the values of empowerment and resistance are privileged, so as to locate Indigenous methodology at the site at which theory, practice and pedagogy, and interpretation come together (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). The function of social inquiry should be to work in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities (Drew, 2006; Morgan & Drew, 2010; Walker & Sonn, 2010) and extend understandings beyond the entrenched dualistic margins of competing storylines (Dodson, 2009; Garvey, 2007; Nakata, 2002, 2007; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008). The present research responded to such ontological and epistemic challenges by situating experiences, identities, and realities within the discomfort of the contested and turbulent site of the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994; Dudgeon & Fielder, 2006). The creation of

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this theoretical space was an intentional shift to unmask power relations and the meaningful subjectivities that formed the complex layers of social relations and 'knowledge sedimentation' (to borrow a notion from Husserl), which collectively fused to influence the construction of this research. Cognisant of consultation with members of the advisory group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000) and the history of psychology in Australia (Garvey, Dudgeon, & Kearins, 2000; Rickwood, Dudgeon, Gridley, 2010), the current research used a phenomenological ontology, a social constructionist epistemology, and a narrative interviewing method. Figure 8 attempts to conceptualise the methodological approach of this study.

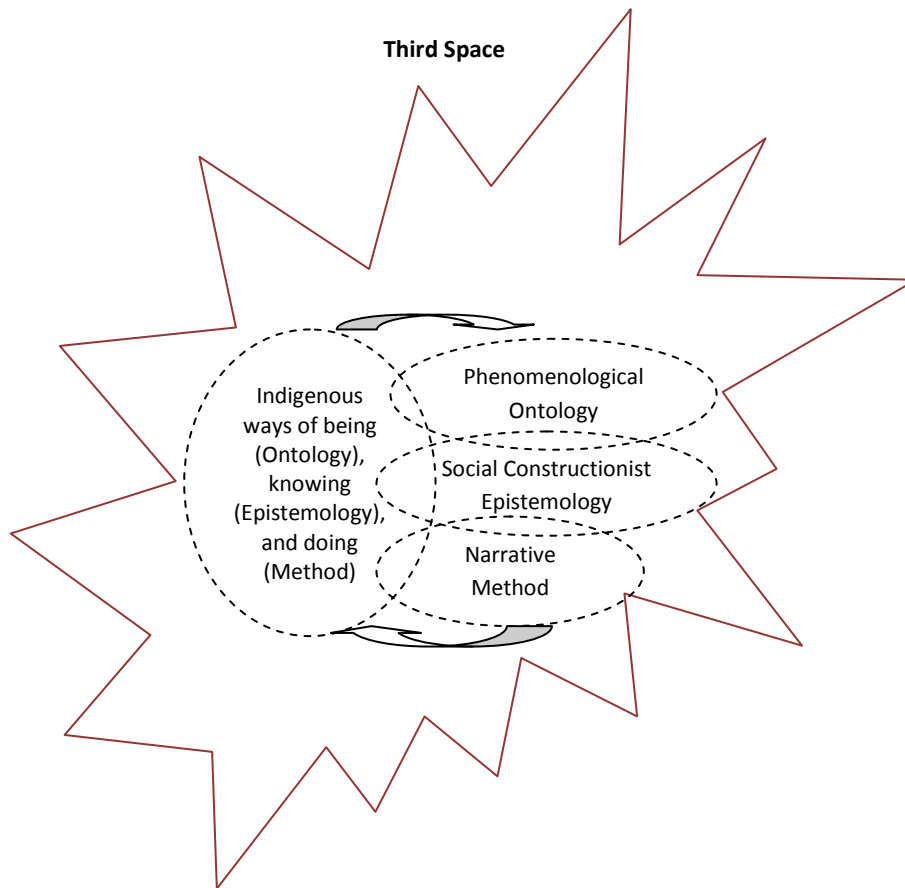


Figure 8. A Conceptualisation of the Methodological Approach.

Choosing and adopting this methodological position presented several philosophical, theoretical, pragmatic, and conceptual challenges. However, in the reflective thinking of the researcher (Walker & Sonn, 2010), the methodological approach selected acknowledged the ambiguous intersection created by diverse ways of being, knowing, and doing at the cultural

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interface (Nakata, 2002, 2007). It equally recognised that despite the complexities of diverse human agency at the interface, not all interchange was wholly incommensurate (Garvey, 2007). Instead, it was conceived as a methodological approach which explicitly intended to shift Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies to the fore (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Oxenham, 2000) and endeavoured to reconfigure research practice in a way that conveyed the affinities that unified different ways of being, knowing, and doing (Martin, 2003), rather than benignly engaging in a research process and methodology that reinstalled dualistic dialogues and the agency of colonialism (Tuhivai-Smith, 2008).

Nakata (2007) stressed the imperative of engaging in dialogue at a conceptual level as quintessential to reconfiguring power relations and exploring the possibilities at the cultural interface. In the context of the current research, phenomenology refuted at an ontological level the subject-object dichotomy found in positivistic paradigms (Creswell, 2007) but embraced the interconnectedness of diverse elements of ordinary everyday life with understanding human experience (Martin, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). At the epistemological level, social constructionism questioned all claims to absolute truth and emphasised how the knowledge is socially situated (Gergen, 2001b, 2011). Moreover, social constructionism recognised human agency in the production of new knowledge and that meaningful understanding of constructs such as 'identity' for example, are understood in relation to sense of belonging with a land, culture, kinship, and spirituality (Christie, 2006; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). At the method level a narrative approach to interviewing privileged a preferred means of knowledge exchange (Garvey, 2007) by empowering the rich oratory and storytelling traditions of Aboriginal peoples (Collard, 2000; DoE, 2002; Somerville, Somerville, & Wyld, 2010). As Figure 8 illustrates, the influence of each element of the methodology was not envisaged as mutually exclusive components, but rather as a collective approach to garner meaningful understanding based on the premise that listening to others was central to capturing in a respectful and culturally appropriate way and the essence of the social phenomenon being investigated.

4.2.1 Phenomenology as a way of being.

Phenomenology has been described as both a research methodology (Creswell, 2007) and as an umbrella philosophy that comprises several subtly distinct views towards understanding human behaviours and experiences (Schwandt, 2007). Prominent amongst these different

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perspectives are the existentialist views of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the hermeneutic emphasis of Martin Heidegger and Max van Manen, and the transcendental or psychological orientation of Edmund Husserl and Clark Moustakas respectively (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Each perspective is unified by a deep suspicion of the philosophical and theoretical proposition that only through objectivism and scientific realism can a succession of universal laws and truths which underline human behaviour and experiences be deductively unmasked (Schwandt, 2007). By contrast, phenomenologists assert that meaningful understandings of human experiences are derived from embracing the everyday and ordinary lived occurrence within the naturalistic setting (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Similarly, phenomenologists posit that no universal laws and truths exist to be found (Crotty, 1998; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Rather, the essential foundations and structures of human behaviour and experiences are best understood through taking cognisance and the careful description of how one ordinarily engages everyday with social phenomena (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

According to Edmund Husserl the everyday lived experiences that construct the life-world of an individual or what he referred to as *Lebenswelt*, form the very starting point (van Manen, 1997) and basis upon which all knowledge about ways of being are conceived (Crotty, 1998). A central premise for Husserl was the notion of intentionality which stressed that humans were in a consciousness state of continual engagement with the world and cannot be described separately from the world in which they live (Schwandt, 2007). It called attention to the interconnectedness of the human mind with the natural and social reality in which an individual intersected (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Husserl was initially distrusting and critical of culture and language which were seen as obscuring the true essence of phenomena (Caelli, 2000) and conceived both as aspects of a pre-given sociolinguistic framework that grounded meaning about phenomena but which did not construct it (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997).

The need of the present research to focus less on the simple description of human behaviours and to converge more on the experiences of individuals to learn how meaning and understanding are formed, meant that the present research aligned with tenets of transcendental phenomenology proposed by Edmund Husserl and Clark Moustakas respectively (Creswell, 2007). This branch of phenomenology, sometimes interchangeably referred to as psychological phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989), invites the researcher to, “set aside all

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previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizon of our thinking ... to learn to see what stands before our eyes" (Husserl, 1931, p. 43, cited in Crotty, 1998, p. 80). Husserl referred to this process as 'epoche' or bracketing (Schwandt, 2007) and envisaged it as encouraging social inquirers to set to one side theoretical beliefs, preconceptions, and prior social constructions. The purpose of which was to systematically explore the independent existence of phenomena by suspending the natural attitude of the researcher and allowing intrinsic meanings to emerge (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). By repeatedly suspending the natural attitude, a process described as phenomenological reduction (Crotty, 1998), Husserl argued it was possible to discern the true essences of human experiences at their fullest and in their most pure form, unadulterated by existential assumptions and intrusions (Patton, 2002). Critics have argued that complete phenomenological reduction was rarely achievable in practice (Moustakas, 1994). Concern also existed that at any given point the natural attitude of the researcher could not be completely bracketed from social inquiry (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; van Manen, 1997). Hence, the premise of bracketing has been reconceptualised as an ongoing aspiration (Moustakas, 1994) and as intent to be open to the essence of phenomena (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). Critically, phenomenology has more recently been envisaged as constituting an openness to explore the multitude of possibilities of meanings linked with phenomenon that is offered to our experiences as social inquirers (Caelli, 2000).

The premise of bracketing and complete phenomenological reduction has been subsumed by several less philosophical but more pragmatic strategies designed to negotiate the natural attitude of the researcher (Caelli, 2000). Prominent amongst these is to suspend understanding in a reflective framework in a move to engender both caution and curiosity (Creswell, 2007) and to utilise multiple voices in a critical capacity to question the validity and reliability of social inquiry. The aim of both strategies is to enrich descriptions through exploring alternative views of phenomena (Caelli, 2000) and in turn decrease the likelihood that data was constructed in an abstract, idiosyncratic, essentialist, and stereotypical way (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). As Chapter 3 outlined, both of these strategies were pivotal elements of the design of the current research and took the form of critical reflective practice (Walker & Sonn, 2010) interwoven with an advisory group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000). Notably, this also served as a form of

‘investigator triangulation’ (Denzin, 1989) which has been described as when alternative observers purposefully and systematically challenge the biases of the researcher (Flick, 2006).

4.2.2 Social constructionism as a way of knowing.

Social constructionism has been described as both a meta-theory of knowledge - a theory about theoretical claims to knowledge construction like empiricism, and as a social theory used in everyday practice such as cognitive theory in family therapy (Gergen, 2011). Although the roots of social constructionism are linked with phenomenology (Caelli, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998), conceptually it is informed by a diverse range of contemporary dialogues including but not limited to, anthropology, communication studies, cultural studies, gender studies, history, psychology, and sociology (Gergen, 2001b). Central to social constructionism is a deep scepticism held towards the continued authority exerted by positivist research paradigms and all claims to objectivity, pure truths and knowledge (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Schwandt, 2003). Social constructionism has synergies with philosophies such as Buddhism (Kwee, 2012) and Confucianism (Yang & Gergen, 2012) and linkages with the establishment of effective working research relationships with Indigenous communities (Bishop, Higgins, Casella, & Contos, 2002; Davidson, Sanson, & Gridley, 2000; Sonn & Bishop, 2000; Garvey, 2007) and the practice of Community Psychology in Western Australia (Bishop, Sonn, Drew, & Contos, 2002).

Sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1966) held that to understand the foundations of knowledge and in turn the fabric of meaning, inquiry methods have to look at “the social construction of reality” (p. 66). Berger and Luckmann (1966) proposed that meanings, understandings, and knowledge about social phenomena did not exist independently of individuals but rather it was social interactions and forces that existed between individuals that created and generated meaning, understanding, and knowledge. That is, all knowledge was negotiated through social interactions between individuals, a process that encompassed historical and culturally situated elements as well as all levels of consciousness to reality ranging from dreaming to the wakened state (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). The dynamism, fluid habits and routines that are typically exchanged during social interactions institutionalise and render certain actions, behaviours, and understandings as meaningful and hence the world and life as coherent (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Hence, no purely objective, fixed, or absolute knowledge truths are argued to exist, rather the rules of knowledge are socio-culturally created and situated thus often subject to change.

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The place of language has been highlighted as a significant aspect in the social construction of meaning and knowledge. Within Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework language was conceptualised as generating "a social stock of knowledge" (p. 56) through its capacity to hold and transfer meaning between individuals. By contrast, Gergen (1985, 2011) emphasises the centrality of language and argued that meaning making and knowledge were derivatives of language and that both could not exist outside of language. Language was not viewed by Gergen (2011) as an inert vessel which only carried meaning and knowledge from one person to the next, but rather as a dynamic vessel that intersected human thinking, meaning making, and ultimately the construction of knowledge (Gergen, 2011). Like other social constructionists, Gergen (2001a) maintains meaning and knowledge originated from the inter-dependency, paradoxes, and social contours from social interchange, and did not pre-exist innately within the human mind (Gergen, 2001b). However, he considers it was the conventions of language which governed how meaning and knowledge of the world are constructed (Gergen, 2011) as both meaning and understanding resided in the communal space between the minds of individuals and are linked by the need for a common language with understood conventions of communication (Gergen, 2001b).

Latour controversially argues that both scientific realism and the traditional sociological orientation of conceptualising social constructionism in their postmodernist forms were equally fruitless endeavours (Latour, 2005). Prominent views of social constructionism were criticised for only focussing on the role of humans and overlooking the role that non-human actors played in exerting agency on human experiences. As a result, Latour proposes the actor-network theory (ANT) that emphasised non-human actors and other non-human artefacts played a functional and significant role in the social construction of meaning and knowledge (Latour, 2005). For example, in relation to experiences at school, ANT would seek to address how the architectural, organisational, the physical location and layout, and landscape aspects of a school interacted with students and teachers, to collectively form a network that influenced the construction of meaning and understanding held by those within that network.

Latour and Woolgar (1979) notably support this position by also drawing attention to the typical scientific study conducted under laboratory conditions. Rather than representing an unbiased and orthodox method of inquiry, Latour and Woolgar (1979) maintain that the tenets of scientific realism were founded upon a process intimately connected with culturally specific

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practices and shared social understandings. For example, the setting up of the typical scientific study was argued to require a procedure that was subject to a multiplicity of subjective decision-making points to do with the selection of a methodological process, the allocation of time frames, and the choice of apparatus used (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). In addition, the process by which data was retained, analysed, and reported of data was an equally subjective process and relative to the purpose of the study. Thus, challenging the traditional construction of scientific inquiry as objective and neutral, and instead emphasising its dependence upon the social construction of knowledge and socially valued variables inherent within the process itself.

Indigenous ways of knowing emphasise how knowledge is inseparable from kinship, the natural world, and spirituality (Christie, 2006; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). For example, many important non-human actors exert agency on meaning making processes, such as plants and animals, land, rivers, trees, springs and waterholes, hills, artwork, ceremonial sites, weather cycles and seasons (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2008). In contrast to positivistic theoretical frameworks which would seek to deconstruct the elements of Indigenous ways of knowing, approaches to social constructionism have embraced the interconnectedness of Indigenous ways of knowing. Many have argued for theory to be used, and in particular social constructionism (Bishop, 2007; Davidson, Sanson, & Gridley, 2000), to challenge academic imperialism and the hegemony of Western paradigms to social inquiry involving Indigenous contexts (Denzin, Lincoln, & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Martin, 2003; Nakata, 2002, 2007; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, 2008; Yang & Gergen, 2012).

4.2.3 Narrative interviewing as a way of doing.

When engaging with Aboriginal young people the most accurate, relevant, and valuable information comes from talking directly with the young people themselves (Bird & Wallis, 2000; Sheldon, 2010; Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006; Vicary & Westerman, 2004; Westerman, 2004, 2010). Thus, interviewing was the primary method of data collection used by the present study. Interviews have been described as a two-way conversation whereby one person talks and another person listens, responds, and encourages (Liamputtong & Ezzey, 2005). Interviewing presented as the most pragmatic, flexible, and culturally appropriate data collection strategy given the preferred communication style of the informants (Garvey, 2007), the purpose of the research, and the research questions being investigated (Creswell, 2007; Riessman, 2008).

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Narrative inquiry has been described as exploring social phenomena in terms of the stories that individuals share when they gather together and the term narrative is often interchangeably used with 'story', 'stories' and 'storytelling' (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). Narratives and stories have meaning and come in many forms. They help individuals and communities to make sense of human experiences (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000) and are told for particular audiences and to serve multiple needs and obligations. These may include the justification of a decision made, to humour and entertain others, as a protective strategy to release tensions about misunderstandings, or even to purposely mislead an audience (Riessman, 2008). The process of storytelling is not only a social activity (Elliott, 2005), it is also a means to provides stability, continuity, permanence, and plays a central role in relaying knowledge and in-depth understandings (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000).

In an important sense, storytelling often brings to light the previously buried, hidden, and marginalised discourses and subjectivities linked with social phenomena (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). A common feature of narrative interviewing is the act of telling or retelling stories, which has been argued to heighten the likelihood that a decolonising and transformative interchange will be facilitated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006). The opportunity to narrate not only enables human experiences be heard and affirmed, it also connects and enriches the world with a fuller sense of the multiple voices and versions of meaning and understanding that are attached with social phenomena (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Riessman, 2008). The historical accuracy in a story relayed are not always the primary interest to social researchers using narrative interviews, rather it is the construction of meaning during a moment in time which are often what narrative interviewing is seeking to explore and understand (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Elliot, 2005; Reissman, 2008).

Embracing narratives and storytelling was central to placing culturally valued practice at the heart of this research (Garvey, 2007; Sheldon, 2010; Somerville, Somerville, & Wyld, 2010). In addition to the significance of storytelling to the maintenance and transmission of cultural knowledge (Pearce, 2003), storytelling also has linkages with valued communication and conversational conventions such as 'yarning' for Aboriginal people (Vicary & Bishop, 2005; Westerman, 2004). Yarning has been described as an informal, relaxed, and reflective form of verbal communication and way of communicating meaning and exchanging information through conversation (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Yarning may include the telling of oral histories, talking

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about country and the landscape, and the sharing of social understandings in a purposeful effort to both gather and disclose information (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Garvey, 2007). Several authors have identified that yarning has special significance to building rapport and trust with Aboriginal children and young people in WA (DoE, 2002; Westerman, 2010). By contrast, evidence shows that social inquiry structured around predetermined check-lists, forced-choice responses or closed-ended questions only receive apprehensive and superficial responses from Aboriginal children and young people (Kearins, 2000; Powell & Snow, 2007; Vicary & Westerman, 2004).

In the reflective thinking of the researcher a narrative interviewing strategy provided access to preferred communication conventions such as yarning (Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006) and to familiar practices of knowledge transmission such as storytelling (Garvey, 2007). Narrative interviewing facilitated for informants control of the dialogic space with the researcher and provided the opportunity for informants during interviews to make autonomous choices about the nature and type of knowledge they wished to share (Powell & Snow, 2007). This helped to minimise the risk that informants might experience discomfort such as shame or embarrassment (Sheldon, 2010), or feel pressurised to reveal information or provide a response to a question they might otherwise not choose to. Conversely, a narrative interviewing method hoped to convey as Ralph (2000) noted with regard to Aboriginal families and children, that “the telling of one’s story to a respectful and interested listener ... is affirmation of the speaker’s experience and confirmation of the genuineness and sensitivity of the listener” (p. 213).

In practice, the researcher reconceptualised interviews from a sequential acts whereby the order and completion of predetermined questions were the focal point to an open-ended exchange to elicit detailed accounts of experiences and understandings (Riessman, 2008). In particular, the researcher sought to open-up conversations around a reciprocal exchange of communication in which the researcher was more focussed on listening (Kearins, 2000) and exploring conversational threads provided by informants so as to glean a fuller sense of an experience for an informant (Polkinghorne, 2005). Such an approach enabled informants to translate knowing into telling (Elliott, 2005) and invited informants to not only explore their own meaning and understanding of experiences as an individual, but also as a member of a boarding school community and with respect to their home community.

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However, there were moments during interviews when the unstructured approach of narrative interviewing sometimes was initially responded to with silence, or caused informants to pause and wait to be prompted. Sometimes the excess of possibilities that narrative interviewing creates can overwhelm individuals and cause them to provide succinct summaries rather than to recall detailed experiences (Powell & Snow, 2007; Riessman, 2008). However, in forging positive relationships with Aboriginal children it is important for psychologists to, “learn to live with longer silences” (Kearins, 2000; p. 170) and particularly with Aboriginal children from the Kimberley region in WA it is essential to “slow down and give them time to think about a question asked ... to get a story” (Bird & Wallis, 2000, p. 366). A study by Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, and Adupa (2006) into the development of an Aboriginal Child Engagement Model, outlined that during periods of silence, Aboriginal children should not be misinterpreted as an informant having nothing to say. Instead, periods of silence are a common sociolinguistic convention of communication in many remote Aboriginal societies and used to reflect and think about what is being discussed. Confident Aboriginal children often use periods of silence to not only think about what has been asked but equally to think about potential questions they would like answered (Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006). Hence, the researcher kept in the forefront of his mind the importance of silence and providing ample time for reflection, to encourage such thought processes in an effort to benefit from a greater depth and breadth of responses during interviews.

Notwithstanding these steps taken, there were instances when it was appropriate to prompt informants to consider a specific time instead of asking them to recall information about a very wide time frame (Elliot, 2005). To this end, open-ended questions were sometimes asked such as: “can you recall a particular moment when?” Each was typically followed by non-verbal prompts such as nodding of the head, short verbal cues such as ‘hmmm’ and ‘yeh’, and longer verbal prompts to encourage interviewees to elaborate on their experiences such as: “can you tell me more about that?” (Powell & Snow, 2007). Throughout all interviews the use of body language, personal space, eye contact, and tone of voice was closely monitored by the researcher as was the use of unnecessary jargon and elaborate language (Kearins, 2000; Sheldon, 2010; Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006). However, the careful and appropriate use of humour was embraced in an effort to build rapport and connect with informants, and to minimise informant nervousness (Garvey, 2007; Gower & Byrne, 2012).

4.3 Sampling method, informant selection criteria, and the recruitment process.

Qualitative sampling methods do not endeavour to be statistically representative rather they respond to the research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They may depend on specialist experience (Jupp, 2006) or on the prior knowledge of a researcher (Schwandt, 2007) and are relative to the availability and willingness of informants to participate in research (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Different sampling methods were required at different stages by the current research. Purposive sampling was used to select the five boys' only boarding schools. Purposive sampling has been described as a powerful non-random sampling approach that aims to select information-rich cases (Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005). A particular form of purposive sampling was used by this study, namely 'intensity sampling', which seeks to access information-rich cases (in this case boarding schools) that usually manifest the social phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). Criterion sampling was also required to identify potential informants. Criterion sampling is commonly used with in-depth qualitative social inquiry (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) and involves setting criteria to ensure informants are able to provide rich and relevant data in relation to the research question (Creswell, 2007).

The criteria for the student informants were:

- They identified as of Aboriginal heritage
- Their gender was male
- They had a primary home residence located outside the Perth metropolitan area, and
- They were enrolled at a secondary level in a boarding school in Perth for the duration of the school year.

The criteria for the parent informants were:

- They had a male child who identified as of Aboriginal heritage
- They had a male child enrolled at a secondary level in a boarding school in Perth for the duration of the school year, and
- They had a residential home address located outside the Perth metropolitan area.

The criteria for the boarding school staff informants were:

- They were employed at a boys' boarding school in Perth, and
- They had experience teaching, working with or supporting male Aboriginal students whose primary home residence was located outside of the Perth metropolitan area.

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It is acknowledged that other variables such as age, variations in access to support from siblings or extended family while in Perth, and difference in pastoral care systems of boarding schools, may have influenced the data collected by this research. However, the purpose of the criteria in the present study was to ensure the sampling method and informant selection process were congruent with counsel provided by members of the advisory group (Vicary & Bishop, 2005). In particular, the emphasis of the advisory group that it was more culturally appropriate for the male researcher to focus on the experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students.

4.3.1 The recruitment of boarding schools.

Eligible boarding schools were identified by means of specialist experience (Jupp, 2006) and the prior knowledge of the researcher (Schwandt, 2007). There are seven boys only boarding schools in WA and all are members of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA). The AISWA is the peak body that advocates on behalf of independent schools in WA (AISWA, *n.d.*). The AISWA was committed to supporting the present research as it was viewed as contributing to boarding school's ability to enhance the educational experiences of Aboriginal students enrolled at member boarding schools (see Appendix C). Consultation with the Executive Director of the AISWA prior to the onset of this research was essential to inform to the Headmaster of each boarding school that the project had been scrutinised by the AISWA. Both the current and previous Executive Director of the AISWA supported the present research.

Notwithstanding the support of the AISWA, the responsibility for screening the appropriateness of proposed research and the granting or denying of permission to conduct research ultimately resided at the discretion of the Headmaster of each boarding school. An information letter introducing and outlining the proposed research was distributed to the seven boys only boarding schools and five agreed to participate in this research. In several instances the information letter was also distributed to the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, the Indigenous Program Coordinator, or the Indigenous Consultant at a boarding school. A meeting was held with the Headmaster of each school, or a representative appointed by each school (e.g., Aboriginal Liaison Officer, the Indigenous Program Coordinator, or the Indigenous Consultant), and a detailed explanation of the research was provided including: the research schedule, consent processes, compliance with Ethic Committee requirements, verification of steps to secure and maintain the confidentiality of data collected. Informed consent to conduct the research was then obtained

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from each school. Further demographic information, as of December, 2010, from each of the five
boarding schools that were recruited is provided in Table 5.

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Table 5

Demographic Information of the Five Boys' Only Boarding Schools Recruited

School Description	Level of Schooling Offered	Total Student Population	Boarding House Structure	Total Boarding Student Population	Total Aboriginal Student Population	Aboriginal Boarding Student Population	Aboriginal Boarding Scholarships and/or Bursary
School A Day-boarding school	Boys only Years 4-12	>1100	Three boarding houses combining students in Yrs 7-12	>210	12 (Years 7 to 11)	9	Yes
School B Day-boarding school	Boys only Kindergarten-Year 12	>1500	Junior boarding house (Yrs 7-8); Senior boarding house (Yrs 9, 10, 11, & 12)	>110	18 (Years 7 to 12)	16	Yes
School C Day-boarding school	Co-educational Kindergarten-Year 6; Boys only Years 7-12	>1100	Junior boarding house (Yrs 7-9); Senior boarding house (Yrs 10-12)	>100	19 (Years 6 to 12)	11	Yes
School D Day-boarding school	Boys only Years 1-12	>1400	Junior boarding house (Yrs 6-8); Senior boarding house (Yrs 9-12)	>200	15 (Years 7 to 12)	15	Yes
School E Day-boarding school	Co-educational Kindergarten-Year 4; Boys only Years 5-12	>1300	Combined Junior and Senior boarding house (Yrs 7-12)	>150	28 (Years 7 to 12)	26	Yes

Note. Data as of December, 2010.

4.3.2 The recruitment of informants.

The main focus of the informant recruitment process was to protect against inherent power differentials, to clearly establish the limits of confidentiality, and to ensure that voluntary informed consent had taken place (Vicary & Dudgeon, 2000). Hence, data was only collected from

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those individuals who provided informed consent (Vicary & Andrews, 2001). On the advice of the advisory group (Vicary & Bishop, 2005) the purpose of the research and its design was in the first instance canvassed with the parents of students via an information package. The information package included an information letter, consent form, and a reply paid envelope. In addition, a copy of the *National Health and Medical Research Council, Values and Ethics: Guidelines and Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (NHMRC) (2003)* with an explanation of how the researcher intended to observe its recommendations was also included in the information package distributed to parents (see Appendix A). The information package was colour coded in anticipation of conversations had over the telephone and to make it easier for the researcher to refer parents to relevant parts. For example, the initial information letter outlining the research was colour coded as a white sheet of paper, the consent form was colour coded as a red sheet of paper, and the NHMRC (2003) guidelines was colour coded as a green sheet of paper (see Appendix E).

Three schools posted the information package to parents. Two schools canvassed the research with parents over the telephone and at the beginning and end of school terms. The use of an information package was deemed to be less intrusive and the least likely to cause parents to feel coerced into participating in the research. Having English as a second language and low parental reading and writing literacy was a concern for the researcher and members of the advisory group. To help mediate these issues, while still fully articulating the aims of the research, meeting the requirements of Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethic Committee, and making it unambiguous that informed consent was being sought; the information letter was structured under six key questions to address anticipated questions that parents might have had. These were: 1) Why do I need your help? 2) Why am I sending you this letter? 3) What does this involve? 4) What happens with the information you give me? 5) What else do you need to do if you want to participate in this research? 6) Who is watching me to make sure I do the right things?. Similarly, the written informed consent form was structured in a dot-point format that explicitly delineated what each parent was consenting to. To guard against parents feeling coerced

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into providing consent because their child's school had contacted them, the researcher requested each school to communicate to parents¹³:

- Participation in the research was at the discretion of the parent
- Giving permission for themselves or their child to be involved in the research was not linked in any way to stipulations or expectations of their child's school
- If a parent decided to change their mind or would like to withdraw their own or consent for their child to participate in the research, even if they had already agreed to participate, they could do so at any given time with no questions asked, and
- All information collected would remain strictly confidential and that no identifiable information about their child or themselves would be published.

In addition, the details of members of the advisory group were also provided in the information package as alternative contact point which parents could access to evaluate the intentions of researcher and the merits of the research (Vicary & Andrews, 2001; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). When informed parental consent was established, the researcher telephoned the parent and took the opportunity to clarify the research purpose, the interview format and time requirements, as well as provide information about the research design. A mutually convenient date, time, and location of their choice to hold an interview was arranged with those parents who indicated a willingness to proceed and participate in the research. When permission was provided by parents for their child to participate, the Head of Boarding, or a representative designated by the school, initially broached participation in the research with that student. As with parents, the researcher emphasised that it be made explicitly clear to students that participation was voluntary and was in no way an expectation held by the school of the student.

A student information letter was developed to help clarify the purpose of the research. It also utilised a six question structure to address anticipated questions of students. In contrast to the parent information letter, where possible the language and technical research jargon used in the student information letter was adjusted for a younger audience. The six questions were: 1) What is the research about? 2) Why do I need your help? 3) What am I asking? 4) What will happen? 5) What happens with the information you give me? 6) What else do you need to know

¹³ This step was explicitly delineated in the research proposal submitted for ethical clearance in November 2008 to the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee.

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or do, if you want to participate in this research? (see Appendix F). For students identified with low reading literacy, the information letter was read aloud by the Head of Boarding, Aboriginal Liaison Officer, or Indigenous Program Coordinator, and then discussed. The researcher only made contact with those students who expressed an interest in participating in the research. During this pre-interview contact students were encouraged to ask questions about the research. If a student was willing to proceed, informed written consent was gained (see Appendix G). Interviews were conducted at the school of each respective student on a date and time of their choice, and took place in a variety of locations nominated by a student, for example in the library, boarding house, common rooms, on the school oval, in an empty classroom, and in the office of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer. The Head of Boarding was always informed of these arrangements.

Staff informants were also recruited through the distribution of an information package containing an information letter and consent form explaining the purpose of the research (see Appendix H). The information letter outlined the research and invited interested staff in each school to complete the attached consent form. The distribution of this information package involved accessing the slightly different internal communication methods preferred by each school. For example, at one school it was requested that hardcopies of the information package were placed in the pigeon holes of all members of staff, while another school asked for the information package to be distributed electronically via email. For those that expressed an interest via email or by returning a hardcopy of the consent form by means of a supplied reply paid envelope, an initial telephone call was made to staff to further clarify the purpose and requirements of the research. If willing to proceed, a date, time, and location of their choice to be interviewed were arranged.

Prior to the commencement of all interviews, the researcher first confirmed that written informed consent had been undertaken. The researcher then reminded informants of the limits of confidentiality and that they could withdraw from participating in the interview or refuse to answer any questions at any time. All interviews were audio-tape recorded and informants were informed and permission for this process was sought prior to commencement of an interview. At the conclusion of the interview each informant was debriefed and provided with the opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns they may have had about the research. It was envisaged that the recruitment of 10-12 informants per informant group would be satisfactory (Morrow, 2005), with the overall number anticipated to be between 30-40 informants in total (Creswell,

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2007). The response was such that the overall total number of informants recruited was substantially above this estimation.

Table 6

Summary of Informant Group Information and Recruitment Details

Group Description	Sampling Method	School	Number
Student Informants	Purposive/Criterion Sampling	Schools A to E	32
Parent Informants	Purposive/Criterion Sampling	Schools A to E	11
Staff Informants	Purposive/Criterion Sampling	Schools B, C, D, & E ^a	16
Total Number of Informants Recruited			59

Note: ^aNo members of staff at School A returned a consent form or nominated via email to participate in the current study.

4.4 Data management, analysis, and research quality.

The pragmatics of data management and analysis in qualitative research are diverse, complex, and inherently multi-phased (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2006; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Three main phases composed the data management and analysis process used by the present study, these were 1) Data Management 2) Data Analysis, and 3) Reported Findings. The following sections will address each of these separately.

4.4.1 Data management and confidentiality.

All informant interviews were systematically de-identified by the allocation of a number and pseudonym corresponding to the order in which an interview was conducted within each informant group. For example, interviews within the student informant group were labelled Student Informant 1, Student Informant 2, etc. Transcription was done as soon as possible after an interview was conducted. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and care was taken to remove any identifying information within the content of an interview (e.g., reference to self, family surname, and name of boarding school) to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. On completion, each transcript was checked against the original audio-tape recording to ensure accurate and complete transcription took place (Flick, 2006). All audio-taped interviews and

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hardcopies of transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet and all electronic information was stored on external hard-drives which were password protected and also kept in a locked cabinet.

4.4.2 Data analysis.

Following transcription, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

Thematic analysis is commonly applied to narratives and stories that are shared during interviews (Riessman, 2008, 2011) and has been described as a general but widely used qualitative strategy to identify, order, analyse, and report patterns, referred to as themes, within collected datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis tries to organise and code sections of transcribed text (Schwandt, 2007) in an effort to discover and generate emergent themes that contribute to conceptualising a description of the social phenomena under investigation (Rapley, 2011). It is often linked with exploratory qualitative research because it is a flexible but powerful analytic process (Bryman, 2008b; Liamputtong, 2009; Patton, 2002), and within a social constructionist framework thematic analysis seeks to explore the socio-cultural context that underpins meaning making processes about experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The present study adjusted and adapted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guidelines to thematic analysis for qualitative psychological research. Whilst not prescriptive (Rapley, 2011), the primary aim of following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines was to ensure an exhaustive and systematic analysis of qualitative datasets took place. In practice, the aim was to approach the analysis of raw data in a procedural manner that produced a rich description of meanings constructed by informants but which did not squash the ad hoc, unique, and unanticipated revelations often encountered by qualitative inquiry (Liamputtong, 2009). A brief outline of the adjusted and adapted six-steps suggested by Braun and Clark (2006) as well as a short description of each step taken by the current study are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Six-Steps to Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Psychology Research

Six-steps to thematic analysis	Description of process within each step
1. Familiarisation with dataset collected	Transcription of interviews collected. Read and re-read transcripts in their entirety, initially as one single whole group, accompanied by note taking.
2. Generation of codes	Systematically code interesting elements of data with each transcript within each informant group - elaboration of this process by highlighting, writing notes, hunches, and personal reflections, paying close attention to language used to explain and describe experiences in transcripts.
3. Search for themes and related sub-themes	Collation of all codes and information identified into possible themes – development of an electronic data-base of coded information generated.
4. Checking and re-checking themes collated	Reiteratively check themes and sub-themes in relation to codes collected and the dataset as a whole.
5. Redefining and naming of Themes and related sub-themes	Established themes and related sub-themes are contrasted with the overall story told across the whole dataset. Complex linkages/interactions between themes and sub-themes are reviewed. Clarification of theme and sub-theme names and the generation of descriptions.
6. Construction of a report	Compelling statements, sentences, exemplars, extracts, and quotes selected from transcripts to give a vivid account of the 'essence' of a theme and sub-theme.

Note. Adapted from "Using thematic analysis in psychology," by V. Braun, and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), p. 87.

In order to become familiar with the data collected each of the 59 transcripts was read as a whole in order to actively immerse the researcher in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially reading all the transcripts as one whole group served a number of different purposes. Foremost, it contextualised the data collected and gave the researcher an overall sense of informants' experiences as a whole. Secondly, it enabled the researcher to both conserve the meaning of the data as a whole whilst reflecting upon structure of meanings within different narratives and across different informant groups. Thirdly, it allowed the researcher to begin the process of synthesising, identifying, and delineating descriptive accounts that expressed the structure of meaning attached to the phenomenon of study. Lastly, it enabled the researcher to

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raise questions about the continuity and contradictions of accounts generated by accessing multiple information sources.

Coding has been described as a procedure that breaks large volumes of data into smaller manageable categories (Liamputtong, 2009) by reiteratively comparing segments of data and identifying interesting elements found within datasets (Schwandt, 2007). In generating codes, the transcripts were organised into their respective informant groups (e.g., students, parents, and staff informants) and reread for common talking points, similar personal accounts, or shared broader contexts that shaped or sustained meanings or experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hand written notes were jotted down the right-hand margin of each transcript to demarcate possible codes identified in the text. The researcher also played the audio-tape recording of each interview when he reread transcripts so as to immerse the researcher in the voice, tone, the duration of pauses, points of inflection and emphasis placed on words during interviews. Common codes identified across two or more transcripts were compared with codes from previous transcripts read or with the next transcript to be read (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher systematically recorded common codes found across two or more transcripts to generate a theme and sub-themes within each informant group (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Sub-themes that did not automatically fit within the boundaries of major themes identified were kept as possible fragments of a major theme not yet discovered by the researcher, or used to reflect on the appropriateness of major themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each emergent theme was reiteratively compared and contrasted across transcripts. Coded information was then recorded and placed into an electronic Word document under its respective theme and sub-theme. In some instances, when a particularly interesting example underpinning a code, large chunks of information were initially shifted to the electronic Word document to remind the researcher to consider the wider context and the natural flow of a code extracted from an interview (Riessman, 2008).

The checking and re-checking process included printing off a hardcopy of the electronic Word document for each informant group at an A3 size and reading and re-reading each as a whole to scrutinise the coded information collated. The researcher then used post-it markers to identify major themes on the A3 document for each informant group. Examples of derived major themes for each informant group were highlighted and the location marked with accompanying

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notes and further thoughts written in the right hand margin of the A3 document. Emerging themes were discussed and validated with members of the Aboriginal Advisory Group to ensure the interpretation of the data was accurate (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). This process served as researcher triangulation (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) as the research findings were explored by others from different perspectives. Similarly, when the opportunity surfaced at participating boarding schools, the researcher had informal conversations and discussions with student, parent, and staff informants about emerging themes (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). This process was repeated until no new major themes were identified.

Established themes and related sub-themes were contrasted with the overall story told across the whole dataset for each informant group (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Clarification of theme and sub-theme names was undertaken and the generation of a description of each theme and sub theme developed. The refining and naming stage involved consultation with the advisory group which again served to triangulate and to ensure the validity of themes and sub-themes identified (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). Compelling statements, sentences, exemplars, extracts, fragments of dialogue, and vivid quotes from transcripts were carefully selected and intentionally collated to convey the 'essence' of a theme and sub-theme reported by the present study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The value of this process ultimately resided in the ability of the researcher to link abstracted themes and sub-themes drawn from each informant dataset, with bringing alive for the reader an in-depth sense of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school away from home. Figure 9 illustrates the data management and analysis process used by the present study.

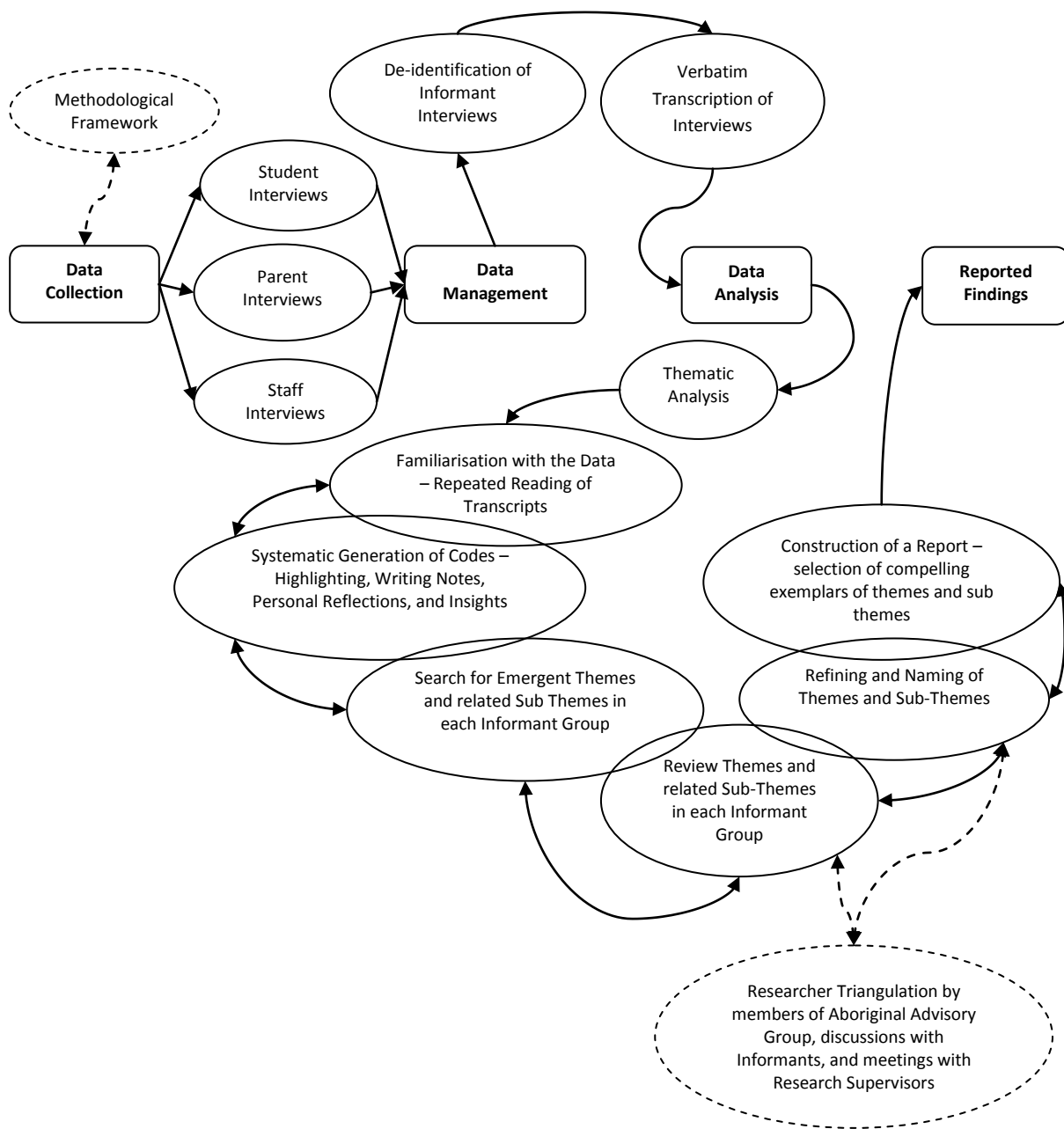


Figure 9. A Conceptualisation of the Data Management and Analysis Process used by the Present Study.

4.4.3 Quality in qualitative research.

As qualitative methodologies have become more commonplace, a corresponding focus has developed concerning how to establish the quality of methods used and the findings reported

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by qualitative research (Flick, 2006). Conventional criteria used to evaluate the methodological quality of quantitative research such as empirical generalisability, reliability, and validity, are not transferable to qualitative research given the different philosophical, theoretical, methodological frameworks that underpin the design of research aims, sampling methods, and sampling sizes (Morrow, 2005). Rather, concepts like rigour and the appropriateness of the methodology used, including the extent to which a methodology enabled research to thoroughly investigate phenomena and to produce meaningful research findings, are instead used to assess the 'trustworthiness' of findings reported by qualitative inquiry (Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008).

Trustworthiness has been described as a key criterion by which to assess the quality of naturalistic inquiry (Schwandt, 2007) and argued to be composed of four elements. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The present research achieved credibility and dependability through extended engagement and ongoing observation in the field and by the triangulation of findings (Flick, 2006). Frequent communication with members of the advisory group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Vicary & Bishop, 2005) and research supervisors enabled member checking of data and interpretations developed by the researcher. What is more the use of critical reflective practice (Walker & Sonn, 2010) to draw attention to researcher blind spots and the influence of researcher bias also contributed to establish credibility and dependability. Similarly, the systematic procedures used for data collection, management, and analysis, combined with persistent written note taking and memoing as well as an archive of electronic notes organised into monthly folders and labelled corresponding to each year, all collectively assisted to establish the credibility and dependability of the present study (Flick, 2006).

Subsequent revisions suggested that authenticity was equally important for naturalistic inquiry to consider (Morrow, 2005). Authenticity has been described as producing a genuine account of an experience had by individuals (Schwandt, 2007). Linked with the premise of authenticity are five sub-criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). The present study for example, achieved fairness by reporting a wide range of realities. Ontological authenticity was achieved as a more sophisticated understanding has been provided about Aboriginal students' constructions of meaning about boarding school. Educative authenticity was achieved by encouraging informants to consider perspectives other than their own. Likewise, tactical

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authenticity was achieved by empowering informants to share their perspectives, beliefs and experiences.

More recently, several sources have proposed frameworks listing criteria by which to assess the construction of quality research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Chwalisz, Shah, & Hand, 2008; Flick, 2006; Kitto, Chesters, & Grbich, 2008; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005; Morrow, 2005). However, the holistic nature of Corbin and Strauss's (2008) framework of nine conditions by which to assess the quality of qualitative research resonated with the current study, as it acknowledged that quality research was not something that just happened, but rather a multifaceted process that was worked towards. A brief outline has been provided in Table 8 of the nine conditions as they were adapted and adjusted by the current study, as well as a short description accompanied by examples to draw the attention of the reader to strategies used to attain each condition in practice.

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Table 8

Corbin and Strauss's (2008) Nine Conditions for Quality in Qualitative Research

Nine conditions of quality research	Brief description of how each condition was addressed
Methodological Consistency	The use of appropriate theoretical and methodological procedures in an effort to ensure research credibility. For example, the present study carefully explained the congruency of theoretical and methodological approaches with the overarching research questions investigated.
Clarification	Clarity from the outset as to the aim and purpose of research. For example, the primary aim for present study was descriptive (and not to generate theory) and the overarching research questions were purposefully written to investigate how meaning was constructed.
Self-awareness	Awareness to the influence of assumptions held by a researcher while conducting research. For example, the present study involved critical reflective practice and an Aboriginal Advisory Group both in the capacity to question and challenge assumptions of the researcher.
Competency	The ability of a researcher to make competent analytical decisions in relation to interviewing, building rich and thick descriptions of phenomena. For example, the researcher systematically engaged in learning activities with members of the Aboriginal Advisory Group and research supervisors. In addition, the researcher participated in cultural competency training opportunities such as the national <i>'Cultural Competence for Non-Indigenous Mental Health Practitioners'</i> program delivered by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (see Appendix I).
Desire	A desire to walk alongside individuals as they negotiated their life-world and an intention to respect and be sensitive to other ways of being, knowing, and doing. For example, the involvement of an Aboriginal Advisory Group and adherence with the <i>National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (NHMRC, 2003)</i> and <i>Keeping Research on Track: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about Health Research Ethics (NHMRC, 2005)</i> research guidelines (see Appendix A).
Strong work ethos	A willingness to work hard. For example, the present study required negotiating a multiplicity of stakeholders, processes, and expectations. These ranged from meeting University requirements, to meeting the expectations of informants and the Aboriginal Advisory Group. As outlined in Appendix A, the desire to conduct respectful research meant that no short cuts were taken.
Openness to creativity	A willingness to thinking in new and unfamiliar ways and being open to new ideas. For example, the conceptualisation and development by the present study of a theoretical Third Space so that different ways of being, knowing, and doing could emerge and enhance the likelihood that the methodology would capture the essence, and a more meaningful understanding, of the social phenomena under investigation.
Methodological awareness	Cognisance of the implications of methodological decisions made. For example, the centrality of Indigenous methodologies combined with a research design that enacted Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR). Reiterative critical reflective practice towards moral and ethical dilemmas linked with research.
Commitment to research	The researcher had a fundamental belief in the healing capacity of research that honoured the equivalency of Aboriginal worldviews, values, and methodologies, but also in promoting important values such as social justice and equity, and respect for diversity.

Note. Adapted from *"Basics of qualitative research 3e,"* by J. Corbin, and A. Strauss, 2008, California: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, Inc, p. 302-305.

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The current study has been transparent at all stages during the research process, such that the research journey can be plotted in its entirety and fullness by others. Critical to achieving this position was the reflexive stance in which the present research was grounded. Reflexivity has been described as self-awareness to the mutual affect and way in which the dynamics between the researcher and participants in research influence the course of a research process (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Being self-aware of subjectivity when in contact with research informants was partially addressed and documented during the explanation of the journey for the researcher (Morrow, 2005) to conceptualise and develop a theoretical Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) (see Figure 6 and 7 in Chapter 3). Lastly, it could also be argued that the way in which the NHMRC (2003) guidelines were addressed and prioritised (see Appendix A) equally served to document the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the researcher (Flick, 2006).

However, the role of the researcher was perhaps most directly addressed by two methodological practices built into the heart of the research design. These were critical reflective practice (Walker & Sonn, 2010) and an Aboriginal Advisory Group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; Vicary & Bishop, 2005). Positioning the advisory group alongside the researcher in the critical capacity of assessing the accuracy and rigour of the research was a purposeful effort to engage in an open and transparent process aimed at disrupting power dynamics between the researcher and the researched (Stewart, 2007). As detailed in Chapter 3, these two methodological practices continually encouraged ongoing and reiterative critical reflection on the assumptions, worldviews, and the reciprocal influence of subjectivities held by the researcher. It was this process which systematically interrogated, unmasked, and opened the consciousness of the researcher to the need to carefully and honestly evaluate each 'thought-decision pattern' at each step, stage, and phase of the research process (Walker & Sonn, 2010).

4.5 Ethical clearance and other considerations.

Ethical clearance for the current research was initially granted in 2008 by the *Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee* (project code: 06 - 198 MANDER). The confidentiality and privacy of informants that contributed to this research were protected at all times including in all email, telephone and other correspondence with research supervisors and myself, and members of the advisory group. Pseudonyms for were used for students, parents, and staff informants, as well as for the five schools throughout this dissertation. All data included in this thesis such as quotes were scrutinised for information that could render an informant identifiable.

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For the duration of the study, the researcher had a valid *Working with Children Check*, which is a mandatory requirement in Western Australia in school contexts.

4.6 Chapter summary.

This chapter has shown how the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of the present study were conceptualised in response to the social phenomena under investigation and the research questions being explored. It has drawn attention to several philosophical, theoretical, pragmatic, and ethical dilemmas encountered in establishing the methodological approach and delineated how each was negotiated. The sampling method, informant selection criteria, and the recruitment process undertaken by this research were outlined. A description of the steps taken during the data management and data analysis were then provided, as were the steps taken to establish that quality qualitative research took place. The following section of this manuscript contains the research Findings for student, parent, and staff informants and is comprised of Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

SECTION THREE: FINDINGS

Presentation of Findings

The research findings are presented in separate chapters: student informants – Chapter 5; parent informants – Chapter 6, and; staff informants – Chapter 7. This allows the nuances unique to each informant group to resonate with the reader. The findings reported in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are presented in the format of major thematic structures with related sub-themes listed beneath. The researcher strived to achieve a balance between thick description and contextualising reported findings to ensure an appropriate balance between the interpretative commentary of the researcher and the provision of evidence to support each major theme and sub-theme (Morrow, 2005). Verbatim examples, quotes, and thick description is used to convey the meanings and essence of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Similarly, prevalent key words and terminology exhibited across several interviews within each informant group is regularly grouped together to emphasise and contextualise meaning and understanding associated with a major theme or sub-theme. Extended exemplary narrative accounts are also provided (Reissman, 2008). Continuous interruption by premature scholarly interjection can infringe on the fullness and richness of the findings presented by qualitative inquiry (Flick, 2006; Marvasti, 2011; Morrow, 2005; Wolcott, 1990, 2009). Hence, reference to the literature has been curtailed except where continuity and connection between the construction of meaning and lines of evidence reported in the research findings. Reference to the literature has been used to illuminate linkages or divergence with prior research and dominant discourse (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Each chapter begins with an introduction and the research question being restated. This is accompanied by a table providing a summary of demographic information of informants. Lastly, each introduction also presents a table listing the major themes and sub-themes for each informant group.

5.0 Introduction.

This research set out to investigate how male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities constructed meaning around the experience of studying away from home at a boarding school in Perth, Western Australia (WA). This chapter addresses the first research question of this study:

How do male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school?

Interviews were conducted with 32 student informants ranging across Years 7 to 12 from five boarding schools in Perth, WA. Interviews ranged in length from between 25 to 90 minutes and only basic demographic information was collected from student informants. The focus of the present study was to explore how meaning was formed and constructed by individuals, which dictated that further demographic information such as academic achievement would be redundant. A summary has been provided in Table 9 of student informants' demographic information.

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Table 9

Demographic Information for Student Informants

Informant	Community	Boarding School (e.g., A,B,C,D,E)	Age	Year Cohort	Years attending Boarding School
Student Informant 1	Beverley	C	15	10	2.5
Student Informant 2	Carnarvon	C	14	9	First Year
Student Informant 3	Port Hedland	C	13	8	First Year
Student Informant 4	Dampier	E	16	11	3.5
Student Informant 5	Lombadina Community	B	16	11	3.5
Student Informant 6	Umbakumba Community/Groote Eylandt, NT.	C	18	12	4.5
Student Informant 7	Oombulgurri Community/Wyndham	C	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 8	Barrow Well Community/Northampton	E	15	10	1.5
Student Informant 9	Kununurra	B	14	9	First Year
Student Informant 10	Jurien Bay	C	16	11	First Year
Student Informant 11	Port Headland	C	13	8	First Year
Student Informant 12	Roebourne/Karratha	C	16	11	2.5
Student Informant 13	Kojonup	E	14	9	First Year
Student Informant 14	Woolah Community/Doon Doon Station	B	17	12	2.5
Student Informant 15	Broome	D	15	10	2.5
Student Informant 16	Broome	B	13	8	First Year
Student Informant 17	Derby	C	15	10	First Year
Student Informant 18	Derby	A	17	12	5
Student Informant 19	Northam	C	14	10	1.5
Student Informant 20	Wyndham	B	16	10	First Year
Student Informant 21	Broome	B	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 22	Red Hill Community/Halls Creek	B	12	7	First Year
Student Informant 23	Broome	B	14	9	1.5
Student Informant 24	Busselton	E	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 25	Oombulgurri Community/Wyndham	B	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 26	Oombulgurri Community/Wyndham	C	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 27	Warmun Aboriginal Community/Turkey Creek	C	18	12	4.5
Student Informant 28	Kununurra	B	15	10	First Year
Student Informant 29	Derby	B	16	10	First Year
Student Informant 30	Kununurra	B	16	11	1.5
Student Informant 31	Moora	E	16	11	2.5
Student Informant 32	Kondinin	C	16	11	1.5

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The accounts presented in this chapter are considered in terms of the different dimensions of cultural, familial, and relational connections with place, time, identity, and within the social spaces that student informants operated in on a daily basis as they negotiated the intricacies of constructing and voicing subjectivity towards the experience of studying away from home at boarding school. Three major themes were identified across the student informant group as a whole, these were titled; 'Decision Making', 'Organisational Climate', and 'Relational Change'. Table 10 presents a list of the major themes and related sub-themes identified across the student informant group.

Table 10

Major Themes and Related Sub-Themes for the Student Informant Group

Major Theme	Related Sub-Theme
Decision Making	Choice-Less Choice
	Opportunity
Organisational Climate	School Environment and Belonging
	Culture Shock
	Homesickness
	Identity and Rites of Passage
	Code-Switching
	Teachers
	Academic Expectations
	Residential Life
Relational Change	Friendship and Peer Relations
	Family Dynamics
	Friendships at home
	Cultural Connectedness

5.1 Decision Making.

Participation in discussions with family prior to making the decision to attend boarding school constructed a significant element of the transition experience for student informants. Of the 32 student informants, the majority indicated they had actively participated in varying degrees in the decision-making process to attend boarding school, with only six reporting their enrolment

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at boarding school as a wholly parental decision. Many revealed highly valuing the opportunity to exercise influence and a sense of control over their secondary education pathway. For example, one informant reported, *“it felt like a new start like in terms of my education”* (Student Informant 3), whereas another informant enthusiastically explained, *“I couldn’t wait to get down here”* (Student Informant 29).

Student informants revealed anticipating both positive and negative outcomes during the period prior to transitioning to boarding school. Although the majority supported the decision to study away from home, many student informants described experiencing emotions that fluctuated between *apprehension and excitement*, and one disclosed feeling *frightened and scared*, supporting the assertions of research by Whyte and Boylan (2008) that described how prior to entering boarding school a significant portion of students experienced mixed emotions. For the six student informants who did not participate in the decision making process to attend boarding school, it emerged that the discovery that they were going to be schooling away from home made them feel *angry, uneasy, hesitant, and powerless*. Two of these informants reported that in spite of understanding their parents’ intention to secure for them access to a better secondary education, they were angered by their parents’ decision as they felt coerced into something they did not agree with. One informant in particular reported exclusion from the decision-making process not only caused friction in his relationship with his father, but it also clashed with his perception of schooling at his local community school. He revealed:

Oh my Dad...he sees that there is nothing left for me back home, that there’s not much opportunity for change...but I disagreed with him. I didn’t want to come and we had arguments. It was very hard to talk it out. (Student Informant 25)

It emerged that deliberation over the risks and benefits of schooling away from home did not cease for student informants after deciding to attend boarding school. For example, one informant described how while flying down to Perth for the first time, he engaged in an intense period of ongoing reflection over the motivation to study away from home. He revealed:

There were a lot of things going on in my head. Like how’s it going to be, am I going to have any friends, what kind of people are going to be down there and all that sort of stuff. Am I going to like the school? So much thinking, especially on the plane as I was getting closer. That was probably my most nervous flight so yeh...so much thinking. (Student Informant 26)

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Two interwoven constructions emerged that student informants used to reflect on and frame the decision to attend boarding school. The first was that informants perceived they had *no other choice* and second was that boarding school was an *opportunity*. These will be explored in the following segments.

5.1.1 Choice-less choice.

In almost all instances student informants explained that at their local school they believed they had to contend with sub-standard learning conditions and with a lack of access to the same secondary education choices and standards found in Perth. Many informants described how their local schools did not have adequate facilities such as classrooms, computers, desks and chairs, ovals, sporting equipment, access to course options in Year 11 and 12 and in turn access to post-school courses and career choices. A firm perception held by most informants was that to experience a sense of achievement and success at the secondary school level, they had to deliberately circumvent being caught up in their local secondary education pathway, which they believed offered no guarantee of delivering the learning experience they desired. For instance, one informant relayed:

I sort of decided during the Christmas holidays I would to come down to Perth because I really didn't like what my old school was doing. I didn't want to go back there and I had nowhere else to go. And Mum saw this advert in the newspaper about [name of School E] and that it had some good programs in sport and other stuff like that. (Student Informant 4)

Such comments reveal how student informants constructed the perception that if they remained in the learning environment of their local school they believed that their academic attainment would not have advanced significantly. Consequently, several reported how they had reached a point whereby they perceived they had little or no choice but to explore other secondary education options such as boarding school. A clear exemplar was provided by one informant when he explained, *"It was a hard call because I sort of didn't have a choice, if I wanted to have more opportunities and go to a better school. I just had to get use to it"* (Student Informant 4). The statement *I just had to get use to it* typified a strikingly common perception across the diversity of student informant's interviews, that the prospect of contending with the limited secondary education choices and options in regional and remote WA was viewed as more daunting than studying away from home.

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A salient subtext influencing student informants' motivation to attend boarding school was the presence of problematic social issues in the wider community. Informants perceived these social issues permeated their local school environment, a finding that supports the assertions of Craven et al., (2005) which identified that negative community issues had a demoralising impact on Indigenous students aspirations and progression into higher education. In the current research, community issues such as crime, drug use and alcoholism, racism, violence, gang membership, and family feuding were problems identified by student informants that they believed presented a serious risk to their secondary education progress. For example one informant revealed:

It was like a bit of...like a dodgy kind of school. Like kids getting into fighting and drugs and stuff, so I didn't really like it that much. No one really cared about education and stuff back home. It's like racist back there, like Whites verse Blacks (Student Informant 19).

Although several student informants' conveyed that they had developed strategies to negotiate how other people choose to live and interact within their home community, many were concerned about the continuity of their secondary education and the level of success they would experience with these social issues occurring around them. For several, such community and social issues provided readily observable evidence supporting the decision to school away. For example, one informant stated:

I see a lot of the boys at home they're not doing that great. They've got kids or they're messing around with girls [sexually active] or been banged up [juvenile detention centre] or they've got no jobs and they've got a wife [term often used to depicted a long-term girlfriend] and I just look at them and think if I hadn't of gone away I'd end up like this. (Student Informant 12)

Such statements reveal these student informants' had constructed the perception that if they had not decided to attend boarding school, they too would have inevitably participated in anti-social and criminal activities. Thus, supporting prior literature describing the negative impact issues such as crime, violence, gambling, a lack of policing services and overcrowding have on the lives of Aboriginal young people (Beresford, 2012b; Gordon, Hallahan, & Henrey, 2002; Mohajer, Bessarab, & Earnest, 2009; Zubrick et al., 2006; Zubrick et al., 2010). Of concern, student informants from the current study believed contact with such social issues was a matter of course rather than as subject to their own choice, discretion, or control. A finding that highlighted a sense of powerless to the influence of social contexts experienced by student informants and a finding consistent with other research into Indigenous education (Craven et al., 2005). In the present

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research, it emerged that student informants were sceptical as to how they would be able to evade the influence of problem community and social issues while at home. For example, one informant revealed: *"If I stayed in community I'd like be doing drugs right now, or I'd probably be in jail or something if I still stayed in community... I feel lucky to come down here and staying away from that"* (Student Informant 6). A troubling feature of this finding in the current research was that this perception was especially pronounced in descriptions provided by several younger student informants. For instance, a Year 8 informant reported believing that at some stage his life would have involved contact with the criminal justice system if he had not attended boarding school. He explained:

Informant: *Well like my mum and dad thought about it for a while, what was happening at my local high school in [name of community] was pretty crap. And if I was still there I would probably be in jail by the time I'm about 16.*

Interviewer: *Tell me about that?*

Informant: *Ohhh...because like what stupid things my cousins get up to and things. My Mum and Dad thought that I might follow them in what they do and stuff, like stealing and stuff like that.*

Interviewer: *Oh ok.*

Informant: *So they decided to send me down here, so yeh.*

Interviewer: *So what do you think about what they think?*

Informant: *Ummm...I think it's pretty right. I reckon it's true.* (Student Informant 3)

Against these wider social issues, many student informants constructed the decision to attend boarding school as a necessary strategy that transcended both the vulnerabilities of community life and the limitations of secondary education options available at home. Despite prioritising this decision in their minds, it emerged that student informants recognised that this required negotiating two interwoven but significant factors that mediated the uptake of boarding school as an educational pathway. Firstly, it involved coming to terms with how to incorporate the decision into their sense of self as an individual. Secondly, it involved coming to terms with how to integrate the decision into relationships with family and friends, and their sense of belonging and membership within their home community. In trying to reconcile and make sense of these complex but interconnected issues, the majority of student informants constructed the decision to attend a boarding school away from home as an *opportunity*.

5.1.2 Opportunity.

Wary of being judged by others in their home community but nonetheless left to make a difficult choice as an individual and family, student informants constructed boarding school as an opportunity. Student informants tended to talk in remarkably similar ways about opportunity. They described it as a *moment* in life, a *chance* to shift away from a scripted storyline and as a *new direction*. For example, one informant reported, “most Aboriginal students don’t get a chance to go to a school like this” (Student Informant 7). For most it meant the prospect to explore alternatives compared with the known experience offered by local schooling. One informant explained, “it was sort of like there was this opportunity to come down here, because they don’t have Year 11 and Year 12 subjects up there, they don’t have any TEE, just really basic stuff, not very hard” (Student Informant 10). Although student informants described boarding school as an opportunity, this did not automatically render schooling away a panacea. Rather, several revealed struggling with the complex interpersonal dilemma of seeking self-advancement while feeling a sense of guilt about taking the opportunity to be educated away from home.

Congruent with Bramston and Patrick’s (2007) research that described how non-Indigenous male boarding students tended to construct boarding school as an opportunity to open doors in the real-world through the development of new skills, it emerged that by constructing boarding school as an opportunity many student informants were able to ameliorate interpersonal conflict by linking boarding school with being a part of a bigger grand plan in life. Reasons underpinning grand plans described by student informants were heightening their prospects of gaining an apprenticeship, enhancing their employability in the workplace, and gaining entrance to university. However, in addition, a salient perception for a number of student informant’s in the current research was a sense the transition to boarding school enabled longer-term goals to come to fruition that extended beyond the immediacy of accessing post-school destinations. Thus, the transition experience to boarding school was also constructed by these informants as enabling them to contribute back to the wellbeing of others in their community. For example, one informant revealed that an important motivation for him was to use the benefits of a university education to build a better future for vulnerable members of his community. He explained:

You want to go back home and make a difference you know, like with people who don’t have jobs, it’s sort of on your mind you know, that you could make a difference. That’s one of the reasons that I wanted to come down here, I could make a difference with my people. Go back home and help the people just drinking their lives away and spending all their

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money on alcohol. So that's one reason I wanted to come down here. I want to like be a social worker first you know, one that works with Aboriginals, I've got to do really well in English, I've research it. I've picked the subjects that I need to get into social work and so I can start working and showing them strategies to like empower our people. (Student Informant 15)

Statements such as *make a difference with my people* support the assertions of previous research which has outlined that a distinctive aspect of socialisation practices and identity development for many Aboriginal young people during adolescence involves valuing the collective wellbeing of others rather than prioritising individual attributes or achievements (Enembaru, 2000; Gollan & Malin, 2012; Kearins, 2000; Penman, 2006). It also supports prior literature emphasising that Aboriginal young people have a strong sense of obligation and responsibility to immediate and extended family as well as to other people in their respective kinship system and community (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). However, closely linked within student informants' perceptions of giving back to their community and statements such as the one above, was an acute awareness of the intergenerational impact caused by a history of discriminatory and racist government policy. For example, this particular student informant went on to explain:

My Nan was Stolen Generation and had to go to missions at like at [name of community]. So my mum was at the tail end of the Stolen Generation at like 10 or 11 years of age, so she had to stay in the mission too, like an orphanage. Being Black and looking Black, they [White people] looked at Aboriginals as less than dogs, animals you know. And like Aboriginal people struggled to stand up from that you know, all the discrimination. I came here so that I can prepare myself, like maybe different to previous Aboriginals. Like challenge the prejudice on us you know. It starts with us, and like I said before, this is why I came here. (Student Informant 15)

It emerged that the construction of boarding school as an opportunity by student informants was highly influenced by the views of trusted family members. Both formal and informal interactions with family members influenced student informants' perception and attitude to boarding school. For example, one informant revealed, *"I told mum that I didn't want to go here but she said I should go, it's a once in a lifetime opportunity. It was the way she said it, a once in a lifetime opportunity, so I came"* (Student Informant 28). Similarly, another informant at the same school reported how when talking with his mother she would say comments like, *"there's nothing here for you in [name of community]"* and things like, *"family does come first but it [boarding school] was an opportunity"* (Student Informant 21). Consistent with the findings of Pedersen and Walker (2000) that purported Aboriginal people were more likely to represent significant others that influenced the lives of Aboriginal children, it was highly evident that previous experiences

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forged through another sibling (e.g., brother, sister) or a member of their extended family (e.g., aunty, cousin, uncle, or grandparent) significantly influenced the construction of boarding school as an opportunity by student informants. For example, one informant divulged:

The reason why I came down here is that my two older brothers came here. Yeh my oldest brother came here in Year 8 and left in Year 10 because he ummm...just made that decision. My second oldest brother started in Year 8 and went through to Year 12. So yeh, that's why I came down here. (Student Informant 6)

In varying degrees, a prior family connection with boarding school exposed student informants to significant individuals whom they viewed as positive role models and whose experience, opinion, and world-views, they valued. In addition, this also provided the chance to explore the thought of being a boarding student through listening to trusted accounts of family members, and construct a personal stance towards the idea of schooling away from home. For example, one informant revealed:

Oh I knew a lot from my brothers about boarding school, because they were in boarding too. They told me about Year 12s and all that lot and what they do here. The traditions in them [boarding schools] and I knew I would get homesick because my brothers got homesick too. (Student Informant 27)

Another aspect that influenced student informants' construction of boarding school as an opportunity was the possibility of securing financial assistance to subsidise the cost of schooling away from home. It emerged in the present research that many of the informants engaged in purposive efforts to deliberately position themselves at an increased likelihood of becoming a recipient of some form of financial assistance to attend boarding school, supporting the assertions of other literature that has purported that Aboriginal families in remote northern communities of the nation are increasing seeking schooling in urban centres and cities (Hughes & Hughes, 2009; Purdie & Buckley, 2010). In the current research these efforts took the form of applying for a scholarship or bursary offered by an individual boarding school; or applying for a scholarship offered by the Australian Federal Government and in particular for a secondary education scholarship available through the *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP)*. However, two student informants also indicated securing funding from programs established by Aboriginal Corporations and philanthropic organisations. For example, one informant described:

Well I ended up at boarding School A through an academic scholarship. Back in the school I was going to in [name of community], which was a primary school, a catholic primary school and basically my parents found out a scholarship was going around the school and

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twenty kids went for it. Twenty kids went for it and you had to get a portfolio together and you had to go see the school principal and I decided to do mine differently, it was like a solid wooden board which I attached everything to. And yeh...I met him and then like a few months afterwards they asked us twenty kids to go in the Principal's office, and they said well two people have got the scholarship, me and another student! (Student Informant 18)

Such statements emphasise how the competitive nature of securing financial assistance often reinforced with student informants the notion of boarding school as an opportunity, as many revealed being aware that other families in their home community strived to secure a similar bursary, scholarship, or support that they had received.

5.2 Organisational climate.

The second major theme that influenced student informants constructions of the transition experience to boarding school, was the challenge of negotiating different academic expectations, attitudes to self and others, cultural and customary activities, residential routines, interpersonal relationship and relational experiences, and other attributes that comprised the boarding school context, referred to collectively as the organisational climate. The majority of student informants reported feeling uncertain as to how they would navigate a new school campus, establish new social networks, and cope with new teacher expectations, a finding consistent with the assertions of prior research involving boarding schools (Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Johnstone, 2001; Mason, 1997; Whyte & Boylan, 2008).

5.2.1 School environment and belonging.

Student informants perceived that the transition experience at their respective boarding schools and to life as a boarding student was initially influenced by first impressions of the school environment. The majority of student informants had transitioned from a previous day school environment where Aboriginal students comprised a larger proportion of the overall student population. Hence, the transition experience to boarding school life was initially perceived to contrast sharply with what they were familiar with and had experienced at their former school, with many reporting initially experiencing a heightened sense of trepidation about, *"fitting into the environment"* (Student Informant 9). A number of informants reported experiencing a sense of apprehension about the logistics of how they would navigate a new school campus. For example, one informant revealed, *"the first time I came down here [School D] I couldn't believe my eyes you know, just bang!"* (Student Informant 15), similarly another commented, *"when I arrived on*

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orientation day I just thought, how am I going to find my way around this?" (Student Informant 24), and another informant recalled;

I just couldn't get over the size of the school. I'd just never seen anything so big; especially like some of the buildings they seemed huge. I was wondering how the hell I was going to find my way around here. That's the first thing that I thought. (Student Informant 18)

Student informants indicated that in addition to the tangible features of the school environment such as physical appearance, campus size and the number of classrooms, the large number of students at boarding school influenced how they initially made sense of schooling away from home. For example, one informant reported how, *"when I first saw the school [School E] and there were heaps of kids I was shocked. It surprised me and I was shocked how big everything was"* (Student Informant 31). For some, this experience caused them to query their initial motivation to school away from home, as one informant pointed out, *"it looked like a very big jail"* (Student Informant 10). By contrast, others reported their initial impression caused them to reflect on a disparity in education infrastructure between regional and metropolitan schools. For instance, an informant commented, *"Oh I thought that since it was all brick buildings that it was heaps modern and heaps rich"* (Student Informant 31), suggesting this initial experience validated their decision and reinforced expectations of gaining access to a better learning environment and more opportunities.

A few student informants perceived that the adjustment to a larger sized school campus combined with encountering a bigger student population caused them to feel lost within a sea of unfamiliar faces, and in turn to question whether they belonged at their new school. This supports the assertion of the *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS)* which emphasised that a school environment can have a significant influence on Aboriginal students sense of belonging at school (Zubrick et al., 2006). Such factors prompted these student informants to re-appraise their ability to build a sense of belonging in such a school setting. For example, one informant revealed, *"When I got here I just thought that the buildings were bigger and the uniforms were all formal, with kids everywhere, and I didn't want to say anything because I didn't feel like I belonged"* (Student Informant 12). Similarly another informant recalled his first impression, *"the vibe I sort of had was that I don't belong"* (Student Informant 15). However, student informants' sense of belonging was also influenced by other aspects of their new school environment and in particular the different value and importance attached to them. Worthy of

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further consideration was the experience for student informants of adjusting to the level of attention given to school uniform adherence and requirements at boarding school. Many informants referred to wearing a tie, trousers or long shorts with socks up to their knees, and a blazer on a daily basis as a new experience. However, many also constructed boarding house routines linked with uniforms at times perplexing. For example, such as student Prefect and Teacher inspections before school started and being told by student Prefects and Teachers to *tidy up their shirt* and *straighten their tie* during the school day.

It emerged some informants perceived uniforms and uniform expectations as signifying the beginning of a new stage in their education journey and they reported feeling a sense of positive self-affirmation. For example, one informant reported:

Oh I'd just imagined it was like my old school and would be pretty relaxed, like you don't have to like wear a uniform, just wear casual or normal clothes. I got here and I found out I had to wear a shirt and tie, socks up and told to tuck your shirt in. I thought like I'd feel like pretty average with that because I didn't really like wearing uniforms, but the first time I wore it, I felt like a gentleman. (Student Informant 6)

By contrast, for other student informants such experiences engendered questions about individual priorities in life and to query their sense of belonging within such a schooling environment. For a few it further perpetuated reflection on wider societal issues such as social disadvantage, social privilege and disparity, and social justice. For example, one informant reported how initially adjusting to uniforms and uniform expectations caused him to introspectively probe his ambition and motivation to access an alternative educational pathway, he explained, *"in [name of community] where I come from you don't really have much stuff, don't really wear uniforms, I just ahhh...didn't feel like I ought to be here"* (Student Informant 12). For a number of student informants such experiences combined with encountering other new experiences and values collectively underpinned a sense of shock.

5.2.2 Culture shock.

It emerged that many student informants perceived that encountering diverse and different in attitudes, cultural activities, behaviour, expectations, routines, values and social norms for the first time as they transitioned into boarding school life caused them to experience a sense of shock. This supports assertions by parent and community submissions made at public hearings for the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* conducted by the Human Rights and

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Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2000a). For example, one informant reported, *"When you come down here you get like a shock"* (Student Informant 4); similarly another commented, *"When I eventually got down here I like got a big shock"* (Student Informant 21); and another explained, *"I'd only been in Perth once before for a development program, that was my first time, so when I came here I was shocked"* (Student Informant 25). Several informants made additional statements, *"the first few years were a really hard slog I reckon. It's just a huge change, I mean everything's different here, culturally different, like I had to sort of adapt"* (Student Informant 18). In trying to make sense of experiencing a sense of shock, a diverse range of factors were considered by students. Some informants reported it was difficult to adjust to the *"noise of the city compared to the quiet of the bush"* (Student Informant 25). Other informants perceived that encountering the lifestyle and level of social privilege found in Perth in contrast to that found at home was a shock. One informant explained:

Oh like the lifestyle down here is like, coming from a pretty small community, I don't know how to say it, but it's like the richness, like the richness of stuff, kind of like rich places and houses you know, which is like wow you know. I'm from one of those communities that are like, not rich, like just can't afford things you know what I mean. Whereas coming down here is like wow you know what I mean, here everyone's like oh I'll just go to Target, or I'll do this, do that, so yeh...just the richness I'd say is pretty much right in your face. (Student Informant 6)

The notion of culture shock has previously been reported in the literature. International research has asserted culture shock as the psychological and socio-cultural adjustments during international cross-cultural transitions (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). Australian literature has described cultural shock as the experience of entering another cultural domain and discovering that familiar cultural cues and ways of being, knowing, and doing are different from what an individual is used to (Trudgen, 2000). Research involving Indigenous university students studying away from home to access a tertiary education course (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000), has reported the onset of culture shock can be a bewildering experience and be a highly stressful occurrence that can severely impact on an individual's daily functioning as well as social and emotional wellbeing (Sonn, Bishop, & Humphries, 2000).

Unique to student informants from the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of the State, the adjustment to the cooler and unfamiliar climatic conditions of Perth added to this sense of shock. For example, several informants made remarks such as, *"it gets very cold and that down here"* (Student Informant 16). Interestingly, one informant also described that the architectural design of

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the residential facilities in his boarding school presented as a shock as, *“well last year was the first time I’d I slept in a three story house; “it was frightening looking out the window down at the clothes line outside”* (student Informant 7). This particular informant went on to reveal his astonishment at encountering the dietary and nutritional regime offered in the dining hall, *“like normally we eat fresh meat, as for down here we eat frozen meat. We eat kangaroo, turkey, goanna, things like that up home. We catch it and cook it ourselves”* (Student Informant 7). In the present research, the shock of adapting to the multi-faceted features of the organisational climate of boarding school life resulted in many student informants reporting they also experienced homesickness.

5.2.3 Homesickness.

Consistent with research by Duncan (1990), in varying degrees of frequency and intensity, the majority of student informants constructed the perception that separation from family and dislocation from community and the familiarity of social support networks at home caused them to experience a sense of homesickness. It has been well documented in the literature that homesickness is associated with students attending boarding school (Bramston & Patrick, 2007). Homesickness has been described as a strong desire for contact with familiar people and places and has been correlated with a range of psychological problems manifesting in children and adolescents (Thurber, 1999). In spite of student informants utilising a variety of contemporary technologies in an effort to evade or remediate feelings of homesickness such as Skype, mobile phones, and email, the experience of homesickness was often described as, *hard times, wanting to leave school, missing out on things at home, thinking about family, and feeling isolated, lonely, depressed, and sad*. One informant even described the experience of homesickness as *painful* (Student Informant 17). For some the onset of homesickness was immediate, as one informant recalled;

I was excited in the beginning because I wanted to actually move down here, but since I got here I didn’t really like it and I wanted to go straight back home because I realised that I really liked being home. I just wanted to go home. I missed mum and family. (Student Informant 2)

Whereas for others, a sense of homesickness remained a constant and ongoing feeling that remained with them for the duration they were away from home, extending dominant understandings of homesickness in the literature that has reported its occurrence as dissipating

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School over the passage of time (Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Duncan, 1990; Johnston, 2001; Mason, 1997; Whyte & Boylan, 2008). In addition, homesickness for one informant was constructed as not only a school-based issue; rather he reported it as a feeling that was equally experienced at home. For this particular informant, the onset of homesickness was not only triggered by an inner affective state in response to actual or anticipated separation from family and home, but was also closely intertwined with yearning while at home for past and lost opportunities to participate in valued social and cultural activities while away at boarding school. In trying to make sense of this experience he explained:

I don't feel homesick while I'm here [at School B] but when I get back around home, being with family, that's when I start feeling like, homesick. So for me it's harder to come back. It's like butterflies in my stomach, I think about what I've miss out on. And just the everyday things I do back home that I can't do down here, I can't take those lost chances back, like going fishing and hanging out with my friends, and going hunting. (Student Informant 25)

Student informants identified a cluster of strategies that assisted them to cope with feelings of homesickness. Foremost amongst these were, *don't plan too far ahead, keep busy, take every day as it comes, not to think too far ahead, get out and mix with people, talk with friends, talk with family, don't be shame, and think about better times*. It was evident across the diversity of interviews that informants believed that those boarding students who built such practices and habits into their daily routine at boarding school were less susceptible to feelings of homesickness. This finding contrasts with the work of Frydenberg and Lewis (1993) that indicated when coping with perceived problems male adolescents tended to be more private and kept problems to themselves, and instead suggests that informants in the current study viewed talking with friends and actively seeking emotion-focussed support as important coping strategies. In particular, it was perceived by several informants that having access to another boarding student from the same community, town, or region of the State that they were from significantly helped to ameliorate feelings of homesickness. A good exemplar was provided by one informant who reported:

There are actually a couple of us who I hang with around up home that come to boarding school down here. I've got a mate at [School E] and another mate at [School A]. So yeh, I like, while we're down here, the three of us just like keep in touch and on the weekends we like go ring up each other...yeh it's just like old times then. (Student Informant 19)

The data also revealed that having an older family member such as a brother or sister also at boarding school, or an extended family member such as an uncle or aunty in Perth, served to

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substantially reduce the influence of homesickness. For example, one informant relayed his experience of the benefits of having an older sister at university in Perth at the same time as he was at boarding school. He commented:

At the start I got homesick. I was still thinking about what if they [family] need me back at home. Like miss my company and to help out around the house. Like all these memories would come back. So I was like oh, I should really be with all my friends and family. And getting used to the isolation, oh I just felt heaps lonely, on my own but I have now a sister down here and that helped me, so now I go out to and stay with her on weekends, which really helps. (Student Informant 21)

5.2.4 Identity and rites of passage.

In adjusting to the organisational climate of boarding school life, it emerged that many student informants reflected on core aspects of their sense of self and cultural identity. A number of student informants constructed the perception that they had to change, relinquish, or set to one side aspects of their cultural identity and true sense of self while at boarding school. For example, one informant recalled how encountering differences in language conventions and social etiquette with adults during Year 8, caused him to not only reappraise his own way of knowing and being but also his cultural identity in terms of core cultural values that informed his sense of self. He explained:

There is this one thing back home that was bred into me; you always respect your elders. Then you come down here and everybody is just saying all this stuff about teachers and parents and stuff like that. And even though it's like offhand jokes, it's still...I didn't know how to handle it, like it took me a while to work it out. Like some guy said something about my mum, it wasn't anything really, really bad, it was just an offhand joke but it really, I got a bit fired up about it. I had a go at this kid because it was just that respect for elders in me. I've always grown up with showing respect to your family, respect your elders. For me family comes first, that's been my value system since I was a little kid. It just seems different here, I guess it's because you're away from your family but ummm...I think that when you come into a boarding house your value system changes because you're in a whole new different environment. Like what I noticed about Year 8 and 9 was that everybody's was trying to get one up on each other, trying to find your place like on a social...I don't know...ladder. (Student Informant 18)

Such accounts support the view of prior research that has asserted school contexts mediate the extent to which Aboriginal students feel they can express their racial identity, worldview and values in life (Kickett-Tucker, 2008, 2009; Purdie et al., 2000). Several older student informants also constructed the perception that aspects of social conventions at their boarding school environment at times challenged the legitimacy of traditional rites of passage as a male.

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These older student informants emphasised that participation in traditional rites of passage ceremonies were a significant part of their sense of self and identity. However, at boarding school they were continually referred to as *boys*, a term they found patronising. For these informants the designation of 'manhood' dictated they had entered adulthood which in turn extended to them certain benefits of adulthood, such as being trusted to function autonomously and independently as an individual, and they believed that such cultural and developmental transitions should be incorporated into boarding school considerations, practices, and processes when they had taken place for individuals. Instead, however, these student informants believed they had to learn how to negotiate co-existing obligations and responsibilities expected of them as students at school and as men in their home communities. In trying to make sense of the discord between two parts of a whole that constructed their life-world as a young person, several of these student informants constructed the perception they were compelled to *walk in two different worlds*. For example, one informant revealed:

Well I sort of walk in two different worlds actually, because it's like back home I'm a man you know. You can do whatever you want, and when you come back here you get like treated like a little kid again, you have to sign out and go to bed at a certain time and get lectures on all the rules and everything and it's hard to you know switching between the two. Like after you've gone back up home, you'll be back here and they're telling me what to do and everything. I feel like I want to cheek them! [Scold boarding staff] But nar, that feeling goes away and I follow the rules because everyone in the boarding house has to do the same thing. Yeh, it's different from being treated like a man to being treated like a kid.
(Student Informant 12)

Relational theorists have emphasised that individuals may need to construct several concurrent identities in life dependent on the social context they are embedded in and the dominant discourse of those contexts; moreover that at times these identities may be fluid and/or contradictory depending on the social context and dominant discourse (Gergan, 1991, 2011). However, Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) emphasised the risk connected with having to negotiate two discrete identities and outlined that Aboriginal people may experience an unsettling identity crisis in trying to accommodate dominant White values and expectations while emergent self-awareness about aspects of self are recognised. Indeed, in trying to make sense of his circumstance the above student informant reported that necessity to fracture his school and cultural identity not only impeded his effectiveness to operate as a student while at boarding school, but he felt it undermined the proactive stance he had taken towards bridging two worlds through seeking to advance his education. The tension and confusion of this circumstance caused

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by this necessity, left the student informant feeling that he was not fully validated as an individual, an experience well established in the literature (Dudgeon & Oxenham, 1990; Dudgeon, 2000b; Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). In particular this student informant felt his reality was negated through having to continually negotiate two distinct identities, which hastened him to re-evaluate and question his own sense of self in terms of his sense of belonging and connectedness to others and the complexity of his life-world, he revealed:

I feel like no one knows me because people back there [home] know me how I am back there, but those that know me here [School C] know me as I am here. And I'm switching between people and switching between places and it feels like no one really knows me for me. Like people say oh I know you and I just look at them and say no you don't know me, you don't know the other half of me. I try to keep my life back home separate from here. When I'm here [School C] I try to be somebody that I'm not and when I'm back home I'm thinking that I'm trying to be someone that I'm not as well. There are like two side of me [long pause]. But in the boarding house you just can't act yourself because you don't have time to, but that drives you into the ground. It's like a constant thing we [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students] talk about; it just gets on our nerves. (Student Informant 12)

Literature has established that Aboriginal young people often attend to the parameters of multiple cultural and social subjectivities, and develop the skills to socialise in 'both ways' of being while at school (Department of Education [DoE], 2002). Hence, multiple and sometimes quite different family and community influences impact on the identity that Aboriginal young people form at school and the way in which each student responds to these influences will vary (Purdie et al., 2000). For some this experience might require minimal adjustment, while for others it may prompt tension and a sense of alienation (Purdie et al., 2000). However, as the above statement by Student Informant 12 indicates, having to contend with a school environment that imposes distinct cultural binaries continues to discount the lived reality of many Aboriginal young people. Moreover, such a school context does not adequately account for the complex and diverse cultural and social identities, life-worlds and experiences that have significance to Aboriginal young people and the individuals and the groups they are connected with in society.

5.2.5 Code-switching.

It emerged that a number of student informants constructed the perception that they need to code-switch to negotiate the transition experience to boarding school. The concept of code-switching has been described as when bilingual people switch between the codes of different forms of language to communicate with others (DoE, 2002). Aboriginal English has been

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used to describe different dialects of English spoken by Aboriginal people throughout Australia and is formally recognised as distinct from Standard Australian English in grammar, lexicon, phonology, pragmatics and semantics (Eades, 2004). The most varied versions of Aboriginal English have been shown to occur in remote regions of Australia (Eades, 2004). Importantly, Aboriginal English has been found to sustain and underpin identity and cultural maintenance which provides the framework for Aboriginal young people to make sense of and organise new experiences (Sharifian, 2005). Consistent with the literature (Grote & Rochecouste, 2012), in describing code-switching student informants reported altering between Aboriginal English and the use of Standard Australian English. For example, one informant reported: *"I really have two sides to me, I talk let's say with all these big words down here, but when I'm back home I like change my style and say heaps of Aboriginal words"* (Student Informant 8). Similarly, another informant revealed how he not only adjusted the language that he utilised but also the speed at which he spoke with other people at boarding school: *"The culture in terms of how we speak, you know the slang and language at home, we like talk a little bit faster you know. So they [Peers and Boarding school staff] like just don't know what we're saying [informant laughs]"* (Student Informant 15).

However, for many student informants the premise of code-switching was conceived as a necessary strategy that was utilised beyond modifying communication and language protocols employed with others. Rather, it emerged that code-switching for many student informants extended to moving between different social roles and scripts, culturally valued attitudes, behaviours, and values, and it was common practice that this extension of code-switching prefigured social interactions and relationships at boarding school. Several informants constructed the perception that to form a meaningful connection with peers and teachers at school it required the capacity to fluidly shift between the social customs and behavioural norms in the boarding school setting and ways of being, knowing, and doing that were normally used at home, during social interactions at school. For example, one informant constructed his understanding of code-switching as *acting Black, acting White*. He revealed:

Informant: *Oh like coming from [name of community] you have to switch. Like back home I'm like my Aboriginal self, around here I just change, like some of the other boys said it before too, it's like being someone that you're not.*

Interviewer: *Can you tell me more about that?*

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Informant: *It's just like trying to please another person. It's like acting, acting like your different.*

Interviewer: *Ok?*

Informant: *Oh I don't find it really that tough. I guess you got to do it one day. It's like if you're going to get a job you're going to have to do the same thing. Act yourself when you're at home and you're with family. Like thinking Black, being Black like when you're around family and stuff, but when you're in white society you switch to the White side of things, so...yeh, acting black, acting White.*

Interviewer: *Acting Black and acting White?*

Informant: *Oh yeh. I'm pretty good at it now, working in two ways, two way talking. Like when you're at home with family and friends and stuff, you just have that way of talking and stuff. With your teachers and staff around school here you change all that and use a different speaking style and way of behaving.* (Student Informant 1)

The premise of *acting Black*, *acting White* was reported in subtly different ways across the student informant group and was described using terms and terminology localised to the particular regional of WA they were from. For example, another informant referred to code-switching as *acting around Gadia*. The term *Gadia* is predominantly used in the East Kimberley region of WA and used to describe a non-Aboriginal person but also used sometimes to delineate someone who is an outsider to the collective. He explained:

Informant: *Up home I'm more talkative than down here. At school I'm quieter; keep to myself because you don't know how other people are going to react.*

Interviewer: *React?*

Informant: *Oh I just keep to myself here. If I acted like I did up home not much people would like me down here. So like I act around Gadia you know.*

Interviewer: *Tell me about acting around Gadia?*

Informant: *Just like you got to say please, thank you, wash up after yourself, clean your room and everything. Watch the way you react to people and talk around people, be really good and everything like that.*

Interviewer: *And at home?*

Informant: *At home you know people and how they talk to you there, so you just act normally, that's really who you are. But here you got to change your attitude, change your actions and things like that.* (Student Informant 28)

A concerning element implicit within the construction of *acting Black*, *acting White* and *act[ing] around Gadia* was the perception of being socially marginalised and ostracised at boarding

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school if they did not code-switch. Such disclosures suggested student informants believed they had to consciously deconstruct ways of being, knowing and doing, to construct a new social identity that was acceptable and able to negotiate what they perceived to be the expectations of boarding school, supporting the assertions of the WAACHS that concluded “many Aboriginal children feel they have to sacrifice or compromise their own culture in order to survive or be successful in Western education” (Zubrick et al., 2006, p. xxxiv). Statements such as the one above equally suggest that when confronted with a school environment centred on the social reality of the dominant Western culture, student informants did not perceive code-switching as a choice but rather constructed it as a necessity. Research has argued that unless Aboriginal students perceive an environment as safe and secure, they do not feel confident and comfortable expressing their identity at school (Kickett-Tucker, 2008, 2009; Purdie et al., 2000). The above accounts shared by student informants indicate that to sustain a sense of self whilst away from home, but also to forge a sense of harmony between home life and boarding school life, they constructed the perception they needed to constantly negotiate how they integrated two distinctly different ways of being, knowing, and doing while at boarding school, a finding that supports the assertions of Kevin (Hatchell, 2003).

5.2.6 Teachers.

It emerged that many reported feeling apprehensive about establishing a relationship with new teachers. Several informants recalled ruminating over questions like, “*the teacher would hate me?*” (Student Informant 24) Or, “*how will I get use to having different teachers?*”. Typically some described teachers as, *bad, bossy, grey, grumpy, growl a lot, miserable, strict, stuck-up, shouts,* and *unfair* whereas others described them as, *caring, good, fun, helpful, nice, interesting,* and *proactive*. Despite such polarised descriptions, all students reported having at least one valued relationship with one or more teachers. Congruent with assertions in the literature (Byrne & Munns, 2012; Gower & Byrne, 2012), student informants perceived that teachers they valued had *a sense of humour, really easy to get along with* but as having *control of the class* and they *explained things properly* whilst being perceived as *available, respectful, supportive,* and *trustworthy*.

The centrality of relationships between teachers and Aboriginal students has been emphasised by a growing body of research as a significant factor that impacts on Aboriginal students’ sense of connection and belonging with school (Byrne & Munns, 2012; Craven et al.,

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2005; Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Nelson & Hay, 2010; Phillips & Lampert, 2005; Zubrick et al., 2006). However, in the current research it was particularly evident those teachers valued by student informants were perceived as interested in building positive, genuine, and reciprocal relationships with informants. In the classroom setting this involved being *“really interested in what you have to say”* (Student Informant 18) and in the boarding house setting it involved spending time kicking the footy after school, talking with students during dinner and leisure time, and being involved in taking students to socials with other schools. Thus supporting the assertions of Purdie et al., (2000) that described how extra commitment and effort by teachers do not go unnoticed by Indigenous students. Foremost, it emerged that teachers valued by student informants primarily demonstrated a personal interest in informants as individuals as well as about learning about where informants were from, their respective culture, family, and community. For instance one informant asserted, *“Oh yeh, they’re all pretty good, they’re all like interested and stuff in us Indigenous boys, like they wanted to learn about our culture as well”* (Student Informant 21). Such statements reveal, positive affirmation of cultural identity was not only constructed by informants as relaying that they were welcome at boarding school, but equally that they were respected and valued members of their boarding school community.

Prior research by Duncan (1990) found that 20 current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students and 22 of the former boarding students reported explicit instances of racism by classroom teachers. By contrast, three student informants in the present research perceived encountering racism by teacher. The profound psychological impact on Aboriginal young people of encountering discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, and racism cannot be overstated (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010). For example, one informant was apprehensive about disclosing his perceptions but alluded to his awareness of the covert nature of racism, *“the bad teachers are just like, being racist but not racist if you know what I mean. I don’t know how to say it in words but you can see it in their eyes and the way they’re talking to you, they’re like funny like that”* (Student Informant 6). Another informant relayed the negative impact of an encounter with one teacher which overtly challenged his cultural status as a man while at the same time pointing out gaps within his academic knowledge base:

“Some [teachers] just do stuff that annoys you. Like with some they say you’re a man, you should be able to do this stuff, I can’t belief you can’t do it, which is like [long pause] I remember sitting in the classroom and the teacher was nagging me and when people start nagging at me, I start feeling right down” (Student Informant 12).

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Such statements exemplify the devastating consequences of inappropriately linking a prejudiced attitude with an education context and how it was germane to this particular student informant experiencing a sense of injustice, powerlessness, and vulnerability while at boarding school. Research has emphasised that condoning negative assumptions, images, and connotations of Aboriginality in school contexts has a profound impact on the perception and identity that Aboriginal young people construct of themselves as individuals and as learners (Purdie et al., 2000). Furthermore, in contexts incongruent with cultural attitudes, behaviours, morals, norms, and values, the developmental need to construct a healthy sense of self and identity during adolescence may lead to confusion and embarrassment being experienced by Indigenous young people (Andermann & Campbell, 2010; Kickett-Tucker, 2008, 2009). As the above statement by Student Informant 12 indicates, the perceived lack of mutual respect caused this particular student informant to retract from participation in class. Thus supporting studies that have outlined how negative attributions made by a teacher can act as a significant motivational barrier that impedes Aboriginal students' educational aspirations and dreams (Craven et al., 2005; Godfey, Partington, Harslett, & Richer, 2001).

5.2.7 Academic expectations.

The majority of student informants believed that adjusting to the academic expectations at boarding school was a significant challenge associated with the transition experience. A few student informants reported coping well with the academic requirements, however the majority perceived the standard of course work as well as the frequency and quantity of homework and study required to be completed at boarding school as *confusing, hard, very hard, and really stressful*. It was evident student informants constructed the perception that this aspect of the transition experience was confronting, as a number of informant remarked, *"the stuff we learn and talk about I haven't even heard of before"* (Student Informant 2), *"I really did know what they were talking about"* (Student Informant 8), *"I really don't understand it much"* (Student Informant 9), comments like, *"it was like everything I did was always wrong. But what could I do you know?"* (Student Informant 14); and similarly, *"it's like starting from scratch because I haven't learnt some of the stuff"* (Student Informant 19). As these accounts suggest, informants perceived their previous schooling experiences had not adequately prepared them with the knowledge and skills to meet the academic expectations at boarding school. For example, one informant remarked, *"I regret not coming here in Year 8 because it seems like I've missed out on so much stuff"* (Student

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Informant 4) and another reported, *“algebra, I didn’t even know what algebra was”* (Student Informant 12).

Notwithstanding these experiences, some student informants asserted that over the passage of time and often combined with re-evaluating subject selection choices, and actively sourcing and engaging in ongoing additional support (from teachers, tutors or peers) that they adjusted to the academic expectations at boarding school. For example, one informant reported that, *“[when] I got here and I didn’t know what my academic achievement was like, so like I was put in the easy class at the start. And yeh...it got better through time”* (Student Informant 8); similarly, another revealed, *“I tend to find that I study way more like being in a school environment like this. Like you have teachers coming up to you asking about work so you have to do it. I study heaps now”* (Student Informant 21). However, a large proportion of informants indicated that they were grappling with classroom tasks that *moved too fast* and feelings unpreparedness for lessons, or struggling with completing set homework in the allotted time a circumstance that a number indicated made it hard to demonstrate their understanding of topics. This perception was a disempowering realisation that for some informants underpinned experiencing a sense of shame. For example, one informant revealed:

The homework, it was really hard because I didn’t get most of it. Ummm...and handing it in on time too, yeh that was hard. I didn’t get most of it. I didn’t know how to do it. And yeh, I was like a little scared to ask for help. Well I was a bit shame to ask, I don’t know why but yeh. I just felt a bit weird asking. (Student Informant 16)

The notion of shame has significant and complex socio-cultural meaning for many Aboriginal groups across WA. In an educational context, shame has been linked with experiencing embarrassment about not attaining high academic achievement and with frustration and a fear of failure, and with feeling inadequately prepared for school (Andermann & Campbell, 2010; DoE, 2002). Shame has also been linked with boarding schools in government reports but only described in a broad context with other issues; *“not knowing what to expect, homesickness, distance from family and community support, lack of local support, poor literacy levels and shame at not succeeding lead many young Indigenous people to drop out”* (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, MCEETYA, 2001, p. 11). Findings of the current research suggested that the implications of shame for academic engagement and achievement extended beyond these descriptions and involved internalising a negative self-concept as a learner, experiencing a sense of disconnectedness, despondency and hopelessness, as well as

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constructing the perception that the task of catching-up on knowledge and skills at school was insurmountable. For example, one informant revealed:

Informant: *When I came down here for the first time, I went to school and oh different work! What's all this you know? And I just look at it and thought I can't do this. So they put me into a lower class so I understand better.*

Interviewer: *How did that make you feel?*

Informant: *Oh I was like what am I doing here you know, and all these other kids are doing it all really easy you know. You feel like dumb being in this sort of class and you feel shame and I didn't want to be there. You just feel like you want to put your head down and be really quiet. You don't want people talking to you. (Student Informant 28)*

As such statements reveal the powerful impact of shame for this informant, and supports the assertions of prior research that has highlighted the significant influence that student self-evaluation and belief in one's ability at school plays in accounting for the learning experiences of male Aboriginal youth (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000). The person-environment theory reminds us that academic motivation and performance, social and emotional wellbeing, and behaviour at school are influenced by the fit between individual attributes and the school environment as well as the fit between attributes of the school environment and the individual (Eccles, & Midgely, 1989). If discord exists between these elements, the person-environment theory asserts a decline in motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and belonging can eventuate (Eccles, & Midgely, 1989). Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognitive development tells us that social determinants and immediate relational contexts influence the performance of cognitive tasks and reminds us of the centrality of socialisation practices and culturally patterned dialogue in aiding cognitive growth in children and young people (Bruner, 1997). In an important sense, it also emphasises the significance of social interactions on not only setting in the foundation for learning experiences, but equally in underpinning the sense of membership children and young people feel in a learning community (Oysterman, 2000).

5.2.8 Residential life.

Student informants reported that adjusting to daily and weekly routines in the boarding house, as well as to weekend signing out processes and other duty of care arrangements, were also challenging aspects of the transition experience to boarding school. Several informants conveyed not realising prior to arriving at boarding school the degree to which daily life as a boarding student was regulated. For example, one informant revealed, *"I thought it was going to*

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be like having fun all the time, but it was different, the boarding house was full of rules” (Student Informant 1); similarly another reported:

There are a lot of rules and you have to follow them, which is pretty difficult because like at home you just like go for a walk around my Auntie’s house and things like that. But here, you have to get signed out and then after you have to come back and check in. And like you have to tell them how long you’re going to be and everything. (Student Informant 9)

Whilst some revealed they *“found it really easy to fit into boarding”* (Student Informant 24) and perceived that they adjusted relatively quickly to the rules and routines of their boarding house, commensurate with the findings of Whyte and Boylan (2008), the current research found that freedom and limited privacy were prominent concerns for many student informants. Some informants reported that the close surveillance of boarding house staff combined with strict boarding house routines and rules infringed on their sense of freedom. For example, one informant revealed about weekend leave arrangements in his boarding house, *“You’re restricted to certain areas, like I’m used to going everywhere”* (Student Informant 4), another commented after describing how he was reprimanded for not signing out prior to going to a local shopping centre after school, *“I find it really hard you know because we get a lot more freedom back up there [home]”* (Student Informant 28). Despite recognising boarding houses were structured to support communal living, student informants believed that boarding house routines and rules meant that there was a lack of privacy. For example, when talking about life as a boarding student a number of informants typically remarked, *“you don’t get very much privacy in the boarding house”* (Student Informant 4) and *“when I first came here I was expecting a little bit more privacy in your own room”* (Student Informant 6).

A few student informants had constructed the perception that issues of freedom and privacy were secondary concerns to the importance of how boarding house rules were implemented by staff in the boarding house. For example, one informant revealed that for him many boarding house rules were bereft of meaning because they were unjustly applied. He reported feeling embittered by what he believed was an unreasonable obsession by a boarding house supervisor(s) with exerting control, which he felt intruded on his sense of autonomy. He explained:

There are a couple of them [boarding house supervisors] it’s like they need to have that control over you, over everything. Like we’ve already got enough rules to deal with but they want to control you further, they give you absolutely no freedom whatsoever. I come

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into my room, I was sort of just bouncing the ball, just bouncing the ball, and he has a go at me for bouncing the ball. And I just thought to myself, for what? Why? Who cares if you're bouncing the ball in your room, there's no one around, and he has the biggest go at me for bouncing the ball in the house. He feels the need to have to control every single thing you do. He didn't come in and say oh sorry you're not allowed to bounce balls in the boarding house, instead he comes in and has a big go at me and just tells me to get rid of the ball and things or he'll give me demerits. (Student Informant 17)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, autonomy and independence are key developmental skills nurtured and valued by Aboriginal parents during adolescence (Enembaru, 2000; Kearins, 2000; Penman, 2006). By contrast, other student informants had alternative perceptions of boarding house routines and rules. One informant believed boarding house routines and rules ensured fairness and an even playing field for all boarding students. Indeed, he questioned what he perceived to be disproportionate criticism of routines and rules by some Aboriginal boarding student peers, particularly those on full scholarships. He asserted that rather than impinging on his sense of autonomy, freedom, or privacy, the boarding house rules were there to establish equality between students within the boarding house community. In trying to make sense of this experience he disclosed:

Like some of these boys [Indigenous boarding students] hate this place and say this place is so shit because we don't have enough freedom. If they went to the place I went to last year [government boarding hostel in Perth], they wouldn't be calling this place shit. So it's a bit hard. Like they're disrespectful to what people are doing to help them here and they're just getting away with things. Just because we're Black doesn't mean we should get away with everything. (Student Informant 23)

Several students revealed that although they found the expectation to conform to boarding house rules and routines hard to adjust to and manage at times, they had also constructed the perception that these experiences helped develop life skills that they perceived would be beneficial as they shifted closer to adulthood; such as functioning as an autonomous individual, recognition of their capacity to problem solve and self-regulate, and belief in their own agency as they grow and develop in life. For example, one informant reported about life in the boarding house, “you don't really have your parents around to help you to do your homework and things like that, it's sort of up to yourself to take the responsibility” (Student Informant 4), similarly another perceived that the experience of residential life was giving him “some of those skills that are preparing me for life” (Student Informant 20). Two life skills perceived as of particular value to the transition experience reported by student informants was the ability to form friendships and negotiate peer relationships.

5.2.9 Friendships and peer relations.

All student informants emphasised at some point the perception that the formation of a friendship group was a crucial step in successfully managing the transition to boarding school life, supporting the assertions of prior literature that the need to be accepted by one's peer group is perhaps one of the most deep-seated psychological drives experienced during adolescence (Harms, 2005; Laser & Nicotera, 2011; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Rutter, 2007; Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). A number of informants described the quality of their boarding school friendships as, *caring, good mates, lifelong friends*, and *valued*. Despite several informants initially worrying about establishing new friendships, many reported being *surprised* (Student Informant 21) by how welcoming other boarding students were. Several informants reported being astonished by the number of students who approached them during the first few days of arriving at boarding school. For instance, one informant exemplified such surprise when he commented, *"you just meet new people and become instant friends"* (Student Informant 15), similarly another informant recalled, *"people were real friendly, coming over to get to know me and asking my name and if they could be my friend and all that"* (Student Informant 22).

Similarly, all student informants emphasised the perception that actively engaging in activities enabled them to establish new friendships and social networks. The significance placed on this belief was repeatedly emphasised to through remarks like, *"I just tried to be open to new things"* (Student Informant 4); similarly, *"it is important to get involved with things"* (Student Informant 16); and *"if you don't like work at making friends here, then you are probably not going to get anywhere"* (Student Informant 8). Consistent with the assertions of Frydenberg and Lewis (1996) that described a productive coping style as involving actively attempting to solve a problem whilst remaining physically fit and socially connected, several informants outlined how participation in social activities coordinated by boarding staff such as boarding house barbeques, sporting carnivals, and movie nights, as well as weekend and afterschool excursions such as weekend trips to the beach, paintballing, and ten pin bowling, were valued opportunities in establishing and building friendship and social networks. Listening to how informants explained forming new friendships and social networks a common sentiment emerged that encountering the social privilege of other boarding students was initially perceived as confronting. For example, one informant revealed, *"it was kind of hard being like a young Aboriginal kid with all these White kids*

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and that, and I'm probably like, they're all rich and that and I'm like don't have that much money and stuff" (Student Informant 8). Similarly another informant reported:

Like seeing [another boarding student] and like his room is messy and he's rich. Like he has a laptop and iphone, tells us about his mansion and that, shows us pictures of two pools and five lounge rooms that's real different yeh... It makes me feel pretty crappy about myself. (Student Informant 11)

Such statements indicate how for some informants this aspect of boarding school life was initially perceived as a daunting feature of the social milieu at boarding school. Yet, as friendship networks consolidated and matured, particularly within the boarding house setting, several revealed how they came to cherish the breadth of friendships that they had been able to establish. For many informants the diverse nature of friendships they were able to build was constructed as highly valued social experience, learning opportunity, and for some it even instigated thoughts of exploring previously unforeseen endeavours in later life. For example, one informant explained:

I've got some international friends and that, I have a friend from Bali and he said if we go to Bali we can stay with him and stuff. And I have a mate from Hong Kong, he's moving to Canada and he said if I go over to Hong Kong he'd show me around and that. (Student Informant 29)

Notwithstanding these findings, a common perception asserted by student informants was that instigating friendships with other Aboriginal boarding students was important to successfully negotiating and coping with the transition experience. This supports similar assertions reported by Duncan (1990). Several informants revealed that they felt it was easier and more comfortable building friendships with other Aboriginal students, supporting the assertions of Purdie, et al., (2000) describing how Indigenous students perceived the presence of other Indigenous students whom they can identify with being a positive attribute of a school community. For example, one informant explained, *"we [Aboriginal boarding students] can relate to them [other Aboriginal boarding students] easier than other people, and they can understand us when we talk"* (Student Informant 7), a finding that also supports the assertions of Nelson and Hay (2010) that described how when moving between schools Indigenous students *"felt more comfortable having friendships with other blackfellas"* (p. 61). Consistent with Nelson and Hay (2010), student informants in the current research perceived that other Aboriginal students were more likely to be supportive of each other. However, it emerged that further embedded within this reasoning for many student informants in the present research was a appreciation that other Aboriginal

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students not only often had a shared cultural heritage, but also an appreciation that other Aboriginal students had often relocated from a similar geographical region of the State.

A number of informants perceived that an important benefit of building friendships with Aboriginal boarding students was that other Aboriginal students often actively sought to open doorways to new friendship and social networks. A strategy that seemingly reflected Frydenberg and Lewis' (1996) 'referring to others' coping style which was described as actively seeking support from peers and friends in an effort to manage a perceived concern or problem. For example, one informant recalled valuing how, *"all the boys [Aboriginal boarding students] come up to you and say oh you're from up north, come meet my friends and you go have a kick [Australian Rules Football] with them and get to know them"* (Student Informant 27). Several informants perceived this specific strategy served to alleviate anxieties, fears, and insecurities that, *"I'd make no friends"* (Student Informant 21) and concern about, *"how it was going to be and what kind of people were down here and that sort of stuff"* (Student Informant 26). Moreover, a number of informants believed this strategy also served as a powerful nexus and foundation from which they developed confidence to engage and participate with the wider context of their respective boarding school community. For example, one informant revealed:

If you get to know one Aboriginal boarding, then you're friends with all the Aboriginal boys, then you get to know other people through them as well as each other, and get to know the school better. (Student Informant 5)

Such comments suggest informants associated the opportunity to first observe how another Aboriginal boarding student negotiated the social context at boarding school with a sense of self-belief that they too could successfully achieve the same outcomes. The reciprocity of such friendship meant that students felt they were able to learn in a secure and trusted context the necessary formal rules, routines, and informal social knowledge that they required to put into practice as they transitioned into boarding school life. Indeed, the positive sentiment of this support and exposure to such role modelling had a profound impact on many student informants. Several older students revealed how they constructed the perception that the purposeful efforts by other another Aboriginal boarding student to support their own transition to boarding school caused them to likewise make similar efforts to support new and younger Aboriginal boarding students. For instance, one informant explained:

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Well I had [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students] here when I first arrived. He was a big help you know what I mean. Like he turned around and told me about the school, we used to just sit down and he was easy to talk to and like at the Wednesday meetings [tutor group meeting] he'd tell me what I needed to know and things like that. So he helped me out a lot...Like most the new boys [Aboriginal boarding students] come into my room now and we all sit down and talk, actually almost everyone just comes in there and talks. (Student Informant 12)

Despite the positive and protective function that the presence of other Aboriginal students provided, several student informants indicated that they sensed racism in interactions with some peers while transitioning to boarding school. Informants perceived how these experiences manifested in both overt and covert forms, but believed they tended to occur more often in the boarding house setting rather than in the day school context. Informants indicated that incidents of racism angered and unsettled them and caused some to re-evaluate their decision to study away from home. In trying to negotiate such experiences informants reported having to draw upon significant personal restraint and tolerance in the face of offensive attitudes, behaviour, and comments. However, it appeared informants constructed the perception that their response to a racist incident depended on whether the foreseeable costs outweighed the benefit. This perception was exemplified by one informant who in trying to make sense of encountering racist behaviour in his boarding house, reported:

I can't remember how it started but he [another boarding student] wouldn't show me something, and I asked why? He said oh it's because you are an inferior race. There's always like a little bit of racism in the boarding house. Like people call you stuff but you can't really go and punch them. That's not really me. I've just learnt to block it out and go back and tell [the Indigenous Student Support Teacher] and they get in much more trouble than if I punch him. (Student Informant 31)

The above student informant statement supports Dudgeon and Ugle's (2010) assertion that when challenged about their heritage and identity, Aboriginal people have become familiar with addressing racism and fighting for their rights. Nevertheless, the above statement also vividly highlights the unacceptable circumstance whereby racism continues to impact on the lives and the relationships that male Aboriginal students have at school. A finding congruent with other previous research involving Aboriginal young people (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Department of Indigenous Affairs [DIA], 2005; Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Mohajer, Bessarab, & Earnest, 2009; Nelson & Hay, 2010; Zubrick et al., 2006).

5.3 Relational change.

It emerged that student informants perceived the transition to boarding school equally necessitated understanding and negotiating changes in relationships at home and their sense of self prior to attending boarding school. The literature on transition experiences at boarding school has predominantly focussed on the impact on students within the boarding school setting (i.e., Baills & Rossi, 2001; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Duncan, 1990; Mason, 1997; Johnstone, 2001; Patrick, Bramston, & Wakefield, 2004; Whyte & Boylan, 2008; White 2004a; Yeo, 2010). By contrast, in trying to make sense of the transition to boarding school a number of informants perceived that being away from family for extended periods of time and being separated by large geographical distances from their local community, brought about change to pre-boarding school relationships with both parents and siblings, as well as with broader social networks at home. Against this context, student informants perceived that a seemingly unavoidable reality was the necessity to not only spend considerable effort and time establishing new friendships and maintaining a sense of self while at boarding school, but equally having the ability to negotiate relational changes at home. This section begins by exploring how student informants made sense of changes to relationships with family as they transitioned to boarding school.

5.3.1 Family dynamics.

Whilst a few students reported they “*don’t mind being away from family*” (Student Informant 14), the majority indicated they found it difficult being separated from their families for long periods of time and by large physical distances. In trying to explain this experience, the majority of informants described it as a variation of *hard*, that is, *pretty hard*, *really hard*, and *very hard*. A wide range of descriptions were reported in how this made informants feel, such as, *down*, *isolated*, *lonely*, *sad* and as a one younger informant reported, “*I get a bit angry, then I start doing stupid things...just to piss people off*” (Student Informant 3). Several informants spoke about family in relation to feeling *homesick* and in particular during times when they believed they were missing out on participating in important family events such as the birthday of a younger sibling, supporting a family member when they were unwell, attending the funeral of a family member, and also involvement in seasonal activities such as hunting and fishing and taking part in regional events such as annual sporting carnivals and annual community festivals.

Congruent with research emphasising the importance of connectedness with family to the lives and sense of identity and belonging of Aboriginal young people (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies,

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Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Purdie et al., 2000), a salient perception across the student informant group was the need to maintain a high level of interest in the functioning and wellbeing of family life at home. Many informants yearned for the ordinary and daily interactions that occurred in the home setting and in particular the opportunity to receive support and encouragement from family at the end of each school day. For example, one younger informant reported, *"It's a bit weird because I'm like used to coming homing home and seeing mum and dad each day but now I never see them"* (Student Informant 3); similarly an older informant revealed that even though he highly valued telephone contact with his parents each evening to see how his school day had gone, *"they're not there to drive you along like they would at home"* (Student Informant 4). However, it also emerged that a number of informants perceived that it was important to censor or minimise the amount of negative information about academic progress and social experiences at boarding school when they spoke with parents on the telephone, as these informants were conscious of their parents' aspirations and hopes, but it also suggested that informants associated a sense of pressure with the expectations for them to succeed at boarding school. For example, one informant explained:

They'd call me on the phone and ask me how I was doing and I'd say I was doing ok, or pretty good, or whatever, but really when they called and I had a problem or a hard time, I'd never tell them what's happening, I'd just keep it to myself. I sort of did that for a while, yeh a long while. Like my parents told me no matter what you become we're not going to be disappointed. We'll still be proud of you whatever, so yeh, I didn't want to disappoint them. (Student Informant 18)

Indeed, in trying to make sense of this experience several student informants perceived that the transition experience had made them appreciate the effort that their parents had gone to so they could attend boarding school. A number divulged that attending boarding school caused them to reflect on previously taken for granted efforts and roles that their parents undertook at home, and the importance of family to their own overall sense of wellbeing as an individual. For example, one informant reported with respect to his relationship with his mother and the contributions she made towards his education:

Me and mum argued quite a bit before I came here. It was not like we were arguing about anything too bad, it was just like stuff that she would always pick on with me, so it started an argument. Coming here made me realise you know, even though I did appreciate her at home, that I appreciate her now a whole lot more. So yeh, I'd say being at [School E] has brought us a whole lot closer even though we're apart. I mean phone calls, they go for ages now. (Student Informant 24)

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Several student informants reported missing the opportunity to participate in supporting the development of younger siblings. However, others also perceived that attending boarding school had underpinned positive growth in their relationship with siblings. Informants perceived that this growth was often characterised by changes to how they socially interact with younger siblings at home during school holidays. For instance one informant revealed:

At home I used to fight with my younger brothers a lot more, since being at boarding school I've noticed we've become a lot closer. We don't argue that much anymore...it sort of shed light on the fact you only have a certain amount of time with them, so you need to use it well. (Student Informant 31)

Some student informants who were the oldest sibling in a family relayed wanting to be a positive role model for siblings and having a desire for younger siblings to follow their lead and experience what they had at boarding school. For example, one informant reported:

I have two little brothers and one is looking to come here to [School B]. They are good footballers. When they're here I'll be in Year 12 and my little sister is looking to go to [girls' boarding school in Perth] next year. Hopefully my brothers will get a scholarship down here as well. It will be good. (Student Informant 23)

As mentioned, the majority of student informants constructed boarding school as an opportunity in contrast to the prospect of the secondary education pathways available in their local community. Instead of feeling ostracised from family or that they had forfeited their place within the family unit, a number of student informants instead seemingly constructed the experience of boarding school in terms of their own personal growth and as taking the next logical step in their journey to adulthood. For example, one informant revealed:

I think like with boarding and living away from your parents, it matures you up. It makes you like an independent person, like for the real world when you get out into life and stuff. Like most kids that live with their parents, it's like they rely on their parents a lot. Coming down here and stuff you live by yourself, you got to make decisions here by yourself, like you've got support but it's still maturing you up. So yeh, it's really good because when I go back to [home community] and talking to some people and they're like yeh, you've really matured up and stuff. It matures you up heaps you know, just learn to live by myself and yeh, you rely on friends and stuff, so that's really good. (Student Informant 19)

5.3.2 Friendships at home.

It emerged that a number of student informants indicated they had to negotiate two sets of friends, one set at home and another set at boarding school. Informants perceived that being away from valued friendships in their home community was “pretty hard” (Student Informant 6)

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and that being away from their *“closest friends”* (Student Informant 13) and people who have *“known you all your life”* (Student Informant 4) was difficult. Several informants revealed being *excited* about seeing their friends at home during the school holidays and one informant described how friends were telling him, *“oh it’s good to see you back, and coming up and talking to you, wanting to catch-up again”* (Student Informant 27). One informant reported *“most of them think it’s pretty good. And they’re happy that somebody’s actually getting out there and doing a lot more for themselves, more than other people do”* (Student Informant 26), similarly another informant indicated that he was aware that friends at home *“kind of look up to me”* (Student Informant 8). Yet, another informant revealed feeling a sense of surprise when friends from his previous school, *“just started asking me about boarding school life, and to my surprise they asked me questions and were interested in things like, do you have doors on your showers and toilets and stuff like that?”* (Student Informant 24).

However, a number of students also revealed that although they had constructed the perception that boarding school was an opportunity, this did not necessarily protect them from criticism or suspicion by friends and peers while at home. It was evident some informants experienced in varying degrees feelings of anguish, insecurity, and self-doubt about how schooling away from home would upset the equilibrium, sustainability and quality of relations with friends and social networks at home. A few informants relayed how they perceived that within their social networks at home some people believed that they had over stepped their societal positioning by studying at a boarding school in the city. For example, one informant reported:

My friends they say when I come back, you talking different you know, you’ve changed you know, like you a White bloke now, you a city bloke. Not really discriminating me from the group but like making comments. Being away has kind of changed my friends, like they’ve changed you know since I’ve been back. It has changed the relationship stuff between us, it’s not very good, like miserable, that my friends that I grew up with, think like I’m a just a city boy, when I’m not really a city boy. (Student Informant 15)

Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) have outlined how the questioning of identity by another Aboriginal person can have a significant negative impact on an Aboriginal person. Several student informants in the current research indicated how small comments and remarks embedded in conversations and interactions with valued peers and friends made them feel that they had abandoned their community because they sought a secondary education pathway beyond the boundaries of that which could be offered locally. This circumstance caused a few informants to

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question their sense of belonging and connection with peers at home and equally question if what they had learnt at boarding school was relevant to life at home and to social interactions with valued peers. For example, one informant divulged:

Informant: *I've tried bringing how I act in Perth to home a little bit, but ummm, people just always joke on me and some people are hard on you for it, like saying to you, why you got to be like that?*

Interviewer: *Yeh.*

Informant: *Like, don't bring your little high words here. If you do say something, like the other blokes will like look at you with an eye like this (student informant raises one eye brow).*

Interviewer: *High words?*

Informant: *Yeh, high words, like big words.*

Interviewer: *So they make a joke about it?*

Informant: *Yeh. Like they'll be trying to say something and find the right word and but can't, and then I'll say the right word and it might be a big long word and some of them are like you had no troubles with that Mr. University*

Interviewer: *Yeh. How does that make you feel?*

Informant: *It makes you think twice about saying stuff. You feel a bit weird because all the boys back at home they don't really care about that stuff, or about whatever they say, you know what I mean. And like most Black people use like broken down English you know. It's just the same with Kimberley people they just say all different things and you get hit on for trying to correct them you know, you don't do that [laughs]. If you do, they're like why don't you move to Perth then? (Student Informant 12)*

Research involving Aboriginal people in remote Kimberley communities of WA, has shown that the decision by an individual to use technical jargon rather than an equivalent Aboriginal English term is often perceived as 'high language' (Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006). For Aboriginal people with limited prior exposure to education and where English might be a second, third, or fourth language, the use of high language can be perceived as lacking respect, and as being ignorant and patronising (Vicary, Tennant, Garvie, & Adupa, 2006). In the present research, the connotations associated with labels such as *city boy*, *White bloke*, *high-words*, and *Mr. University*, were perceived by student informants as challenging their membership and commitment to people, community, and culture, although some informants re-conceptualised such instances as other people perhaps being *jealous* (Student Informant 12) in response to the

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education they were receiving. However, as the above statements indicate, the occurrence of being positioned and constructed in such a way at home and by peers was a confronting experience for student informants.

It was evident that when returning home during school holidays a number of student informants believed they needed to modify the language they used. In a number of instances, it appeared several informants actively sought to conceal from peers at home the full extent of what they had experienced and learnt at boarding school. Several reported purposefully trying to draw less attention themselves in an effort to discourage exposure to social criticism by peers and also within the wider community. For example, one informant reported that on returning home: *"I change when I'm with the boys up home, like how I speak, what I wear, I won't train as hard at footy training"* (Student Informant 21). Similarly another informant revealed: *"I sort of change around friends up home, you're still yourself but you don't like do the same things that you would down here"* (Student Informant 4). Such statements further indicated that the premise of code-switching (DoE, 2002; Eades, 2004; Sharifian, 2005) was not only conceptualised as a strategy exclusively deployed in the boarding school domain. Rather, the wider implications of attending boarding school for these informants suggested that code-switching was viewed as a strategy not only used to sustain friendships at home, but imperatively, to exhibit to friends and peers at home that the informants had remained true to their upbringing and identity.

Despite such endeavours to sustain friendships at home, several student informants nonetheless indicated that some relationships with friends gradually changed and in a number of instances ended. Two reasons were perceived as underpinning this occurrence. First, was spending extended periods of time away combined with being separated by large physical distances, underpinned a sense of estrangement in the relationship with friends at home. These informants constructed the perception that it was difficult to maintain and sustain some friendships simply because they were physically less able to socialise and be present to participate in social activities with friends at home while at boarding school. For example, one informant reported:

The relationship didn't get affected in a wholly negative way, we didn't have any negative feelings towards each other, I guess it's just that being away, we just naturally just grew a part from each other. (Student Informant 18)

The second reason cited by student informants was that in making the decision to attend boarding school they had begun to re-evaluate and reprioritise the type of friendships they had at

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home. These informants constructed the perception that certain relationships hindered or did not support their efforts to pursue a secondary education. Inherent in this circumstance for these student informants was the perception that certain types of friendship activities were obstructive and collided with their own personal outlook and educational aspirations in life. To this end, these informants reported having to negotiate friends at home who were, *fighting, not doing so well, not at school, and stealing*. For example, one informant relayed how difficult this experience was when he remarked, *“oh the main thing would be giving up my friends and stuff, but they all do drugs and drink and stuff now”* (Student Informant 5). Similarly, another informant revealed:

Like back home if we’re doing stuff, and they’re like let’s get into trouble, before I was like yeh ok and would go a long with it, but now I’m like you guys can go a long and do that but I’m not, so I stay away (Student Informant 8)

Such statements reveal that an unanticipated outcome of the transition experience to boarding school for a number of student informants was not only having to negotiate the dilemma of maintaining friendships while away from home, but equally having to negotiate the confusing reality of reconciling the cessation and loss of friendships while at home. It was evident that as students described their relationships and sense of connection with other people, they were also re-negotiating their individual sense of connection and belonging with culture, heritage, land, and spirituality. The next sub-theme explores this further.

5.3.3 Cultural connectedness.

The data revealed a number of student informants lamented their dislocation from customary practices and traditional activities while at boarding school. Indeed, this perception was particularly apparent with older informants as they reported regretting the loss of opportunities to learn and progress their cultural knowledge through spending time with not only important cultural knowledge holders such as Elders, but equally through everyday interactions with significant others in their family and the wider community. By having to spend extended periods of time dislocated from family and home, these older informants revealed often reflected on their relationship with significant aspects of ancestry, culture, heritage, traditional lands and spirituality. Literature has emphasised that an important aspect of self-concept and identity for many Aboriginal young people is not only forming a sense of belonging and connection with the collective tribe and with kinship, but equally upholding cultural customs and spiritual obligations and responsibilities (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000; Wettinger

& Westerman, 1998). For example, one informant reported reflecting on his sense of connectedness with the ancestral land of his people. He explained:

Home that is where my heart is. Like no matter where I am I know where everything is. I can sense it because I've got that connection to the place. Like when we were on the Year 10 camp something happened to the compass and they wouldn't work and they asked me which way is north. I pointed towards to the north and they said how do you know it's there? And I said because my home is there. I just know where it is even though I'm in the south. They said what happens if you were over east or something, would you still know where it is? I said of course I would, I can sense it. I've got a connection with the place.
(Student Informant 12)

For another informant being away from home elicited a need to reflect on his relationship and sense of connectedness with the history of his family, people, and traditional lands. In doing so, he linked the history of his family with the privileges, ways of life, and use of ancestral land that he finds himself accustomed to today. In trying to make sense of schooling away from home and being at boarding school away from family and community this informant shared the history of his family. He explained:

Well Pop squatted for [name of community] because he owned it and that's where his people use to live. The white farmers wanted to use it and take away paddocks because [name of community] has got water and they wanted to use it for horses. My grandfather just squatted at [name of community] and the farmers threatened to kill him, they tried to bribe him, and he just squatted there and said no. They like pointed guns at his head, he still said no. Soon they just gave up, and he did that because that was traditional land. He just sat there. He had his own camp set up, he just stayed there and people tried to take him away and he just didn't let them. So we ended up getting [name of community] and now we can go fishing, go through the hills get some Kangaroo or whatever, we go there most times during the holidays. (Student Informant 8)

Such statements support assertions in the literature that Aboriginal young people have strong cultural, historical, and spiritual links with traditional lands (DoE, 2002; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Somerville, Somerville, & Wyld, 2010). Similarly, it supports research that has emphasised that when trying to solve problems in daily life, Aboriginal young people will prioritise cultural and spiritual explanations before considering other possible options (Westerman, 2010). For example, consistent with the assertions of Westerman (2010), one informant revealed that after feeling unwell for an extended period of time while at boarding school, he carefully evaluated his sense of connection and considered his cultural and spiritual obligations to ancestral lands. As a result, this particular informant reported a strong desire to

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return home to be on traditional lands, so as to enable him to heal and restore his health and wellbeing. He explained:

I've been really sick and a couple of weekends ago I went back [home]. When I went back home I got better you know, because of the heat and everything that I'm use to. When I came back here again, I went to school for a couple days then I just got sick again, it just made me think that when you're home, that healed me you know. It's just like the connection with where I'm from, it like heals me, the strength in that land just sort of healed me from sickness and everything. (Student Informant 15)

A number of student informants were highly cognisant that important cultural activities such as ceremony, dance, language, stories and other customary practices were under threat of disappearing within their respective tribe or language group. As a consequence, to account for less time spent at home, these informants believed that sense of responsibility and obligation existed on them to make-up for what they perceived to be lost time at boarding school. During school holidays these student informants revealed placing pressure on themselves to try to make-up for gaps that they felt existed within their cultural knowledge and/or experience base. For example, one informant explained:

I miss mostly the cultural side, like back home we can go out with our brothers and stuff, and they can teach you stuff which we can't do down here. Like spearing, hunting all that kind of food. And when they call you up [telephone] to tell you they caught this and that, you think oh why couldn't I be there? And like when the Elders take all the young boys out and teach them a lot of stuff. And when you're down here, you don't get taught that, so when you get back there you're behind in time. So you've got to catch-up, and yeh, it's hard. In the holidays they tell you to do this and I haven't been taught that you know. So yeh, that's sort of the down side to being down here. (Student Informant 26)

As the above statement indicates, this particular student informant felt torn between cultural obligations and responsibilities, and pursuing a secondary education at boarding school. For some informants missing out on opportunities to advance their cultural knowledge and being able to fulfil cultural obligations at home caused them to experience a sense of ambivalence towards boarding school during important cultural times in the year. Aboriginal people rarely define a sense of self and identity in terms of discrete individual attributes or achievements (Parker, 2010); rather both are deeply entwined with membership and a sense of belonging to the collective and to kinship/familial relations within that respective collective (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). These student informants perceived that participation in and experiencing cultural activities were central to affirming their sense of belonging to people and community, as well as their

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commitment to ancestors and others. For example, one informant revealed feeling frustrated at being an already initiated man but not being able to participate in Lore season and customary rites of passage ceremonies to support younger males within his community. He reported:

Up home they're kind of like starting Lore up there right now, so I want to do it, but I've kind of missed out on this year's one, but I'll be there for next year's one. Dad just keeps telling me keep working, finish school, don't worry keep going and then just come back next year and do it. (Student Informant 6)

As such statements reveal, for this particular student informant, participation in Lore season and customary rites of passage ceremonies was perceived as something that had to be negotiated with parents as he was aware they were keen for him to first complete the school year before returning home. For a number of student informants Lore season began during school term time (i.e., Term 4). This finding supports the assertion that participation in cultural rites of passage during early adolescence may coincide with the transition from primary to secondary school for male Aboriginal students (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). It also supports the assertion that it is significant for young Aboriginal males committed to carrying the Lore, to return each Lore season to perform ceremonies and to ensure the wellbeing of the land, spirits, and all things connected with their respective Dreaming (Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation & Rijavec, 2004). Statements such as the one above indicate in an important sense that the ways in which student informants perceived and negotiated cultural transition points while at boarding school were not only intimately interwoven with how they constructed their individual sense of self and collective identity but were also interwoven with family.

5.4 Chapter summary.

The underlying aim of this chapter was to describe how 32 student informants from regional and remote communities constructed meaning and understanding about the experience of studying at boarding school in Perth, WA. Three major themes emerged and were explored, as were their respective sub-themes, these were, 1) Decision Making and the sub-themes of Choice-Less Choice and Opportunity, 2) Organisational Climate and the sub-themes of School Environment and Belonging, Culture Shock, Homesickness, Identity and Rites of Passage, Code-Switching, Teachers, Academic Expectations, Residential Life, and Friendships and Peer relations, and 3) Relational Change and the sub-themes of Family Dynamics, Friendships at home, and Cultural Connectedness. Evidence was provided for each through the provision of examples drawn from the data and lined with the literature. The next chapter aims to contextual the perceptions

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and understandings shared by student informants, by exploring the meaning of the transition to
boarding school for 11 parent informants with a son attending a boarding school away from home
in Perth, WA.

6.0 Introduction.

The underlying aim of exploring the understandings and experiences of parents was to elaborate a deeper contextualised view of the transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote areas of Western Australia (WA). Central to this project was the outlook that meaning and understanding are socially constructed (Gergen, 2001b, 2011; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009). Hence, information provided by parents offered valuable insight into the contours of life and social environments that shaped, informed, and contributed to how male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote areas of WA constructed meaning and understanding about the transition experience to boarding school. This chapter addresses the second research question of this study:

How do parents of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of having a child studying at a boarding school?

The information reported in this chapter explores the beliefs, perceptions, and views shared by 11 parent informants, eight mothers, two fathers, and one step-father. Parent informants were drawn from a diverse range of geographical locations, socio-economic circumstances, family configurations (i.e., single parent family, blended family, extended family units), and professional backgrounds. Interviews ranged in length from between 60 to 120 minutes in duration. Each parent informant expressed a desire to share their experiences of having a male child at boarding school. A summary of the demographic information for parent informants has been provided in Table 11.

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Table 11

Demographic Information of Parent Informants

Parent Informant	Community	Boarding School son Attended (e.g., A, B, C, D, E)	Years that son has attended Boarding School	Relationship to son
Parent Informant 1	Broome	D	3	Mother
Parent Informant 2	Derby	A	5	Mother
Parent Informant 3	Derby	A	5	Step-father
Parent Informant 4	Wyndham	B	3	Mother
Parent Informant 5	Wyndham	B	3	Father
Parent Informant 6	Moora	E	3	Mother
Parent Informant 7	Dampier	E	3	Mother
Parent Informant 8	Broome	B	2	Mother
Parent Informant 9	Roebourne	C	2.5	Father
Parent Informant 10	Roebourne	C	2.5	Mother
Parent Informant 11	Lombadina Community	B	3	Mother

Note. Eight parent informants had more than one child attending a boarding school away from home.

Despite the breadth of cultural, geographical, professional, and social contexts from which parent informants were drawn, the complexity of living in a regional or remote location and having a child schooling away from home at boarding school in Perth, WA, served to generate a number of shared commonalities for the parents. As presented in Table 12, three major themes were identified across the parent informant group, these were entitled, 'Access and Equity', 'Parental Agency', and 'Cultural Heritage'.

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Table 12

Major Themes and Related Sub-Themes for the Parent Informant Group

Major Theme	Related Sub-Theme
Access, Standards and Quality	Declining Local Schools
	Opportunity
	Worldliness
Parental Agency	Parent-School Connection
	Parenting Style
	Communication
	Milestones and Siblings
Cultural Heritage	Maintenance and Transmission

6.1 Access, standards, and quality.

A strong sense of history permeated each parent informant interview, including social injustice and marginalisation, discriminatory legislation and racist government policy, and how this history has impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiences with education (see Chapter 1). Against this historical context, it was evident that parent informants perceived that the efforts they undertook to secure an optimal education pathway for their children closely resonated with the expectations and efforts of past generations to secure equal rights and social equality in Australian society. For example, one informant revealed, *“If those old people were alive today they would have been proud, they’re proud now you can tell, that’s the aim for us you know, to fly their legacy”* (Parent Informant 10). Parent informants acknowledged that schools in regional and remote locations of WA faced a number of logistical obstacles and all reported feeling disenchanted and disempowered by an education system they perceived did little to address the provision of secondary education pathways in regional and remote locations of the State. Moreover, several questioned whether the education system had their child’s educational needs and wellbeing at heart. The frustration of this circumstance was evident in the comments of one parent informant from the Kimberley region of WA (see Figure 1) who asserted:

I think that you do not get that same education in remote areas, or even in these sorts of areas like Broome. The kids from here are always two years behind in their schooling and

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that's outrageous. If we are serious about wanting to have Indigenous leaders and educated people, then I think you have to send your kids to boarding school. It's a shame that a good education is not available in the place that we live and don't get that support where they live, but I do believe that if you want a good education they have to leave town. The education here isn't good and if you don't have the education, what are you? (Parent Informant 1)

Such statements reveal that parent informants felt torn between a sense of frustration caused by the standard and quality of local secondary school alternatives and the decision of having to send children away to ensuring they received an optimal secondary education experience. This finding was congruent with prior assertions made by parents reported in the 1984 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* conducted by the Department of Education in WA (DoE, 1984) and in the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC, 2000a). This perception formed a springboard for broader societal questions about fairness and the interest of governments in protecting the sanctity of the family unit for those living in regional and remote communities. For example, a parent informant from a community in the Pilbara region of WA (see Figure 1) with three children at boarding school conveyed his sense of the inequality and the emotional impact this circumstance had on him and his children. He reported:

Oh mixed feelings bro, you happy in one regards but you are sad as well. You've had to send your kids away to get something that is fundamentally important and should be a given. You shouldn't send your kid away to be able to have your kid properly educated; there should be schools here to provide that. It was sad you know, it was sad for the boy, he was in tears going away. (Parent Informant 9)

Similarly, a parent informant from a remote community located 200 kilometres north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula in the Kimberley region of the State revealed:

I mean if he [son] was going to stay here he would not be able to access the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth year of secondary schooling. The children that stay here in the community aren't going or doing secondary schooling. They are repeating and just doing primary school schooling. I feel that is disgusting. (Parent Informant 11)

Such statements are consistent with research by Prout (2009) that explored Aboriginal spatiality and mainstream education systems with 52 parents, local residents, but which also included eight education specialists such as school principals, teachers, and Aboriginal education support workers located in *Yamatji* country near Geraldton, WA (see Figure 1 and 2). Also similar to the findings of Prout (2009) was that the extent of dissatisfaction with the standard and quality

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of local schooling was sufficient for some parent informants to emphasise that if they were unable to locate an adequate local secondary school, then the priority as a family would be to relocate to Perth. For example, a parent informant from a town located in the Kimberley region of WA revealed:

Well there was always the thought of sending the kids away for school or for us actually moving because [name of community] was not an option for high school. The school isn't very good there and still isn't, so we always thought about what we were going to do. It was either us leaving and moving down to Perth or the kids going down and going to boarding school. (Parent Informant 2)

It emerged from the data that the extent of the disparity in local education standards not only surprised parent informants, but that they had constructed the perception they needed to protect their children from the inadequacies, uncertainty, and vulnerabilities they believed characterised local secondary education pathways. In particular, they worried about the implications that the gap in education standards and quality had on the long-term prospects of their children securing employment or access to university or other post-school destinations. For example, a parent informant from a town located in the Kimberley region of the State reported:

I had a look at [School B]. I didn't realise how sub-standard the delivery of education was in the Kimberley until I went outside and had a look for myself and then I realised if he [son] was ever going to get anywhere with a job or academically, that eventually he needed to get an education outside of [name of community]. (Parent Informant 4)

As the above statement reveals, parent informants perceived that to secure an optimal secondary education for their children, they were left with little option but to send them away to boarding school, as one parent explained, “we realised that if we wanted him [son] to succeed in his education we need to send him away, which is a hard decision to make” (Parent Informant 9). Prior to exploring constructions of the transition experience, the next segment will briefly consider parent informant’s perceptions of local schooling.

6.1.1 Declining local schools.

It emerged that parent informants believed that a number of administration and social factors maintained the disparity between regional and remote schools and their metropolitan Perth counterparts. Foremost was the difficulty for local schools to not only attract but also maintain teachers with experience, which parent informants were aware contrasted significantly

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with the continuity in teaching staff and teacher experience available at boarding schools located in Perth. For example, one parent informant explained:

A lot of the teachers they are just out of teachers college. Then they come up here and mate, they haven't got a clue what is going on, so a lot of them leave in tears just after the first six months because they haven't got a grasp on what's happening in the classroom. There just isn't that consistency compared to somewhere like [School B] where the teachers who are working there spend most of their time at the school. It's just amazing; they spend their whole lives there. (Parent Informant 4)

Similar to perceptions held by student informants, parent informants had constructed the perception that negative social issues such as alcoholism, violence, family feuding, gang membership, and truancy, had a deleterious impact on school attendance and the educational environment at local schools (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henrey, 2002; Mohajer, Bessarab, & Earnest, 2009). For example, one parent informant conveyed, *"If he went to Broome [a school in Broome], all the kids there get caught up in other stuff, like fighting, drugs, drinking, and they just don't finish school"* (Parent Informant 11). Given the proximity of local schools to a range of wider societal issues, parent informants perceived the influence of social issues such as drug use, fighting and violence, diffused uninterrupted into the local school setting from the wider community, a finding that supports the assertions of Craven et al., (2005) that described how wider communities problems impacted negatively on the education aspirations of Aboriginal young people. As one parent informant explained, *"the academics are just so impacted upon by the social issues that exist up here. The social issues that come into the school from outside makes it just difficult"* (Parent Informant 3). For several parent informants, in addition to their own observations of local school environments and wider community issues, the reports about schooling experiences that they received from their children further reinforced the perception that the presence of negative social issues in the wider community would impede the progress of their child's secondary education. For example, one parent informant reported:

[child's name] would come home and would say to me every day, I need to get out of that classroom because the kids were punching the teachers, or there would be a fight in the classroom or the teacher was trying to control the classroom but she couldn't. Or, there would be swearing and shouting, and he would be sitting and would be trying to be doing his work but he couldn't because of all the other stuff that was happening. (Parent Informant 2)

Such statements reveal how witnessing the experiences of their children became a catalyst that amplified parent informants' resolve to secure the optimal secondary education

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possible within their means for their children, whilst also further heightening the value that these parent informants placed on education. This finding supports the assertions of research conducted by Lette, D'Espaignet, Slack-Smith, Hunt, and Nannup (2009) involving 14 Aboriginal mothers from the Geraldton region of WA (see Figure 1), which described how Aboriginal parents associated gaining access to a school that they perceived as having a strong supportive learning environment and ethos with securing a better future for their children.

6.1.2 Opportunity.

Consistent with perceptions held by student informants, parent informants perceived that the transition experience to boarding school was an *opportunity*. For example, one parent informant reported, *"I could just see that there were much better opportunities than there was in Broome"* (Parent Informant 1). Similarly another explained, *"when it [boarding school] came up, it was a good opportunity for him to try and take"* (Parent Informant 5). While another stated, *"the opportunity to improve his education while at the same time explore other interests whether it's sporting, drama or music"* (Parent Informant 7). It emerged that informants believed they had not only secured the optimal secondary education within their personal means, but in turn lessened the risk that their children might drop out of school, supporting similar description of Aboriginal parent decision-making described by Lette, D'Espaignet, Slack-Smith, Hunt, and Nannup (2009). Parent informants in the current study asserted that education would provide a foundation from which positive social mobility could be achieved by their children. They also perceived that boarding school would heighten access to post-school destinations like apprenticeships and university, a finding similar to student informants' construction of boarding school as an opportunity. To this end, one parent informant revealed how sending her son and other children to boarding school was a deliberate strategy to place them in direct contact with wider range of educational opportunities, she revealed:

We know that the only way for our kids to move up is to work up and the highest way of moving up is through education. Sport is a bonus, art is a bonus, drama is a bonus, but education is where our kids have got to succeed. If it means sending our kids away, well let it be. I've had the experience of sending three of my beautiful children away to the city [Perth], the opportunities were bigger and brighter and better in the city, than in the country. (Parent Informant 8)

As the above statement suggests, parent informants perceived that boarding school offered the chance to step beyond the margins of local secondary school pathways and

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opportunities. This belief was often closely interwoven with comparisons drawn between their own personal experiences, struggles and missed opportunities at school and in life, with the impact this had on them as individuals. For example, one parent informant revealed after reflecting on her educational experiences, *“you sort of want something different for your children you know, when they grow up”* (Parent Informant 2). By contrasting boarding school with the stark reality of their own experiences with schooling as an individual, parent informants not only encouraged their children to aspire to do well at school but equally role modelled to their children how to recognise an opportunity when it presented itself. For example, one parent informant who had left school before Year 9 described his hopes for his children:

I tell them [his sons] if I had the opportunity I would be doing this. I missed out on all this [education], which was silly. I look back and the only regret I have is not being properly educated. If I had another chance at life I would be properly educated. (Parent Informant 9)

This finding provides a point worthy of comparison with the previously mentioned research conducted by Prout (2009). For some Aboriginal parents, Prout (2009) described how their own negative experiences with being sent away for schooling deterred them from sending their own children to boarding school. By contrast, the majority of parent informants (nine) involved with the current research had themselves not schooled away but nevertheless were not reluctant to send their children away for schooling. This finding is consistent with the study by Lette et al., (2009) that described how Aboriginal parents were motivated by their own perceived lack of education and limited opportunity to advance their situation in life. Prout (2009) also reported that if Aboriginal parents sent their children away for schooling, to avoid boarding school, many preferred and organised for their children to stay at Aboriginal hostels or with extended family and relatives. Such accommodation alternatives were not raised by parent informants involved with the current research. Congruent with Prout (2009), parent informants reported that if a suitable local school option were available they would have preferred to have their children school closer to home. However, set against a context of limited access to an equitable standard and quality of schooling to that evident in Perth, boarding school was envisaged by parent informants as more than simply the optimal secondary education pathway but as a chance for their children to encounter a wider breadth of social experiences.

6.1.3 Worldliness.

The data revealed that a number of parent informants had constructed the perception that boarding school enabled their children to participate in an educational setting that offered a more worldly experience compared with that which was available at a local school. In particular, boarding school was seen as facilitating a valuable life experience that would expand their children's world-view. For example, one parent informant reported:

If they stay in their small community, they don't broaden their views and I wanted him to have the opportunity to look at different things. I didn't want them to really go away but at the same time I'm thought they needed to have an inside into what it's like in the world out there (Parent Informant 11)

Parent informants reported that it was common for them draw to the attention of their children their own limited experiences in life with education and to the advantages of exposure to lifestyles and social contexts beyond that of their local community. In doing so, parent informants relayed that they were not advocating for their children to leave or lose a sense belonging or connectedness with community, or to demean the capacity and resources available to their respective local community. Rather they perceived they were encouraging their children to experience the benefits of encountering a wide breadth of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, values and ways towards life. This finding supports cultural theorists and Indigenous education practitioners who have emphasised that to support Aboriginal young people to negotiate life as they grow and develop it is necessary to facilitate the opportunity to explore and learn about both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (DoE, 2002; Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010; Partington, Beresford, & Gower, 2012; Reynolds, 2005). Parent informants believed that exposure to diverse ways of being, knowing and doing, would assist their children to traverse a rapidly changing world, meet the challenges of a dominant Western society, and in the longer term take charge of their future. For example, one parent informant reported, *"I want them to be who they can be. I wanted this to be a great learning curve for them. I wanted them to see that there is more outside of small [name of town in the Wheatbelt region of the State]"* (Parent Informant 6). Similarly another informant revealed how in her assessment many of the understandings and world-views held within her local community were bounded by a link between the remoteness of that particular community and the prevalence of exacerbated perspectives of the wider-world presented by television. She reported:

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If they stay in an area like this their whole world view will become so narrow, [name of community] just so small, just so tiny. For people who have grown up here, educated here, spent their whole lives here, there is nothing wrong with them or the way that they live necessarily and some of them are quite happy to live their whole life here, but they really have little understanding of what goes on in the world outside. Often their view of what White society is got through an American sitcom, and that is how they think White people live. I have to say hang on a minute that's not right. For us it's [boarding school] about broadening his [son] world view, so he knows that there is more to life than [name of community]. Then, if he comes back and wants to spend the rest of his life here, that's fine but at least he's had that opportunity to go outside and know that it is possible to do that. (Parent Informant 4)

As the above excerpt indicates, a salient aspect of the decision making process for parent informants to send their children to boarding school was a sense that they were exposing them to an educational setting which fostered meaningful interaction with a diverse range of world-views, and people. For example, one parent informant noted, *"the other positive thing is making new friends from all different walks of life you know. From all different parts of the world even, because kids from overseas go to that school"* (Parent Informant 1). Another informant explained how she perceived that a distinct advantage of boarding school for her son was that it had expanded his social networks and ability to appreciate the benefits of different social contexts. She reported:

It has opened up his whole world. He's got the best of both worlds. He's got the Pilbara and his mates up here and then he's got the city [Perth]. So he's got that combination, which has made him that much wiser than his Pilbara mates because he's city wise. And then he's got something on his city mates, like being aware of the Pilbara, going bush, camping and fishing and operating your own boat, diving for fish, spear fishing, things like that. Perth kids haven't got that experience, so he's a very lucky boy. (Parent Informant 7)

Learning about different world-views and how to function autonomously in new and different social contexts was constructed by parent informants as enriching the development and growth of their child while at school. Moreover, several believed that learning to adjust to diverse cultural and social settings was a life skill that their children needed to master if they were to successfully negotiate the transition into adulthood. This finding supports similar assertions by Appleyard (2002) who reported Aboriginal parents in the Mid-west region of WA (see Figure 1) believed that the success of their children was closely linked with preparation for the "real world" (p. 30) after the completion of school.

6.2 Parental Agency.

The necessity to send children to a school geographically located far away from the family home caused informants to experience feelings of *guilt, stress, loss, and sadness*, while some described feeling a deep sense of *“loneliness by not having him [son] here”* (Parent Informant 7). One parent informant, regardless that her son had attend boarding school for four years, reported, *“I think for me it was always that in Year 8 he was so young and it felt like [started to cry softly] he had left home already. He wasn’t there anymore”* (Parent Informant 2). Several parent informants indicated that the actual experience of sending a child to boarding school brought about a reiterative sense of anguish and doubt. For example, one informant with three sons schooling away from home revealed that for the first few years each time she sent them back to boarding school at the end of the school holidays, *“it was hard to just let the boys go, I just cried”* (Parent Informant 6). This particular parent went on to describe how a heightened sense of loss characterised her experience both in terms of her sense of self-worth as an individual and in terms of her role as parent. She reported:

I found that I felt really redundant. I thought that I no longer had a purpose when they weren’t at home. I was lost, I could not function normally and I was just completely lost. I would go and seek friends out, I hated being on my own. Hated it, I could not even be in the house on my own, especially at night. That’s why I’d always be ringing the kids you know. I didn’t even understand at the time, because I wasn’t listening and was obviously stressed, that they had prep time [homework time] in the evening and you can’t ring between those times. I didn’t know that until somebody told me. (Parent Informant 6)

Interestingly, a parent who reported attending boarding school during his own childhood, similarly revealed feeling a sense of loss when he commented, *“I went through boarding school myself, so I could understand perhaps what [step-son] felt. What it was like for him. But it’s odd; it’s leaves a big void in me every time when he goes away”* (Parent Informant 3). An extensive body of literature has identified that a communication gap between home and school can leave Aboriginal parents feeling marginalised and ostracised from their child’s educational journey (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Hayes, Johnston, Morris, Power, & Roberts, 2009; Lea, Wegner, McRae-Williams, Chenhall, & Holmes, 2011). Indeed, it was evident that new demands of supporting a child who was schooling away from the immediate family context also brought with it a sense of uncertainty for several parent informants. Some questioned their own perceived capacity and confidence as a parent, while others had reservations as to how to effectively provide emotional and moral support to their child from a distance. For example, one informant

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contextualised the significance of this issue by pointing to the challenges from a parent perspective of engaging with the systems and formalities that underpin of boarding schools as institutions. She revealed:

A lot of parents they send their kids down there [boarding school in Perth] but they don't know how to support them while they're down there or know how to get on the phone and talk to people down there. They don't know how to keep in touch, who to ring, what to say, when to ring, you know all that sort of stuff. Take all the paperwork for example, they can't read it and they don't know what it means and they're often lacking the confidence to ask for help with that one problem, so they're not understanding. Some parents they've lived their whole life in the bush, they do not understand what their kids are going into. Hospitals is all they know Perth for, I mean Perth is some where you fly down to when you get really sick, that's all Perth is to them, it's a hospital. Or another problem is when they do want to say something to someone, it's interpreted a certain way by the person at the other end of the phone and often that interpretation will be wrong. But instead of trying to explain themselves, when the person at the other end says bla, bla, bla, they will just say yes. But it's just not what they initially meant to talk about. (Parent Informant 5)

As the above statement suggests, a salient way in which parents constructed understanding about the transition experience to boarding school for their children was by drawing upon their own individual relationship with a school. It was particularly common across the informant group for the connection they perceived they had with a boarding school to be evaluated in terms of the type of relationship that parents developed with individual staff, and for this relationship to be influenced by the individual attributes of and efforts made by staff members. The following sub-theme explores the ways parent informants viewed the parent-school connection.

6.2.1 Parent-school connection.

Although the majority of parent informants (nine) had not attended boarding school themselves as a child, all recognised that the transition experience to boarding school required their children to navigate and cope with an unfamiliar learning environment which included a significant increase in the school size and student population from what they had been used to. For example, one informant revealed how her son had previously attended a local school with just over one hundred students at which she estimated that on any given day only about sixty of those were in attendance. She remarked, *“That's a big transition for kids like my son to make from here to there and into a big school with over a thousand kids”* (Parent Informant 11). Unlike the student informants, rather than using a variation of the word *hard*, parent informants were more inclined

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to construct their perception of the initial transition experience in terms of a *struggle* for their children. For example, one parent commented, *“the first year was a real struggle”* (Parent Informant 7); another remarked, *“he struggled in his academics”* (Parent Informant 8); and another again reported, *“he struggles a little bit with certain issues”* (Parent Informant 10). For example, one informant relayed his perception of the magnitude of the transition experience for his son by explaining:

It’s like a foreign country down there [Perth], it really is. They don’t talk the same language, they don’t do anything the same, they don’t think the same, sleep the same. [Son] got to get use to the whole thing. (Parent Informant 4)

Parent informants reported being aware that their children had to contend with a mixture of emotions during the transition experience and some reported that their children were, *hesitant*, *nervous*, and *reluctant*. By contrast, other parents described how their child found the anticipation of attending boarding school *pretty exciting*. One parent informant recalled being surprised and bemused by the enthusiasm of the initial response displayed by her son. In particular, she was surprised by the pre-constructed perception he held of a boarding school, as well as by which aspects of boarding school life that he initially focussed on in terms of the adjustments he anticipated he would have to make. In this case *hair styles*; she revealed:

I remember when he first went, when he first realised he was going down there to [School D], he said to me I can’t wait to get a White boy hair cut and a suit [school uniform] because he knew that it was that sort of place [laughs]. A White boy hair cut [laughs]. (Parent Informant 1)

Several parent informants believed homesickness was a foreseeable outcome of boarding school in Perth, as one informant put it, *“he was more than likely to get a lot of homesickness”* (Parent Informant 8). Some informants constructed homesickness as a short lived experience for their child, lasting for the first few days or the first week of each school term. Others described it as an ever-present issue that reoccurred intermittently throughout the school year, as one parent reported, *“The first year was really hard, he wanted to come home all the time of course”* (Parent Informant 2). Interestingly, another parent divulged that for her son, *“He never rang back saying he’s homesick or whatever, so we never had to deal with it”* (Parent Informant 5), a finding that corresponds with some student informants assertions that they censored the information that they provided to their parents while at boarding school (i.e., information about troubles at boarding school). However, contrary to the emphasis given by student informants, parents tended

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not to speak in great detail about specific areas of academic study although the majority acknowledged that it was difficult academic transition for their children. Rather, it appeared that parent informants perceived attending boarding school, doing homework, and not getting into trouble while at school as indicative of their child performing well academically. This suggests that parent informants tended to focus on the overall experience of boarding school for their child, rather than just evaluating academic progress; an outlook that was also influenced by the sense of wellbeing demonstrated by their child. For example, one parent informant explained, *“He was just beaming telling me about his subjects, what they’re going to do, what results he got. This was an Aboriginal boy really interested in his education”* (Parent Informant 7).

Consistent with the assertions of prior literature emphasising the importance Aboriginal parents placed on involvement in the formal decision-making processes of schools (Appleyard, 2002; Hayes et al., 2009; Lea, et al., 2012; Reynolds, 2005; Zubrick et al., 2006), the data revealed in the current study that parent informants perceived that the opportunity to interact meaningfully with school staff and to participate in decision-making process about their child’s educational journey reassured informants that the school prioritised the care and wellbeing of their child. It was common for informants to construct the individual efforts of staff members as an intention of a boarding school to build a meaningful reciprocal relationship with their family and as confirmation of selecting a supportive school for their child. Those staff members whom parents valued the most were perceived as accessible and as receptive to their advice and guidance in shaping the support their child received while at boarding school. For instance, one mother revealed:

Well like [staff member] has been wonderful, I can ring him up any time of the night and he can ring me, and like he tells me stuff about [son], I think that’s what he needs as a kid, somewhere like that. (Parent Informant 11)

Other informants interpreted the individual efforts by staff members as the boarding school as a whole striving to lessen the impact of the transition experience on them as parents. This perception was often reinforced when informants discovered that staff had fulfilled functions and roles they highly valued as a parent. For example, one informant revealed her deep appreciation for the efforts made by a housemother to ensure her son felt loved and cared for while away from his family, she reported:

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I reckon people like Mrs. [name] the house mother down there, she was fantastic. She just loves the boys. She takes care of the little things with [son] like a mother would do. She knows the things to look for in someone, so when they're missing affection from their own mother they're getting it from her. You want someone to do that for your children. You know, take care of the little things for them, so they've got someone asking how they're going everyday and fussing over them every day. (Parent Informant 2)

Similar to the assertions of Hayes et al., (2009) that described how official information between school and home was perceived by some Aboriginal parents and carers as embedded within a discourse of judgement, some parent informants in the current study believed there were moments when they were subjected to judgment by school staff. These informants indicated that they perceived school staff thought of them as lacking commitment to their child's education because they were not always able to attend school events. In addition, these informants believed it was sometimes forgotten by school staff that they had to negotiate complex factors such as distance, time, and finances, while simultaneously manage care responsibilities for family members at home. For example, for one parent was disheartened when several teachers suggested an inadequate level of parental involvement existed with his son's school and education. He reported:

One teacher said when was the last time you were down? Another would say why didn't you come for this? They just don't understand the distance and the school doesn't understand, like they will expect you to attend things and you know that financially you can't make it. (Parent Informant 3)

Similarly, another parent revealed that whilst grateful for a partial-scholarship that her son received to attend boarding school (e.g., academic fees were waived, but boarding fees were paid by mother), she perceived that school staff transmitted subtle counter-signals. In this case, because her son was a recipient to of a scholarship to attend the boarding school, she believed school staff differentiated between her and full fee paying parents. She revealed:

Well I always felt, and this is deadly honest, like I was second class to the other families because he was on scholarship, you know what I mean. I always felt like I, even though I paid money for him to go there, I always felt like I didn't have as much of a say, you know. (Parent Informant 1)

Several parent informants believed that when they had queried aspects of practices and policies which organised the structure of how their child's boarding school operated as an institution, this action had caused strain in their relationship with the school. However, it was also evident that few parent informants were prepared to put up with cultural insensitivity and racism.

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For example, one informant described her irritation at the cultural insensitivity exhibited by her son's school when she discovered that staff had pressurised him into performing a *Welcome to Country Ceremony*, even though staff at the school were aware her son was not a member of the group that are the traditional custodians of the land on which the school was located. She reported:

There was an assembly and they wanted him [son] to do a Welcome to Country ceremony. They told him to do like ten minutes before, he was given ten minute notice by the Headmaster who said oh you're going to do this, this and this for a welcome to country ceremony. And he [son] goes, but I'm not from here. And it was oh no, no, no, it doesn't matter you're of this background you know. And he was just put on the spot like that. So he had to go up and the Headmaster handed him something, I think it was a didgeridoo on the stage and he had to say a Welcome to Nyungar Country and he was like but I'm not Nyungar. But to them he was Aboriginal so it didn't matter you know. So it was like really tokenised and he could see what was happening. I've taught my kids that that's not what you do. You don't put yourself out there when you're on somebody else's country [the traditional lands of another Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander group] and do all that because that's not right, you know. (Parent Informant 2)

Three parent informants had constructed the perception that their child's boarding school had responded unconvincingly when addressing events of racism. For example, one informant revealed:

The head of boarding, he commented to somebody that oh you know he's Aboriginal, he doesn't even look Aboriginal. As an Aboriginal person you just hate that comment. It doesn't matter how dark you are, if you're proud to be Aboriginal, you're Aboriginal. I made a point of it when he (head of boarding) was up in Karratha, taking my mum along and introducing her and my mum is very dark skinned, I think his jaw dropped to the ground. I mean yeh, there you go. (Parent Informant 7)

Supporting prior assertions that racism continues the impact on Aboriginal family's experiences with education (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Beresford, 2001; Beresford & Gray, 2006; Gray & Beresford, 2008), when a staff member was perceived as having responded inadequately to unacceptable behaviours such as racism, informants indicated it was necessary for them to firmly assert their concerns with the school. In particular, parent informants believed a lack of response to a negative school experience put at risk their child's academic progress, sense of identity and self-worth as a student. For example, one informant described his disappointment and frustration at what he perceived as poor school policy towards addressing an incident of racism that involved his son. He explained how the deputy principal of his son's school had initially telephoned him to explain his son was going to be suspended for punching another pupil. It was

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outlined during the conversation that his son had admitted striking the other pupil; consequently his son was to be suspended as reflected in the school policy. However, after talking with his son on the telephone about the incident, the parent discovered his son had felt uncomfortable during the school investigation process to report that he had been racially taunted by the other pupil prior to punching him. He explained:

I've always told my kids, this is all of them and probably something I shouldn't encourage, but when they get racially abused I say to them the first thing you should do is punch them in the mouth. Straight out, don't turn the other cheek and say well you have a problem; fuck that, get stuck into them. So the only time they ever fight or get in trouble is if someone says something bad about their race. I say to them, you have to control your school and the other students as well, because I know my kids will not tolerate that [racism]; I won't tolerate it. And then you find out that everything has been settled, the Headmaster and teacher then go and get stuck into those other kids for going on and saying those sorts of things. I teach my kids not to take that shit on board, if somebody calls you a Black bastard to your face I tell them smack them, and they do it. If one of my kids does something wrong and needs disciplining, I will punish them. If they break the law, or swear at a teacher I will punish them. But if they go to school and are racially abused, that is something that I will not punish them for. So teachers quickly learn what our stance is. (Parent Informant 9)

As the above statement reveals, whilst acknowledging his parenting approach might clash with school policy, this particular parent nonetheless felt it was imperative to be vigilant and advocate strongly for his son and convey to the school the gravity of such events for him and his family. The above statement also indicates a salient aspect for parent informants in trying to understand the transition experience to boarding school for their children was to reflect on their personal learning curve as an individual and a parent, as well as on how to navigate a way to continue to play a significant parental role in shaping their children's developmental growth. For example, one informant revealed how she felt like she was, *"handing over my authority as a parent, to somebody else to actually look after my children. I found that really, really hard"* (Parent Informant 6). Similarly another reported, *"I just kept going to myself, am I doing this right or not?"* (Parent Informant 11). Indeed, some informants reported having apprehensions that the transition experience to boarding school would underpin estrangement and manifest distance in their parent-child relationship. In particular, they worried that boarding school would negatively impact on the level of closeness and intimacy they had previously enjoyed in their relationship with a child. Subsequently, the following sub-theme explores different ways parents supported their

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children while at boarding school and in turn how this caused many to reconstruct aspects of their approach to parenting.

6.2.2 Parenting style.

All parent informants reported spending significant time honing their parenting skills and style, as well as developing new skills since their child began at boarding school. Two general approaches and strategies emerged that parent informants used to support their children while they were at boarding school. One group of six parents perceived that it was better to take cues from their children as to when they needed help from them as parents. These parents entrusted boarding school staff to look after the wellbeing of their children and equally believed that their children would endeavour to work hard while at boarding school and that they were capable of making decisions and taking their own steps while at boarding school. For example, one parent informant explained, *“you’ve got to give them some breathing space, you got to let him [son] walk alone at times, if he needs us he will call us, let him go a bit”* (Parent Informant 5). Congruent with prior literature describing Aboriginal child-rearing and socialisation practices (Enembaru, 2000; Grote & Rochecouste, 2012; Kearins, 2000; Penman, 2006), this sub-group of parents actively encouraged their children to embrace a high level of autonomy and independence while at boarding school. They also specifically promoted the benefits of exploring opportunities to interact with students from diverse backgrounds. For example, one informant revealed:

I reckon that a wonderful thing about boarding school is meeting new people. I like the idea of not just the Indigenous kids sticking together, I like them [Indigenous students] to be integrated with everybody. I like the [School D] approach, which is they are not so special just because they are Indigenous, but rather because they are a part of the whole school. (Parent Informant 1)

It was evident that this sub-group of parent informants was not ambivalent to anticipating and protecting their children from potential problems while at boarding school, rather they preferred to combine encouragement to explore with a more hands-off approach to parenting. However, as the above statement suggests, this was not an effortless parenting stance taken, as one informant pointed out, *“I worried to a degree. But I also think that you’ve got to be tough, teach them to be independent from us”* and in turn described this approach as, *“tough love, it was tough love”* (Parent Informant 9). It was apparent that by enabling independence and the opportunity to execute judgement autonomously that these parent informants perceived they were encouraging their child to develop important life skills (Grote & Rochecouste, 2012; Penman,

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2006). One parent informant in this sub-group also revealed that a benefit of having her children at boarding school was that it enabled them to develop a sense of confidence in negotiating unfamiliar social situations and to practice social skills such as code-switching:

What I try to teach my kids is to get over that shame business and when you're in situations with White people and that there's a different way of talking. So learning to flick [code-switch] into that way of talking, and then, when they're with their own mob, they talk our way. So that's what they have to get over [shame] and what they have to learn to do [code-switching]. (Parent Informant 11)

It is noteworthy that another parent informant within this sub-group reported that from her experience of having several children attending boarding schools in Perth, the development of domestic life skills was an area that required further attention at boys' only boarding schools. She explained:

I think the boys' are a bit spoiled there [at boarding school]. They rely on, well they don't rely they just get treated like kids when you compare it to a girls' boarding school. They don't do their own washing, they don't have chores and that is pretty luxurious you know, isn't it? I think that they could prepare the boys' better with life skills; domestic life skills like cooking and cleaning and washing laundry. They don't do any of that. Whereas in the girls' boarding schools they do vacuuming and dishes and I don't know what else they do but I know they also have chores. (Parent Informant 1)

By contrast, a second group of five parent informants perceived that they needed to assert their involvement in their child's educational journey at boarding school. For example, one parent revealed, *"in the first year I would speak to him every day"* (Parent Informant 2). This second sub-group described making it their business to get to know all facets that comprised their child's boarding school and they placed significant emphasis on understanding the specific systems and routines of a school, as well as the various roles and responsibilities of the staff members it employed. Whilst it was evident parent informants in this sub-group did not want to be invasive or overprotective, it was also apparent that they identified strongly with being advocates for their children. This hands-on approach appeared to serve a need for these parents to hedge against their own exclusion from the development and growth of their child while they were away from home. Hence, it was perhaps not surprising that several parent informants with this sub-group described developing a highly solution focussed parenting approach which they modelled directly to their children. One of these informants even coined this approach as, *"taking the wall away and opening the door"* (Parent Informant 8). This particular parent explained that she spoke on the

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telephone every evening with her son and each time she engaged him in problem solving exercises to address issues such as feeling lonely and homesickness. This informant explained:

The first thing that I did was built up his support network, similar to learning protective behaviours. So I would ask, now if you can't get mum, who do you get next? Ok who's your contact in the boarding house? Who can help you there? (Parent Informant 8)

This hands-on approach to problem solving suggested parents within this sub-group had constructed a sense that their involvement not only enriched their child's education, but also provided an extra depth of support that would help increase the likelihood their children would succeed at school. Despite implementing a diverse range of parenting styles and support strategies, it emerged across the parent informant group as a whole that establishing good communication routines and protocols was perceived as an essential element of the boarding school experience for their children. For example, one informant reported, *"communication is the key to the success of my children living away"* (Parent Informant 8). Similarly another emphasised, *"communicate well, be honest with each other, and then you'll all get along heaps easier and get to where we all want to get to"* (Parent Informant 11). The next sub-theme explores this further with a particular focus on the experience for parent informants of communicating from a distance and over the telephone with children.

6.2.3 Communication.

In the absence of being physically able to attend to the support needs of their children, it emerged that parent informants' had constructed the perception group that it was important to respond effectively to the unspoken signals that children transmitted to them about their wellbeing. For some informants, their distal proximity when supporting their children presented an initial point of frustration. For example, one parent relayed the sense of helplessness and vulnerability as a parent that he experienced when he was aware that his step-son was unhappy at boarding school, he revealed:

It was very hard to have any sense of influencing those things you know. Like in the last couple of years from time to time, you had to ring up someone else to be able to have a yarn to [step-son]. And that's quite frustrating because you want to help but over the phone it's never as good as being there, so you've got to rely on someone else to feel it [the issue] out and maybe because they don't know [son] as well, they don't know or can't understand the signals he gives off as well, or can't understand where he's coming from, if he does in fact open up. (Parent Informant 3)

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Several parent informants asserted that learning how to translate the tacit signals communicated by their child over the telephone was a critical way in which they could continue to exert a parental role. In addition, a number of informants revealed not only paying close attention to what their child actually said, but also attuning their parental senses to recognise and decipher unspoken behaviours and patterns associated with telephone calls. In particular, monitoring the frequency, time, and duration of telephone calls, but equally the consistency of content in the telephone conversations they had with their children. For example, one parent informant recalled:

When he [son] goes away to school, for the first couple of days he rings three, four times a night, and then on the third day he would settle a bit. When he was away he would not talk to my husband about being homesick and stuff, but he would talk to me and I used to sometimes cry to my husband about it and say it's just getting too hard for him, and he [husband] would say how come he is telling you that and not tell me? So he [son] kept a lot of things hidden away from his father. And when he'd talk to his father, he'd be like nar, nar I'm having a good time, it's really good here, I like this place. But when he talked to me, he'd tell me a different story, I'm really homesick, I don't like it, I want to come back home and stuff. My husband use to say just keep talking to him but don't talk to him about home, or about things happening here good or bad, because you might upset him. (Parent Informant 10)

As the above excerpt indicates, for those parents with partners, listening carefully and cross-checking of conversation content and communication patterns between each other was constructed as significantly assisting them to evaluate the wellbeing of their son while he was away from home. The strategy of cross-checking conversations was perceived by parent informants as enabling them to be consistent in the support they provided to their children and in the messages and expectations that they in turn transmitted back to their children while they were at boarding school. For example, one parent informant explained:

We support each other when it comes to the kids so they can't play one off against the other. So it's like ok if there something that has to be said, we both say it, so it's clear that is coming from both of us. (Parent Informant 2)

However three parent informants did not have a partner to cross-check with. These informants perceived they had to work harder to get a sense of their children's wellbeing while they were away at boarding school. One of these parent informants explained how her initial reaction was to compensate by telephoning the boarding school frequently and by routinely travelling to Perth to be present at her child's school. She reported:

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I felt really, really alienated, there was nobody for me to talk to, so I was a regular parent down there [Perth]. It was like I'd not even left the boys and I was always ringing, and they would say oh mum do you have to ring so much. (Parent Informant 6)

Another single parent informant who was unable to travel to her son's boarding school, described drawing upon cognitive visualisation techniques when talking to her son on the telephone. This parent revealed that visualising her son in her mind while speaking with him on the telephone assisted her to focus beyond the immediate range of auditory cues available to her through over the telephone. Accordingly, for this informant, this visualisation technique enabled her to contextualise the tone of her son's voice with an image of his face while focusing on word selection, including pauses between words, and the speed at which he spoke. This informant asserted this strategy better enabled her insight into his needs and wellbeing; she explained:

The problem is if I had my son in front of me, the body language, I would pick it up immediately. I can't see him over the phone, so I've got to try harder. So when I'm on the phone to him, I imagine that he's right there in front of me. So I can feel and know what he's doing, and I tell him, you're putting your shoes on, and he says how you know! That's ok darling I'm your mum. That's what mums do, we're magic. So when my child's talking the tone of the voice will prompt me, so when he says something and I think I've never heard this tone before, I know something's happening. (Parent Informant 8)

This parent informant went on to describe also using relaxation techniques over the telephone to support her son during moments when she perceived he was unsettled while at boarding school. This informant reported drawing on guided breathing exercises to provide immediate comfort to her son and as a strategy to positively reaffirm their parent-child relationship. In addition, this informant often deliberately combining both visualisation and breathing exercises to assist her to instil a sense of control and confidence in her son while also allowing her to support her son to reframe the apprehensions he was experiencing while at boarding school. This finding supports research that has outlined how during adolescence demonstrating empathy in conjunction with cognitive strategies such as emphasising personal strengths are effective parenting skills in managing unanticipated problems experienced by children (Spring, Rosen, & Matheson, 2002). For example, this particular informant reported:

I was often getting him to take a deep breath, breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out, ok you alright, can you hear mum now? I love you, I miss you too ok. I'm right here, but guess what? What are you there [boarding school] for? So repeatedly I would say remember when we sat down you said you wanted to go to boarding school because of this, this, this and this? Well guess what? You're doing it. So I'm going to remind you again, you are there for this, and this for this, now let me hear you say it.

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Alright then, it's a part of growing, it's a part of being independent and it will boost your self-esteem. (Parent Informant 8)

6.2.4 Milestones and siblings.

Despite parent informants utilising a range of parenting styles and communication strategies to support their children while they were away from home, the absence of a child from the family unit instigated recognition of their own absence as parents during developmental milestones for their children. For example, one informant revealed, *"I felt ill, because I thought oh my god I've lost years with my kids"* (Parent Informant 11). However, rather than lamenting a specific developmental milestone, many of the parent informants believed that missing out on sharing in the everyday aspects and the natural unfolding of their child's maturation and growth as a young person transitioning from childhood to adulthood provoked the strongest emotional response. For example, one informant reflected, *"I think it's just so hard to make that emotional decision to be away from your kids and them growing up away from you. I just feel like I've missed out on a lot you know"* (Parent Informant 2). Indeed, whilst informants indicated they appreciated and trusted the judgement of staff at their child's respective boarding school, several nonetheless grappled with what they perceived as a sense of loss of control and influence as a parent in shaping the developmental trajectory of their child as they transitioned towards adulthood.

A number of parent informants constructed the perception that they had to renegotiate certain cultural milestones. Congruent with perceptions held by student informants and with the assertions of Mellor and Corrigan (2004), four parent informants outlined how the transition to boarding school (a secondary schooling context) coincided with rites of passage ceremonies for their son. For example, one informant explained:

Over the Christmas holidays last year we were over in [name of community] because you know they had the Lore and things like that over there and my nephew was recently all a part of that. You try when [son] is up on holidays to keep that contact when that's happening. It's hard because when [son] is down at school and different things [Lore ceremony and activities] are happening but that's one of those things I suppose; another one of those sacrifices you know. He's down there going to school rather than being up there living in the community and being a part of it. Lore happens once a year with all the children...for [son] participating in Lore was a bit of an issue for him at one point. And that was a concern but we sorted that out. Now it's not a concern because he's gone through; experienced Lore and come out it and he's well balanced. But for a young boy who might be hearing that his cousins up [name of community] way are jumping for turtle and doing things like that, it would be hard. (Parent Informant 2)

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As such statements reveal these parent informants believed that participation in rites of passage ceremonies that formally transitioned young males from childhood to manhood formed an important part of their son's developmental journey in terms of sense of self, identity, wellbeing, and social standing within wider community settings, supporting the assertions of prior literature (Berndt & Berndt, 1996; Bourke & Bourke, 2002; DoE, 2002; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Ryan, 2001; Wettinger & Westerman, 1998; Westerman 2010). Parent informants asserted that participation in such important cultural milestones required careful consideration and negotiation between family, community and their son. As the above statement suggests, often these parent informants' perceived that cultural milestones and participation in rites of passage ceremonies needed to be delayed so as to maintain a commitment to ensuring their child successfully completed their secondary education.

The data revealed that parent informants perceived consequence of sending their son to boarding school was that the family unit as a whole had to also adjust and learn to how cope with having one of its members away from home for extended periods of time. Several informants believed that having a child away at boarding school underpinned changes in the internal dynamics of relationships and the social functioning of their family unit. For example, one informant shared how prior to boarding school her family had lived vicariously through their son's sporting interests. When the son began boarding school the routine for the whole family changed. This informant explained:

It was more of an adjustment for us than him [son]. During the first year he was away that was the worst. We didn't want to be in the north-west because we really missed him, our whole life revolved around him and his sports you know, taking him to training and taking him to sport. It wasn't just me taking him to sport; it was a whole family effort. We would pack up a picnic; pick up the grandma along the way, so yeh it was huge. And then socially you naturally socialised with other parents who had children the same sports as him, we would see a lot of each other and then all of a sudden it was like boom, stop. (Parent Informant 7)

It also emerged that parent informant perceived that a significant aspect of the transition experience for the family unit was negotiating the impact it had on siblings that remained at home. For example, one informant reported that the commencement of boarding school for her son was an equally a significant life event for his younger sister. In this case, the informant outlined how having her son at boarding school had underpinned a heightened sense of affection

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in the younger sister for her older brother, which culminated in a noticeable growth in
independence and social interaction by the younger sister. This informant perceived:

It was a life changing experience for her as well, because she had to adjust to not having her big brother there and his support, and also she thought oh, I think I've got to start going out and doing stuff on my own, she's really stepped up. Even though, she still has times where she really misses her brother, and she will sleep in his room for a whole week after he goes, but she won't say that she misses him, so yeh, its really, really gorgeous.
(Parent Informant 7)

Several informants indicated how they observed that the transition of one child to boarding school had a direct impact on the relationship between siblings. Whilst some parent informants indicated they valued the growth at home in sibling relationships, others described feeling *guilt*, *regret*, and *sad* about the extended periods of time their child attending boarding school spent away from their siblings. For example, one parent informant revealed how:

For his siblings it also leaves a bit of a hole in the family while he is away. It's important for siblings to be around each other and that was one of the things I was always concerned about [step-son] being away, that he wasn't around his brothers and sisters as much.
(Parent Informant 3)

In response to this concern, this particular informant constructed the perception that as a parent she needed to organise additional family activities for each school holidays so that siblings could reaffirm their sense of belonging and connection within the family structure and with extended members of family when they returned home. This informant outlined how:

When the kids come back and all of that, my family you know I have sisters and nephews in [name of town in the Kimberley], we all get together and have a big barbeque when they come back. So they get to have the big get together, something to acknowledge that we've got them back home. It's all about them, it's not about just you're home now, we get yarning and mucking around, and it's good. (Parent Informant 3)

Similarly, other parent informants reported that they deliberately modified their parenting style when their children returned home during school holidays. These informants were conscious that their sons had been away from home and were keen to extend a smooth transition back into home life, routines, and social interactions with family. For example, one informant explained, *"when he comes home we give him plenty of time to rest, sleep in and stuff, try not to give him too much of a hard time"* (Parent Informant 9). Whilst informants reported their agenda was to secure the optimal quality secondary education experience possible for their children, as this segment has already alluded to, an equally important perception parent informants constructed about the

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transition experience was the necessity for them to ensure their children maintained a strong and healthy sense of connection with their respective cultural heritage. The next section explores this major theme further.

6.3 Cultural Heritage.

Parent informants emphasised that they wanted their children to retain a strong sense of connection, belonging, and identity with cultural heritage throughout their secondary education journey, thus supporting the assertions of prior literature (Appleyard, 2002; DoE, 2002; Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Lette et al., 2009; Reynolds, 2005; Russell, 1999). Parent informants did not necessarily perceive that it was the role of boarding schools to facilitate this sense of connection with culture, however a number of informants revealed that as their child increasingly focussed on meeting the academic and co-curricular demands of boarding school and steadily spent more time away from home and community they experienced a feeling of apprehension that a sense of disconnection with cultural heritage may result. For example, one informant revealed, *“being back for a week at a time [during school holidays], you can’t learn those things in that time you know what I mean”* (Parent Informant 2). Similarly another informant reported, *“I was worried that their culture would be lost in the mix of the school”* (Parent Informant 6), and another informant explained, *“culture’s a hard one because you’re constantly trying to find the right balance for them, and then make a decision which is right for where our kids are at”* (Parent Informant 9). Embedded within the above statements was a concern about how they were able as parents to ensure as a family that their child maintained a healthy and strong sense of identity with cultural heritage. However, as such statements also revealed that informants perceived that an important element of the transition experience was finding the balance between participation in cultural activities, attendance at boarding school and a parental desire to ensure their children maintained a sense of connectedness with cultural heritage. Hence, the final sub-theme for this chapter explores parents’ constructions of this sense of balance and the strategies they reported using to support the transmission of culture to their children.

6.3.1 Maintenance and transmission.

Parent informants were quick to distinguish that culture was, *“very specific to groups of people and is an individual experience in terms of how culture may affect you”* (Parent Informant 2), however it emerged that parent informants had perceived that during school holidays it was

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necessary for them to organise cultural excursions as a whole family to counterbalance the impact of schooling away from home on their children's sense of self, identity and belonging. Whole family activities were seen as a powerful way in which they as parents could ensure the transmission of culture and knowledge to their children. Such perspectives are interwoven with kinship and a sense of belonging and membership to the collective, and a sense of self and identity that is intimately connected with ancestry, traditional lands, and Dreaming (Collard, 2000; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Garvey, 2007; Parker, 2010). Parent informants in the current research asserted that time specifically dedicated to interacting meaningfully with the land and language of their family/people, to share the oral history of their family/people and spirituality, and to participate in the performance of traditional practices such as hunting and fishing, helped to affirm their child's sense of belonging and connection with culture. For example, one informant revealed that they went on cultural field trips as a family each school holidays. This informant reported:

Every time when they have holidays we make sure we plan a field trip so we take them out bush for a couple of days and we show them country. We not only take them, but also take my extended family, like my mum, sisters and brothers and all the niece and nephews, they all come. So we plan a big family trip, we take all the kids out, take them to country they've never seen before, tell them the stories and the history about that place. We give them the opportunity to catch up with everybody, enjoy the bush life, walking out in country, sitting down and fishing, shooting kangaroo and cook them over the ashes, just doing what we do as a culture. Just because you go away to get educated, it doesn't mean you have to forget who you are, that's how we were taught, always going out bush with the old people.
(Parent Informant 10)

Consistent with the literature (Appleyard, 2002; DoE, 2002; Lette et al., 2009; Penman, 2006; Purdie, Tripocony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000), parent informants wanted their children to be "*proud of their culture*" (Parent Informant 7) while at school. Moreover, this was seen as serving an important protective function by ensuring an overall sense of positive wellbeing in their children. For example, another parent described how their approach as a family was to organise to travel and visit extended members of family during each school holidays:

Each school holiday we go back over to [name of town in the Kimberley region] because that's more where my family are from and we stay over there for the two weeks. We just hang out with family and do what we do, fishing, camping, hunting, and he really enjoys that you know, so do the other children, they just love to go over there and see everyone. And you know, when they go back to boarding school, yeh they miss everybody, but I think that they appreciate what they have at home more because it's not there every day.
(Parent Informant 2)

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In addition to affirming a sense of belonging and connectedness with culture, these parent informants understood that they were facilitating the transmission of cultural knowledge to their children through organising activities during the school holidays. Congruent with literature asserting that a salient aspect of the parental role for Aboriginal parents is to ensure the cultural heritage and history of their respective people is passed on to their children (DoE, 2002; Gollan & Malin, 2012; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Penman, 2006; Reynolds, 2005), parent informants in the current study perceived that an important role of parenthood was for them was to ensure the transmission of culture and knowledge to the next generation in their family. One parent shared his philosophy towards the transmission of culture and knowledge in his family. He reported:

I have had a fortunate life. I have been around old people, from my grandfathers, to my uncles and they taught me everything I know. A thing that we tell our kids like [name of son] is always learn every day, don't reach a point when you think you know everything. Even though I know as much as I know, I'm still learning as well. I'm always learning and then teaching, and that's what the old people taught me. When he's [name of son] here, it is our job to focus on him, so we teach him as much as we can for Lore, about also about language and culture, so that we give it to our kids, even though they are going away for school to get educated on the White man's knowledge. (Parent Informant 9)

A few parent informants also reported undertaking efforts to try and maintain the continuity of the transmission of culture to children even while they were away from home and at boarding school. One informant in particular described making extensive efforts to post language books and other cultural texts to his son. He also reported utilising the benefits of digital technologies such as iPods to continue the transmission of important aspects of his culture to his son while he was at boarding school, he reported:

We do a lot of history work so we send our son books and stuff like that when he is away. But, the good thing about the iPod these days is that we put a lot of our songs and language on them. That's how come [son] learnt how to sing [ceremonial songs]. There is a picture at home of him going through lore with the iPod on, he's painted all black [black ochre], you can't see his face, but you can see the white iPod hanging out. So you can use technology to continue passing on your culture, and keeping your culture strong. We record everything down, as much as we can, digitalise it and then transfer it on to iPod and bang! Our son goes away to boarding school in Perth somewhere and he can sit down in his leisure time, or walk, or jog, whatever it is he is doing while listening to our culture, our songs that we have here. When he comes back home, it's like he never left, so this is how we go about trying to develop our children. (Parent Informant 9)

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Such statements reveal parent informants believe that building a strong sense of identity and connectedness with cultural heritage acted as a protective factor for the cultural and spiritual wellbeing of their child. For example, one informant asserted that cultural knowledge empowered her children with the necessary awareness to be respectful to ancestral linkages and customary practices that constructed and bound the traditional custodians of the land that their boarding school was located on. She succinctly noted: *“I don’t want them [children] to be offensive to other Aboriginal groups, especially while being away from home”* (Parent Informant 6).

6.4 Chapter summary.

The underlying aim of this chapter was to explore how 11 parent informants, of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities, construct meaning around the experience of having a child studying at a boarding school in Perth, WA. Three major themes emerged and were explored, as were their respective sub-themes, these were, 1) Access, Standards and Quality, and the sub-themes of Declining Local Schools, Opportunity, and Worldliness, 2) Parental Agency and the sub-themes of Parent-School Connection, Parenting Style, Communication, and Milestones and Siblings, and 3) Cultural Heritage and the sub-theme of Maintenance and Transmission. Evidence was provided for each through the provision of examples drawn from the data. The next chapter aims to contextual further the perceptions and understandings shared by student informants by exploring the meaning of the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal secondary school students according to 16 staff informants at boarding schools located in Perth, WA.

7.0 Introduction

Consistent with Chapter 6, the underlying aim of exploring the understandings and experiences of staff was to elaborate a deeper contextualised view of the transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote areas of Western Australia (WA). This chapter addresses the third research question of this study:

How do members of staff at boarding schools construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school, for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities?

The information reported in this chapter explores the beliefs, perceptions, and views shared by 16 staff members drawn from four private boys' boarding located in metropolitan Perth, WA. A diverse range of occupations and roles existed across the staff informant group as a whole, and interviews ranged in length from between 60 to 120 minutes in duration. Each staff informant expressed a desire to share their experiences of supporting male Aboriginal secondary school students their respective at boarding school. A summary of the demographic information for staff informants has been provided in Table 13.

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Table 13

Demographic Informant of Staff Informants

Staff Informant	Boarding School Employed at (e.g., A, B, C, D, E)	Role at Boarding School
Staff Informant 1	D	Teacher
Staff Informant 2	E	Headmaster
Staff Informant 3	C	Teacher, Head of Boarding
Staff Informant 4	B	Teacher, Boarding House Supervisor
Staff Informant 5	E	School Psychologist
Staff Informant 6	D	Teacher, Head of Boarding
Staff Informant 7	B	School Nurse
Staff Informant 8	E	Indigenous Student Support Teacher
Staff Informant 9	C	Teacher, Boarding House Supervisor
Staff Informant 10	C	Deputy Headmaster
Staff Informant 11	B	Teacher
Staff Informant 12	B	Deputy Headmaster
Staff Informant 13	C	Aboriginal Liaison Officer
Staff Informant 14	E	Deputy Headmaster
Staff Informant 15	C	Teacher
Staff Informant 16	B	Headmaster

Note. No staff members from School A volunteered to participate in the present study.

The range of staff informant roles and associated duties was unified by the collective responsibility to care for the welfare of boarding students while they are studying away from home. This common function served to generate a number of shared experiences in respect to supporting male Aboriginal secondary school students at a boarding school in Perth, WA. As presented in Table 14, three major themes were identified across the staff informant group and were entitled; 'Indigenous Education', 'Academic and Social Determinants', and 'Relationships'.

Table 14

Major Themes and related Sub-Themes for the Staff Informant Group

Major Theme	Related Sub-Theme
Indigenous Education	Social Responsibility Opportunity
Academic and Social Determinants	Culture Shock Homesickness Friendship and Peer Support Literacy and Numeracy Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Racism
Relationships	Staff-Student Relationship Staff-Parent Relationship School-Community Relationship

7.1 Indigenous education.

A strong perception existed across the staff informant group that Aboriginal students represented the most vulnerable student population in WA in terms of retention and participation rates at the secondary school level. Several informants revealed being worried about the *dilemma* (Staff Informant 10) and *plight* (Staff Informant 2) of Indigenous Education, while others described feeling *anger* (Staff Informant 8), and *frustration* (Staff Informant 3) with the ongoing circumstance whereby Aboriginal students struggle to thrive and experience success more so than any other population of secondary school students. Consistent with student and parent informants, staff informants emphasised that the context of Indigenous Education in regional and remote areas of the WA was further compounded by a disparity in secondary education standards and the lack of equivalent opportunities available at schools in Perth. For example, one informant reported:

If you go to a town like [name of small community located in the West Kimberley] they're proud of getting attendance rates for Aboriginal kids up to 70% and that sounds great, but when you think that through, that means every two weeks every kid misses three days of school. Here [School D] you cannot get somebody to graduate to Year 12 doing that. All the literature will tell you that those kids whose attendance is under 90% are at risk academically because of how much they simply miss. It is physically impossible for private

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or government schools in remote areas to offer the equivalent academic opportunities. It just can't be done. Even in [larger town located in the West Kimberley] with all the academic opportunities that it can offer as a town. They [Aboriginal students] just aren't going to get the opportunities up there compared to if you send them to boarding school in Perth. That's the bottom line you know. You wouldn't send them away if the educational opportunities were as good where they live, but they're not. (Staff Informant 1)

Aboriginal boarding students were linked by several staff informants with a broader context of social disadvantage. For example, one informant reported, *"they're disadvantaged before they arrive"* (Staff Informant 8), while another referred to the *"disadvantaged element with Aboriginal students"* (Staff Informant 12). When expanding on this belief a number of informants conveyed how Aboriginal communities in regional and remote areas of the State were over-represented in terms of social disadvantage and were grappling with a number of socio-economic problems such as poverty, unemployment, substance use and dependency, as well as having to contend with dilapidated housing conditions and overcrowded living arrangements in these homes. For example, one informant relayed the sense of hopelessness he perceived at one Aboriginal community and likened it to, *"almost like a refugee situation where they [families] were pleading with us, please take my boy out of here"* (Staff Informant 6). He went on to report:

One of our Aboriginal boys whose home I visited on my trip up to [name of Aboriginal community], he was living with his mum in one of the Aboriginal communities around [name of town]. We visited the mum at home and just sat in the front yard. Just doing that you get a sense of the level of despair, lack of direction, and poverty for the people living in that community. Obviously not a lot of them [residents of Aboriginal community] are employed, people sitting around during the day, wrecked car bodies and broken windows everywhere. And his mum was saying to us what it meant for this young fella and how happy he was at [school name], saying he's got everything she wanted for him at [school name], he's got his own bed, fresh sheets, he's got his own clothes, food at every meal time. (Staff Informant 6)

A number of staff informants perceived that the impact of social disadvantage particularly extended to young Aboriginal males and reinforced this belief by emphasising their awareness of low retention rates to Year 12, high unemployment figures, or by highlighting the link between low school achievement and an early intersection with the criminal justice system and juvenile detention centres for many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males in WA. For example, one staff informant stated:

In the current secondary schooling system their [Aboriginal students] literacy and numeracy is so far behind that what we're trying to do is actually give them the skills to be positive citizens. Why is it that in standardised literacy and numeracy testing in both WA

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and NT [Northern Territory] Indigenous students are way behind the rest of the country? Why is it that 90% of Banksia's population is Indigenous? [Banksia is a juvenile detention centre for offenders aged 10 to 18 years, administered by the Department of Corrective Services] Why is that Indigenous literacy and numeracy rates are so far below Caucasian ones? (Staff Informant 2)

Such statements reveal, staff informants associated low literacy and numeracy with impeding Aboriginal males from attaining optimal education and life outcomes, a finding similar to assertions made in prior literature (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Martin, 2010; Zubrick et al., 2006). In trying to make sense of a number of social determinants including low participation and retention rates, a significant disparity between regional and remote secondary education standards, and poor literacy and numeracy, staff informants perceived that their individual school communities had an obligation and social responsibility to contribute positively to improving educational experiences for Aboriginal students and families. For example, one informant emphasised, *"schools like ours has an obligation to ensure we make an effort to engage disadvantaged populations"* (Staff Informant 12). Similarly, *"I think fundamentally we [name of School C] have an obligation to provide the opportunity for them [Aboriginal students] to get back to the real basics of their literacy and numeracy"* (Staff Informant 3). Another informant revealed:

For me it's a social responsibility, a social justice issue that the school needs to take on. Whatever problems we've got with Aboriginal people with lack of education, the lack of employment, shortened life spans, and all the problems we know that statistically impact on Aboriginal people, we need to ask, what can we do to help? (Staff Informant 6)

Despite being a commonly held perception, a diverse range of fluid, sometimes contradictory and at times seemingly discrete values and views towards Indigenous Education underpinned staff informants sense of social responsibility. The following segment of this chapter will explore these perceptions in more detail.

7.1.1 Social responsibility.

Whilst acknowledging that boarding school was not the first choice for all Aboriginal families in regional and remote communities, a number of staff informants' sense of social responsibility was constructed around a seemingly pragmatic outlook. These informants suggested that boarding schools in Perth were uniquely placed to reach out to families in regional and remote areas of the State. Foremost these informants perceived that in light of the dearth of local secondary education pathways available in regional and remote areas, and the challenges created

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by the geographic scale of WA as a State, boarding school equated to a practical option via which families could bypass these constraints and to a limited extent, exercise choice with regards to the experience their children had with secondary schooling. In addition, these informants often supported this perception by outlining how boarding school offered the benefits of well-established infrastructure and systems to support students such as on-site residential facilities to accommodate students, a diverse range of subjects and academic pathways to select from, pastoral care systems, sporting programs, and access to other co-curricular activities.

Other staff informants revealed that their sense of social responsibility extended beyond the premise of pragmatism and instead incorporated the wellbeing of the school community as a whole. These informants emphasised the positive benefits that a diverse student population brought to the cultural, social, and learning environment of a school community. For example, one informant asserted the performance of traditional dance, didgeridoo playing, painting and artwork by Aboriginal students were important because, *“we do not only want to educate the Indigenous boys, we want to educate the other students as well, and hopefully we’re trying to create a better world”* (Staff Informant 14). For other staff informants their sense of social responsibility was couched within the mission statement, values, and underpinning faith of their school community. For example, one informant remarked:

How can you say you’re a school for everybody when you don’t have any Indigenous kids in it? Even though we’re a Church of England school we take anyone of any religion from anywhere around the world, well if you’re going to promote yourself as that sort of school, then how can you do that if you don’t have any of the Indigenous population represented at the school.” (Staff Informant 1)

By contrast, other informants revealed their sense of social responsibility extended beyond the cultural climate of a school community. Rather, it also embodied a belief in the benefits of education to empower Aboriginal young people with the skills and self-assurance to disentangle the ubiquitous ways in which stereotypes and racism continue to shape the individual and collective experiences of Aboriginal people in wider society. For example, the Aboriginal Liaison Officer at School C reported:

It’s about teaching the boys [Aboriginal students] how to tackle those negative stereotypes found throughout the community, so they are they aware of difficulties these images cause Aboriginal people, where Aboriginal people are all placed in the one box and called lazy drunks that are good for nothing. (Staff Informant 13)

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Such perspectives support the assertions of Purdie, Tripocony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, and Gunstone (2000) that emphasised the impact of negative television, radio, and newspaper images on Indigenous young people's sense of self-identity. Similarly, the Indigenous Student Support Teacher at School E revealed how her sense of social responsibility equally transcended school mission statements and entailed equipping Aboriginal students with the knowledge and confidence to question the neutrality, legitimacy, and hegemony of dominant discourse and socio-political constructions present within wider society. This informant revealed:

We're doing this because I want these boys [Aboriginal students] to go out there and rock the boat and really challenge their oppression. And bring forward the things that their forbearers were doing in the 1960s. That White oppression got so great during the 1970s and 1980s that in the 1990s and today it's now a situation where Aboriginal people have got to get out there and challenge it. I want them [Aboriginal students] to be leaders and be really literate and numerate and be able to speak in public so they can deal with the injustices. I work with these boys [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students] and build them up, get them angry about things so I can get them to understand that you don't have to sit back and put up with that, you don't have to put up with racism and injustices. I teach them how to fight the fight. (Staff Informant 8)

As such statements reveal, for several staff informants their sense of social responsibility was linked with cultivating a schooling experience which empowered and motivated Aboriginal students to unmask historical, political, and societal mechanisms of oppression for Aboriginal people in wider society.

7.1.2 Opportunity.

Consistent with student and parent informants, many staff informants had constructed the transition experience to boarding school as an *opportunity* for Aboriginal students from regional and remote communities. The notion of opportunity was associated with the prospect that completing secondary education would enable students to break the cycle of disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal families and communities in regional and remote areas of WA. However, it was also linked with awareness that a number of Aboriginal boarding students were recipients of scholarships and bursaries. Notwithstanding these perspectives, informants reported *"it's about giving talented Indigenous boys the opportunity to become talented Indigenous community leaders"* (Staff Informant 2); *"I think with the family they want to see them take that opportunity and do something positive"* (Staff Informant 3); *"I think we're giving Indigenous boys real opportunities to become leaders not only within our society but also within their own society"*

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(Staff Informant 4); *“they do need to understand that they are being given a very, very, very good opportunity”* (Staff Informant 7); *“I want these Aboriginal boys to have an opportunity”* (Staff Informant 8); *“they have the opportunity of getting out and involved with other things rather than staying at home and getting involved in all the negativities”* (Staff Informant 13); and that, *“it’s knowing that these boys [Aboriginal students] have the opportunity to have a different life”* (Staff Informant 14). Such statements suggest staff informants perceived the long-term individual and collective benefits for Aboriginal students from regional and remote communities far outweighed the short and medium term adjustments that students had to contend with.

By contrast, some informants revealed their perception of boarding school was conflicted by an acute awareness and sense of discomfort with wealthy private boarding schools specifically promoting scholarships and bursaries that encourage Aboriginal families in remote communities to send their children to schools a long way from home. These informants were particularly concerned about the familial and wider social implications for students, families, and regional and remote communities, as well as inherent power imbalances within processes used to select Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for scholarships and bursaries to attend a boarding school in Perth. For example, one informant revealed:

You know, this prestigious White school sends people up to choose the best Aboriginal students and then says we will take you. It just seems a bit patronising to me. It should be more about the community choosing who should come down and that we are grateful they have sent us their boys. (Staff Informant 11)

Similarly, another staff informant emphasised:

I think part of our selection criteria should be to get out into the communities. We have to go and talk to the teachers, parents and the community members about these boys [Aboriginal students] and talk about their desire to come into schools like this. I think if we’re not doing these things then we’re potentially setting some of the boys for failure; because if we’ve not got the whole picture of who these boys are, we’re potentially putting unrealistic expectations on the boys and families and making their transition to life here more difficult than what it may need to be (Staff Informant 3)

7.2 Academic and Social Determinants.

Consistent with perceptions held by student and parent informants, staff informants perceived that the transition experience to boarding involved Aboriginal boarding students contending with a range of feelings. For example, staff informants reported being aware that some students were *excited* (Staff Informant 4), *“very nervous”* (Staff Informant 10), and others

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observed that some students were *“so shy and unable to communicate that he didn’t say one word”* (Staff Informant 8) as well as *“be a little bit withdrawn until they start to feel comfortable with people and their surrounds”* (Staff Informant 12). Similarly, the majority of staff informants perceived that the transition to boarding school presented a number of concurrent academic and social challenges including navigation of a physically larger school campus and learning the systems and procedures of a new school environment. For example, one informant reported:

It’s a big school and it’s a complex organisation. So on top of transitioning into a brand new environment, there’re all those initially stressful issues like being in a place at that particular time, with no one telling you to go to class and no bells ringing to let you know to go to class, but you’ll be held accountable to be here or there on time. And here’s your timetable and here’s your diary and you need to write this in your diary as homework and have this done by this time, and this is done by that time on this week. It’s all that kind of stuff, the expectations, not just academic ones, but also the personal organisation ones and the way that this school is structured. (Staff Informant 5)

It is worthy of attention that a few staff informants believed the transition experience to boarding school was the same for Aboriginal students as it was for all boarding students. To this end, these informants reported the initial period of adjustment *“wasn’t such a problem for them [Aboriginal students]”* (Staff Informant 7) and that the *“challenges are no different to those for any other distance boy [boarding student]...[as] most boys are full of fear and trepidation about what’s ahead of them”* (Staff Informant 9). It was evident that these informants perceived that having an ethnically diverse student population and a history as a boarding school of enrolling international students within their school community with a similar experience being shared by all boarding students. However, by contrast the majority of staff informants believed that a number of specific academic and social determinants influenced the transition experience for Aboriginal boarding students. In particular, it emerged that five distinct academic and social determinants were perceived as particularly influencing the transitions experience, these were Culture Shock, Homesickness, Peer Support, Literacy and Numeracy, and Prejudice and Racism. The following section will explore these perceptions in more detail.

7.2.1 Culture shock.

A large proportion of staff informants believed that the transition to boarding school for Aboriginal students involved contending with *“coming into a school environment that has a very different value system to what they’re use to”* (Staff Informant 3) and negotiating *“real cultural differences”* (Staff Informant 15). Consistent with student informants, a number of staff

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informants perceived that this experience presented as *“a shock to the Indigenous boys”* (Staff Informant 14) and as *“a culture shock”* (Staff Informant 3; Staff Informant 4; Staff Informant 8, Staff Informant 13). In trying to make sense of this shock, informants indicated that at the student level one element involved, *“a huge cultural difference between the backgrounds that Indigenous students come from and backgrounds of other boarding students”* (Staff Informant 4); with one informant emphasising that, *“for an Aboriginal kid that comes here from Halls Creek [town in the East Kimberley] most of the other kids at [School D] would be like kids from Mars”* (Staff Informant 1). Such perceptions were prefaced by outlining awareness that students were often relocating from a smaller day school environment that was predominantly populated by Aboriginal students, to living in a school environment within which Aboriginal students were a minority ethnic group. For example, one informant reported:

They’ve come out of schools where there are often lots of other Aboriginal people and come into a really White, White world. All the teachers are White, there’s no Aboriginal people around, not in the streets, not in the school, so they feel like a real minority and are really challenged by this, I reckon for a majority of them it’s a slog, day to day to be living here and experiencing being a minority in the dominant culture. (Staff Informant 8)

Notwithstanding these issues, at the school level staff informants commonly referred to differences in *expectations* when describing the sense of shock experienced by Aboriginal students. However, few informants precisely defined what they meant by expectations, preferring to utilise the term in an omnipresent fashion. For example, informants asserted, *“adjusting to the routine of the school and how that all works but also the expectations of the school”* (Staff Informant 4); and *“vast differences exist in the expectations of the school and how the Aboriginal boys believe life is supposed to operate”* (Staff Informant 5). By carefully reading how staff informants responded to the sense of shock experienced by Aboriginal students, it emerged the premise of expectations was derived to incorporate perceived differences in value systems. To this end, some informants perceived that adjusting to different expectations and value systems was a reality of attending boarding school and was the same for all new boarding students. For example one informant revealed:

Some of them [Aboriginal students] struggle with the expectations that we have of them, but it’s about being able to look at those values and say I’ve seen them, they’re real and I need to adjust and align myself with them. Not give up where I come from but just realise that I come from a different value system, into this value system and just switch into that. (Staff Informant 3)

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However, the data revealed that the majority of staff informants perceived encountering new and diverse expectations and values systems brought to boarding school by students, was an opportunity to pause for self-reflection as an individual and importantly as an opportunity for development and growth as an educational practitioner. For example one informant remarked, *“I’ve had to rationalise it myself you know, do my expectations of them match their own expectations of them?”* (Staff Informant 6). These informants perceived that such experiences provided the opportunity to refine their teaching pedagogy in the academic setting and pastoral care practices within the boarding house context.

In addition, but consistent with the perceptions of parent informants, several staff informants believed that in a supportive school environment the experience of negotiating new expectations and diverse value systems as an opportunity for Aboriginal boarding students to learn and practice social skills important for the transition into adulthood. For example, the Indigenous Student Support Teacher at School E revealed, *“the boys [Aboriginal students] have the chance to learn how to code-switch¹⁴ and they learn pretty quickly about what’s Wadjella¹⁵ rules and what’s home way [rules]”* (Staff Informant 8). However, worthy of attention and a somewhat candid insight into some contributions made to discussions had by Headmasters of private boys’ boarding schools in Perth, was provided by one informant when he divulged:

...this is what I think most boarding schools do when they approach giving an Indigenous kid a go to integrate into the life of the school...in effect they [Aboriginal students] are expected to assimilate; and I’ve certainly heard Headmasters at the PSA level [Public Schools Association, Perth] talk about assimilating Indigenous kids into their schools. (Staff Informant 2)

As outlined in Chapter 1, the premise of *assimilating Indigenous kids* within mainstream education is a construct laden with painful memories and negative socio-historical connotations for many Aboriginal people and families in WA (Beresford, 2012a; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haebich, 2008; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997). Arguably, such statements as the one above support the assertions of Purdie et al., (2000) that suggested some educators have little awareness or idea of the kinds of experiences lived by Aboriginal people and families.

¹⁴ Code-switching has been described as when bilingual individuals switch between the codes of different forms of language to communicate with others (DoE, 2002).

¹⁵ Aboriginal Language word meaning any non-Aboriginal person (DoE, 2002).

7.2.2 Homesickness.

Congruent with student informants, it emerged that staff informants perceived disconnection from family and dislocation from home underpinned the onset of homesickness for many Aboriginal boarding students. Homesickness was described by informants as a *difficult, hard, and stressful* experience for students. Moreover, several informants revealed being surprised by the frequency, intensity, and duration of homesickness experienced by Aboriginal students to the extent that it caused them to worry about the impact it might have on their overall social and emotional wellbeing. For example, one informant reported:

Just the intensity of homesickness; for all intents and purposes during the day [name of student] achieving well in class, he actually likes it here, he loves the sport, but there is this element in him, that when he gets back to the boarding house he misses home so intensely that it was really quite disturbing at times. (Staff Informant 10)

In contrast to prior reviews of the literature that have correlated homesickness with younger chronological age (Thurber & Sigman, 1998; Thurber, 1999) and research that has constructed homesickness as a temporary and short term psychological state for boarding students who settled down over the school year (Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Johnstone, 2001) staff informants in the present research suggested homesickness was an omnipresent risk factor for Aboriginal boarding students. However, this finding is congruent with Duncan (1990) who described homesickness as an ongoing issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students in Queensland. For example, the Head of Boarding at School D revealed his surprise and frustration when homesickness caused one Aboriginal student who began as a boarding student in Year 8, to leave school and to return home just prior to graduation in Year 12, he reported:

I think that the boarding environment here is so different for some of these Aboriginal boys. I mean it's much more different for the Aboriginal boys than it is for most of the others. I worked really hard with one boy in the boarding house, he was pretty capable academically but his homesickness was so strong that even after five years here, he was just really keen to go home. And that's fine, I have no problem with them going home, but he had a lot of academic aptitude and at that time, he was pursuing a career in wild life and nature. (Staff Informant 6)

Somewhat at variance with the above statement, a common perception held across the staff informant group was that the younger that Aboriginal students began at boarding school, the greater the likelihood students would successfully negotiate issues such as homesickness during

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the transition experience and in turn adjust more smoothly into life as a boarding student. For example, one informant revealed:

When you take them [Aboriginal boarding students] in Year 8 they're all in the same boat and they are lead through the whole process of finding out how they fit in academically, socially, and how to live in boarding, whereas if they come in Years 10, 11 and 12, then it's very, very difficult. (Staff Informant 1)

Similarly, another informant revealed:

I'm not saying that you get them [Aboriginal boarding students] in and indoctrinate them, but if you get them in Year 8, they get used to the system so that by the time we churn them out at the other end [Year 12] being away from home is natural and normal for them. The benefit for any child coming in Year 8 over Year 10 is they're shaped into the mould and develop really strong friendships. (Staff Informant 7)

In addition, these informants perceived that sharing in an induction process with same aged new boarding students held other important social benefits for Aboriginal boarding students, such as facilitating developmentally timely and potentially important supportive friendships and peer networks. This finding supports the assertions of prior literature that fitting-in and making friends are both key psychological needs for adolescent students during times of transition (Downs, 2003; Harms, 2005; Howard & Johnson, 2004; Pereira & Pooley, 2007; Perry & Pauletti, 2011; Rutter, 2007).

7.2.3 Friendships and peer support.

Congruent with student informants, a number of staff informants outlined the importance of forging new friendships to the success of transition experiences to boarding school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For example, one informant reported:

The ability to make friends within either the Indigenous or the non-Indigenous boys helps a lot and makes them [Aboriginal boarding students] comfortable. If they feel like they've got a strong friendship base down here [Perth], I think that's one of the key attributes for them to be successful. If they become isolated or take a long time to come out of their shell, then I think it becomes quite a quick road to home. (Staff Informant 4)

In addition, consistent with student informants a salient perception evident across the staff informant group was the positive benefits and function that establishing new friendships with older Aboriginal boarding students played for new and younger Aboriginal boarding students. A number of informants emphasised that Aboriginal boarding students formed highly supportive relationships with each other. For example, one informant revealed:

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I think the camaraderie that the Indigenous boarding students share. They really look after one another, and they've got each other's best interests at heart. So when one of them doesn't come back [at the end of school holidays] there is a level of concern where they will actually get on the phone and ring each other and talk to each other. (Staff Informant 3)

As such statements reveal, staff informants perceived that new Aboriginal boarding students tended to feel more comfortable initially building friendships with other Aboriginal boarding students and using this friendship foundation as their primary support network as they navigated life in a new school environment. This finding supports the assertions of Duncan (1990) that described how former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students strongly advocated for vertical peer support programmes. For example, one informant reported, “often the younger Indigenous boys use the older Indigenous boys as role models, for support, as big brothers, to help them find their way through the boarding environment” (Staff Informant 5). However, the perceived tendency of Aboriginal boarding students to first build strong friendships with other Aboriginal students was not uniformly viewed as a positive attribute. For example, one informant believed that at times this propensity impeded for new Aboriginal boarding students, the opportunity to develop a wider breadth of friendships, he reported:

We're finding our kids [Aboriginal students] tend to then cling together a little bit, as a cohort within the day school community and also in the boarding school community. Which is good but it can have negative connotations as well so getting them to feel at home here and to mix with other boys and create links outside of their own Aboriginal network, and spending weekends with other boys that is a real challenge, a real difficulty. (Staff Informant 6)

By contrast, several staff informants perceived that having an older family member such as an older brother or cousin already at a boarding school, significantly increased the likelihood that new and younger Aboriginal students would make a smoother transition to boarding school life. This finding contrasts with prominently referenced international research conducted by Fisher, Frazer, and Murray (1984) that suggested the presence of siblings at boarding school served to create competitive pressures and heightened student's difficulties in adjusting to boarding school life. However, it is consistent with more recent research involving 38 Year 8 students boarding at a State Government run hostel in WA, which asserted the presence of older siblings made the transition to schooling away from home easier for younger students (Mason, 1997). For example, one staff informant revealed:

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One of the positive things that I see is having brothers coming through the school and using them as support. I've also had a few phone calls recently about cousins of this boy who are pretty keen to come here because they feel much more confident in coming into this system if there's an older person who's been here and experienced it. (Staff Informant 4)

The scale of the perceived positive benefits of Aboriginal peers on the transition experience to boarding school for new and younger Aboriginal boarding students, caused several staff informants to assert that a 'critical mass' of Aboriginal boarding students needed to exist within each year cohort at boarding school. For instance, one informant reported, *"I have a philosophy that we need to have three or four boys in every year group. You've got to have a number that's big enough but not too big. You've got to have a critical mass"* (Staff Informant 2). Similarly, while explaining why School D was predisposed to annually offering three or four boarding scholarships specifically to Aboriginal students in Year 8 rather than during upper secondary school Years of 10, 11, and 12, he revealed:

We thought you can't just take one or two; if you're going to make it work then you have to take at least two or three every year and make it so they have some peer support. You want to try and get at least three in Year 8 because they support each other and travel home with each other and there's a whole support thing that comes with that. Also, they usually know of each other, or are related, so they've got someone they already know which is important because they can then share experiences and support each other. (Staff Informant 1)

7.2.4 Literacy and numeracy.

Similar to parent informants, staff informants tended to describe the experience of adjusting to the academic aspect of boarding school for male Aboriginal boarding students from in terms of a *struggle*. For example, many staff informants conveyed that, *"they've struggled academically"* (Staff Informant 1), *"they really struggle"* (Staff Informant 2), *"some of them struggle with the academic side of things"* (Staff Informant 10), and *"academically they've struggled and that causes a real dent in their confidence"* (Staff Informant 15). It was highly evident that staff informants closely associated the perception of struggling with encountering gaps in literacy and numeracy fundamentals, as well as with limited familiarity and understanding of key curriculum concepts, supporting concerns about disparities in literacy and numeracy reported by State, national and international reports (Department of Indigenous Affairs [DIA], 2005; Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2010; Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman, & Buckley, 2011). For example, one informant reported, *"sometimes*

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their literacy and numeracy is too far behind for them to catch up" (Staff Informant 2). Similarly another informant revealed:

Generally speaking I find that most Aboriginal boys that come to me have literacy and numeracy problems. It doesn't matter if they come from [name of Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory] or [name of Aboriginal community in the Kimberley region] they all have the same problem, it's not to say that other children don't have those problems but they have it in a completely different sort of way. (Staff Informant 9)

Several staff informants believed that the magnitude of the gap in literacy and numeracy made it difficult at times for many Aboriginal boarding students to access curriculum content. Moreover, these informants were particularly concerned about the implications of this experience on Aboriginal boarding students' wellbeing in terms of self-esteem and self-concept as learners. For example, one staff informant reported:

Academically many of these boys [Aboriginal students] are coming from quite a low base point and if you're putting them into a mainstream class and their realising they can't do the work and then dropping them down, dropping them down, dropping them down, it's not such a good thing for their self-esteem. (Staff Informant 4)

Whilst staff informants acknowledged that as a school community they had significantly more educational resources at their disposal than most regional and remote schools, several informants questioned if their respective school was actually able to bridge the gap in literacy and numeracy support needs that Aboriginal students from regional and remote communities arrived with. Similarly, other informants questioned the premise that the decision to attend boarding school equated to substantive academic advancement for Aboriginal students. For example, one informant reported:

I think if we are going to bring Aboriginal boys down [to Perth] we've got to know that they have a certain level of literacy and numeracy. Otherwise, I think as a minimum we need to dedicate more resources to assisting Aboriginal boys with the academic side of the transition. I don't think we're skilled up enough to cope with some of the needs and the learning difficulties that they've got. (Staff Informant 3)

Such statements reveal some staff informants experienced a sense of conflict over disparity between the scale of the literacy and numeracy needs of Aboriginal boarding students and the limited support resources available at their schools to remediate literacy and numeracy difficulties. In addition, a number of staff informants indicated that many Aboriginal boarding students had to contend with the complex and interwoven challenge of trying to access a

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curriculum at boarding school delivered in a language that was not their first or preferred language. For example, one informant reported:

The fact that for many of these boys [Aboriginal students] English is the second language or third choice for them is a really interesting thing. I probably wasn't aware of that as much as I should have been but also I don't think that anybody down here at the school would be too aware of that. (Staff Informant 4)

By contrast, a few informants located the root cause of “struggling academically” (Staff Informant 6) within the students themselves. Despite being aware that often Aboriginal boarding students had relocated several thousand kilometres to attend a school away from home and family, it emerged these informants queried the students’ personal motivation and academic goals, with minimal reflection on teaching strategies and pedagogy. For example, one informant reported “I’ve found that the Indigenous boys don’t seem to have the same academic resilience” (Staff Informant 6). Whilst another informant revealed:

Typically with them [Aboriginal students] they will give it up completely. Reject it totally. Now that’s a thing in their culture, if you’re not going to be good at it, or able to do it well, then don’t do it at all. While in our culture most kids will keep on trying. (Staff Informant 1)

Such statements raised a number of insights into the constructions of these particular informants. Foremost, how seemingly well-intentioned informants did not perceive that schools and classrooms are socially constructed sites defined by human agency and reciprocity (Byrne & Munns, 2012; Gower & Byrne, 2012; Gergan, 2011). But also how such comments position and constructed Aboriginal students as powerless to the influence of culture and as having no sense of autonomy and strength. In addition, how such statements normalise prejudice and stereotypes within the pedagogical practice of school staff and educational institutions (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Sarra, 2005) and that how such notions operate under the assumption that all students have had equitable access to the same educational experiences, support, and opportunities prior to transitioning to a new school (Nelson & Hay, 2010). In an important sense, however, such statement suggested that some informants did not seemingly realise how such assertions can be interpreted as absolving themselves of responsibility to understand how their own actions and views are linked with the experience at school had by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

7.2.5 Prejudice, stereotypes, and racism.

Consistent with perceptions held by students and parent informants, it emerged that staff informants believed that prejudice, stereotypes, and covert racism impacted on the experience of boarding school for Aboriginal students. For example, one informant remarked:

One of the Indigenous boys was late or didn't show up for an exam or something and this person was like, 'oh god these bloody Indigenous kids are not turning up for exams again...they should be able to come down here and just fit in'. (Staff Informant 11)

Such statements reveal staff informants were aware of instances of prejudice, stereotyping, and covert racism within their respective school communities and were conscious that such comments contributed to overlooking the individuality of students and the construction of an ordinary school based event into a race bounded issue. An extensive amount of literature has connected teaching pedagogies and practices and importantly, teacher attitudes, as significantly influencing Aboriginal students academic attainment, retention, and participation rates at school (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Byrne & Munns, 2012; Craven et al., 2005; Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Godfey, Partington, Harslett, & Richer, 2001; Nelson & Hay, 2010). Descriptions provided by staff informants in the current research suggested that instances of prejudice, stereotyping, and covert racism were not perceived as discrete or isolated issues. For example, one staff informant reported, *"I think there is a lot of covert racism at this school and it's really surprised me at times how it has bubbled to the surface"* (Staff Informant 15). Several staff informants went further to reveal they perceived their school community was grappling with episodes of prejudice, stereotyping, and racism being experienced by Aboriginal students. This perspective was particularly salient at School E as at some point each informant from that school either explicitly mentioned or alluded to their awareness of instances of prejudice, stereotyping, or racism. The Indigenous Student Support Teacher reported:

When [name of student] was abused racially by a teacher, he came to me and said a teacher had said something really inappropriate to him in front of the class and really shamed him out. It was the first time the school had told off a teacher. It took a lot of guts for him to do that and report that teacher because it carried repercussions in that relationship for him, because he ended up leaving that class. But the teacher had to apologise. I mean racist staff; the ignorance...that's the thing that's probably personally upset me the most. (Staff Informant 8)

Similarly, the School Psychologist at School E perceived that prejudice and covert racism was an issue of sufficient magnitude within the wider student and staff population that he commented:

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I don't think that [School E] is a blatantly racist environment but I think there is something's that they're [Aboriginal students] struggling with here, that other groups are probably not as students exposed to at this school. There were three or four boys in the boarding house who were hassling an Indigenous student and the language they used was increasingly upsetting to him, which was stressing him out, until the school dealt with it, suspending one of the boys and turning that issue on its head. In saying that, I still see students that are angry and aggressive about really explicit instances of racism. And there is still, I'm not sure what the word is for it, hidden, no not hidden, there is still a kind of passive racism that is kind of evident in some of the staff and some of the kids as well.
(Staff Informant 5)

The Deputy Headmaster at School E alluded to this circumstance and remarked, *"I think that providing staff with professional development about teaching kids from different cultural backgrounds is important for us"* (Staff Informant 14), as did the Headmaster of School E who revealed:

I think that we've got some older staff that have been here a long time. They are fairly conservative and right wing you know, I guess they'd almost say why are they [Aboriginal students] getting special treatment? So that's a challenge for us. (Staff Informant 2)

Collectively these statements provide support for Duncan (1990) who asserted racism needed to be addressed systemically after describing how at two Queensland boarding schools former Aboriginal boarding students perceived that school administrators, teachers, boarding supervisors, support staff, students, and members of the wider school community engaged in blatant and open racism. These findings also support other research that has confronted the taken-for-granted assumption that prejudices, covert racism, and stereotypes in educational practice is a thing of the past for Aboriginal young people at school (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008). Similarly, this finding aligns with prior literature emphasising that despite a plethora of government policies, strategies, and programs aimed at combating such issues, they continue to negatively impact on experiences that Aboriginal young people have in education settings (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Beresford, 2001; Beresford & Gray, 2006; Craven, et al., 2005; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Lette et al., 2009).

7.3 Relationships.

Across the staff informant group a considerable amount of focus was directed at the influence of relationships on the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal students from regional and remote communities. In particular, staff informants perceived how establishing positive relationships in multiple settings (i.e., student, family, and community setting) were

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imperative to building a supportive foundation for Aboriginal students while they schooled away from home. For example, several staff informants emphasised, *“If you don’t have family support from my experience there is a very, very good chance the student won’t last the distance”* (Staff Informant 1). Similarly *“I guess what we’ve learnt is how important the family connection is to the success of a student”* (Staff Informant 2), and another informant revealed, *“I certainly know for someone like [name of student] the support he has had is just phenomenal from his community and from his parents”* (Staff Informant 3). Subsequently, the following segment explores constructions of the staff-student relationship, staff-parent relationship, and the school-community relationship as perceived by staff informants.

7.3.1 Staff-student relationship.

Congruent with the literature (Appleyard, 2002; Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Godfey, Partington, Harslett, & Richer, 2001; Partington, 2003; Prout 2008, 2009), staff informants asserted that allocating time to build rapport and foster a relationship with Aboriginal students had a critical and positive impact on the transition experience to boarding school life. For example, an informant stated, *“with the Indigenous kids I find it’s about making time and building rapport really”* (Staff Informant 11). Similarly another reported, *“they do develop good relationships with our staff, but it takes time”* (Staff Informant 6), and another purported, *“spending a lot of time on rapport building, much more than just one or two sessions”* (Staff Informant 5). Several informants perceived spending time to build relationships was about nurturing a sense of trust with Aboriginal students, as one explained, *“I think for these boys you’ve got to earn their trust first. They’re so sharp, if they think you’re bullshitting them or pulling the wool over their eyes or you’re not sincere, they’ll work it out so quickly”* (Staff Informant 7). The data revealed that several informants also perceived the time spent fostering rapport with Aboriginal students was equally important to their own personal sense of confidence as an educator. For example, one informant reported, *“I guess I’ve been aware of developing a rapport, building a bit of trust first so I feel like I’ve got a good relationship and can then move forward”* (Staff Informant 11). It also emerged that informants perceived the establishment of a positive staff-student relationship was predicted on the efforts and creation of opportunities by individual staff members to spend time and build rapport with Aboriginal boarding students.

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Such findings support the assertions of Nelson and Hay (2010) who described how those teachers not prepared to invest in relationship building exercises were perceived by Aboriginal students as unapproachable. For example, several informants reported, *“it’s really about what we’ve put in place as individuals through our relationships with Indigenous students”* (Staff Informant 3). In building relationships with Aboriginal boarding students, a number of informants perceived *“they’re [Aboriginal students] very shy boys, so getting a conversation happening can take a long time”* (Staff Informant 4). To overcome issues of shyness, several informants believed that not taking themselves too seriously and being able to *laugh, joke, and “having a good sense of humour”* (Staff Informant 16) was a critical starting point. A finding that supports the assertions of Byrne and Munns (2012) that emphasises that a critical aspect of positive classroom relationships with Aboriginal students is attitude and in particular for teachers to keep a good sense of humour.

In addition, other informants emphasised the value in searching for mutually shared interests, a particularly prominent strategy was to discuss sporting interests, as catalyst from which to build the foundations of a positive and supportive staff-student relationship. This finding supports a growing amount of literature emphasising the benefits of aligning organised sports and education in supporting Aboriginal students to construct a positive sense of identity and belonging while at school (DIA, 2005; Gray & Partington, 2012; Kickett-Tucker, 2008). The data revealed that those informants which felt secure about their staff-student relationship tended to adopt a more student-centred approach and took interest in their students as individuals, including allocating time to find out about where students were from and how they came to be a boarding student. For example, one informant reported:

For me the starting point was to try and understand a little bit about who they are, where they come from and what it might be like for them to be in this environment These kids [Aboriginal students] are happy to give knowledge of who they are, where they’re from and a little bit about their culture. (Staff Informant 7)

As mentioned, several staff informants believed that Aboriginal students presented with different expectations in comparison to other students. In terms of the staff-student relationship, informants described how they perceived a significant but sometimes unrecognised priority for Aboriginal students by staff was being acknowledged as a unique individual and seen as more than just a student. For example, one informant divulged, *“I think for Indigenous students they’re more interested in that you care about them as a person rather than their academic outcomes as a student”* (Staff Informant 3); similarly another informant reported, *“they [Aboriginal students]*

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actually want someone to believe in them as a student and to also say I really like you as a person”

(Staff Informant 8). Such statements suggest these informants believed that validating Aboriginal students as individuals as well as their sense of self and cultural identity in wider social contexts played an important role in supporting the transition experience to boarding school. Byrne and Munns (2012) have emphasised the powerful positive impact on Aboriginal students when teachers relay how they genuinely care for their students both as people and learners. Moreover, this approach as central to constructing a school and classroom environment that students perceive as positive and supportive (Byrne & Munns, 2012). This finding also supports the assertions of other literature that has outlined the significance to Aboriginal students, that staff-student relationships are formed at both a personal and pedagogical level (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Godfrey et al., 2001; Gower & Byrne, 2012; Nelson & Hay, 2010; Partington, 2003).

Congruent with reports provided by student and parent informants in the current study, a salient topic which a number of staff informants raised while discussing their staff-student relationship with male Aboriginal students, was the influence of traditional rites of passage practices and ceremonies on the transition experience. Several informants were aware that some Aboriginal students had either been through traditional Lore or had aspirations to do so. For example, one informant reported, *“He lives in two worlds. He lives in the traditional world and then in this world as well”* (Staff Informant 9). Although these informants reported traditional rites of passage as an important developmental transition in the formation of students sense of self and identity; several equally drew attention to the varying impact they believed this transition had on behaviour and outlook of students while at boarding school. For example, one informant reported:

The best example of this situation is with [student name] who’s gone through parts of Lore and considers himself a man. He comes back into this boarding environment and expects to have those privileges that he associates with being man at home here at school, so he’s sort of been able to run his own race a little bit and believes that certain things shouldn’t apply to him like having to be in certain spots on time and those sort of things because back home I’m a man. Whereas someone like [name of second student], would be the complete opposite. He’s been through Lore but is just happy to go with the flow, as is [name of third student] whose also been through Lore as well. (Staff Informant 3)

Similarly, and consistent with perceptions held by student informants, another staff informant perceived:

They [Aboriginal students] have to rapidly transform their own sense of self and identity in response to the demands of life at boarding school. When they’ve have gone through the

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Lore back home, they are considered as men in their community and the rights of a man are often extended to them, an adult male you know. During the early stages they may not completely have all the benefits of a man, but even so they're grouped as men. When students who have gone through the Lore enter into the boarding environment, they're still treated as a boy. For some, this situation can feel like they are forced to neglect their manhood and the expectations people have of them in their home community. (Staff Informant 13)

Such statements reveal a number of staff informants incorporated sensitivity and understanding into their staff-student relationship during this significant period cultural and developmental transition for Aboriginal boarding students. However, it was also evident that a few staff informants were selective in their perception of which elements of student's culture they wished to acknowledge and at times questioned the functionality and legitimacy of participation in cultural practices for young Aboriginal males while trying to meet the requirements of a secondary education. For example, one informant revealed:

For some families it's a tough decision because they know their kids will lose some of their connection with cultural aspects of home life, language, sense of connection with country and things like that. It's a family decision...but you know, for how many is this still important to them now? For some communities further away from urban centres like Broome [town in the Kimberley region], then it's more likely they will follow traditional pathways and we acknowledge that. (Staff Informant 1)

Such statements indicate that not all staff informants viewed participation in rites of passage ceremonies as an equivalent consideration for boarding schools to incorporate within school processes, but rather positioned and constructed it as a matter that Aboriginal students and their family had to negotiate. It was evident these informants perceived that Aboriginal students were sent to boarding school by their parents primarily for educational reasons and in making this decision needed to prioritise that decision. These perceptions parallel to some degree the findings of Hatchell (2003) that described how the culture of the private boys' only boarding school was "greatly influenced by a White Eurocentric middle class model" (p. 2). An observation that was argued to perpetuate a school environment that diminished the equivalence and heterogeneity of diverse beliefs and worldviews held by minority groups, but which reinforced the superiority of Western values, perceptions and cultural norms.

7.3.2 Teacher-parent relationship.

The sub-theme of school-parent relationships emerged as an area of earnest deliberation for many staff informants. Several informants believed that the transition experience for

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Aboriginal boarding students was significantly influenced by parental support and events that at occurred home within both immediate and extended family contexts. For example, one informant revealed, *“I believe with all our boys [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students] that family is paramount. And what happens to family affects them”* (Staff Informant 13). However, a number of informants conveyed that they were unsure and apprehensive about the type of support to expect from parents, despite it being evident that most staff informants ascertained a critical aspect in supporting Aboriginal students was to establish positive and a reliable communication pathway with parents. For instance, one informant reported:

For Indigenous students coming into boarding, you want clear lines of communication. Communication with the parents and you want regular communication. When there’s not a clear communication path, the boy [Aboriginal student] in the school will at more risk of becoming emotionally isolated. (Staff Informant 5)

It emerged that staff informants believed that the most effective staff-parent relationship developed when congruency existed between the encouragement Aboriginal boarding students received from parents at home and the support provided at boarding schools. Whilst many staff informants reported they were mindful that parents had made a difficult decision to school their child away from home, a few questioned the efforts of some parents to participate and be involved in support their son’s education. These informants reported how some parents were frequently difficult to contact and intimated that some were indifferent towards attending scheduled school engagements such as teacher-parent meetings. For example, one informant divulged:

It’s not always easy being responsible for their [Aboriginal parent] children; because the person ultimately responsible for the child, are sometimes the last person that you meet. I mean quite frankly I’ve got one boy [Aboriginal student] here in Year 8 at the moment, I didn’t see his mother until the middle of September. I’d never met her before. I’d only seen the sponsors [scholarship provider]. I’d only seen the people trying to provide the opportunity, the mother stayed away. (Staff Informant 9)

By contrast, a number of staff informants reported how they believed that the transition experience to boarding school not only involved a significant period of adjustment for students, but equally a significant adjustment for parents as they negotiated a new school environment that was distant from home. As one informant revealed, *“it’s often a bigger cultural shift for the parents than it is for the students”* (Staff Informant 2). These informants were cognisant that Aboriginal students often arrived from family circumstances in which their parents had not

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completed any formal secondary education. Moreover, they perceived some parents were hesitant or intimidated by being on the school campus or by the prospect of meeting teachers. These informants conveyed how they believed not only travelling to meet parents at home or in a community setting sent a strong message to parents that their child would be well cared, but importantly set the foundations for building a more meaningful connection with parents and the family of a student who would be under their duty of care. For example, one informant reported: *“you’ve got to go out to those families to say hello, so that parents know who is actually looking after their boy”* (Staff Informant 3).

7.3.2 School-community relationship.

It emerged that staff informants also associated having an insight into the home community of Aboriginal boarding students with assisting in the provision of effective support to students during the transition experience. This perspective was linked with the importance of getting to know the whole student, which for a number of informants included getting to know the home community. These informants perceived that attaining local knowledge and being aware of social contexts that informed student’s sense of identity, belonging, and connectedness with their respective community were critical factors, which enabled them to build both informed and stronger supportive relationships with Aboriginal boarding students while they were away from home. For example, one informant asserted:

Going up [to the West Kimberley region of the State] and spending a week camping with the boys [Aboriginal students] is a very, very good way to get to know who the boys are and how they operate in certain situations, as well as their leadership skills. It’s important for when you’re making judgments about students, you get to know where the families coming from, get a picture through talking to people in their community. You get to know how keen they really are to come down [to Perth]. You just get a whole picture of where they come from. (Staff Informant 12)

As mentioned, staff informants reported how they were aware that boarding school was often viewed as an opportunity and perceived that Aboriginal boarding students were seen as positive role models and potential future leaders of their community. However, consistent with perceptions held by student informants, a few informants also acknowledged that attending boarding school and dislocation from community life put at risk elements of students’ social networks. For example, one staff informant relayed how an element of jealousy and a social division sometimes accompanied the decision to attend to boarding for some Aboriginal students

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and worried about the impact this might have on students' sense of belonging and connectedness with their home community. She divulged:

They're often in no-man's-land these boys [Aboriginal students]. They get the opportunity to come down to the big flash school in Perth and they've got to fit in down here, and then go back home to be taunted by some of their peers, you know oh here they come, the boys from the big fancy private school in Perth. So they get to the point where they don't fit in back home anymore and actually fit in a bit more here. So they're actually losing their connection with their own communities. (Staff Informant 7)

The premise of *no-man's-land* arguably captures what was often a prelude for a number of staff informants who were aware many Aboriginal students wanted to return to life in their home community after graduation from boarding school. Congruent with reported perceptions of student and parents informants, these staff informants perceived that Aboriginal boarding students' were keen to make-up for lost time with family and community, and that for some pressure existed within the wider community for them to do this. However, these informants were equally aware that regional and remote communities offered few opportunities with regards to further training, study, or employment. Moreover, these informants questioned the value of pursuing a secondary education in Perth if after graduation students simply returned to a community environment that was often not supported (i.e., limited access to government services) or equipped with the infrastructure, available skill base, and capacity to provide to post-school destinations or other viable training pathways to build on the initial steps taken by students to advance their secondary education. For example, one informant reported:

I think we bring these kids [Aboriginal students] down here, we put them in this uniform, we give them the [name of school B] experience and give them the education, and at the end we say good bye and push them out. And that's it. They go home to what? (Staff Informant 11)

As such statements reveal, a number of staff informants perceived that the pursuit of post-school training or employment in the workplace was a key measure of success of the overall boarding school experience for Aboriginal boarding students. Whilst several informants revealed they spent considerable time following-up and offering support to Aboriginal students to access post-school destinations after they graduated in Year 12, many informants also worried that as a school they did not do enough to ensure students successfully negotiated the transition out of boarding school. For example, one informant disclosed, *"transitioning them [Aboriginal students] into the workplace and the workforce, we don't do that as well as we could"* (Staff Informant 11).

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Similarly another informant divulged, *“I don’t think we’ve had enough success in that sense [supporting students transitioning into post-school destinations] and I think that’s something that we’ve got to reflect on”* (Staff Informant 15). To this end, it was evident that several staff informants believed that boarding schools’ commitment to Aboriginal boarding students from regional and remote communities should extend to supporting families and communities with the step into post-school destinations.

7.4 Chapter summary.

The underlying aim of this chapter was to explore how 16 staff informants from four boarding schools located in metropolitan Perth, constructed meaning around the transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities. Three major themes emerged and were explored, as were their respective sub-themes, these were, 1) Indigenous Education and the sub-themes of Social Responsibility and Opportunity, 2) Academic and Social Determinants and the sub-themes of Culture Shock, Homesickness, Friendships and Peer Support, Literacy and Numeracy, and Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Racism, 3) Relationships and the sub-themes of Staff-Student Relationship, Staff-Parent Relationship, and School-Community Relationship. Evidence was provided for each through the provision of examples drawn from the data. The next chapter aims to summarise the key findings of the current research and discuss policy and practice implications pertinent to Aboriginal young people and families in regional and remote areas of WA, boarding schools, and Indigenous Education.

SECTION FOUR: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

8.0 Chapter overview.

This final chapter is divided into several segments. Initially, the research aims and questions are restated which is followed by a summary of the key findings and meta-themes that emerged from that data across the student, parent, and staff informant groups. Next, the findings are discussed in relation to policy and practice implications pertinent to boarding schools and Indigenous Education. To conclude the strengths and contributions of this research along with its limitations are discussed and possible future research directions are considered.

8.1 Research aims and questions.

This research set out to investigate how male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities constructed meaning around the experience of studying away from home at a boarding school in Perth, Western Australia (WA). While students' experiences with being away at boarding school were explored, it also investigated how meaning was constructed around the experience for parents of having a child away from home at boarding school and the experience for staff in supporting students, more precisely:

- 1 How do male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school?
- 2 How do parents of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities construct meaning around the experience of having a child studying at a boarding school?
- 3 How do members of staff at boarding schools construct meaning around the experience of studying at a boarding school, of male Aboriginal secondary school students from regional and remote communities?

8.2 Brief summary of the key findings and meta-themes.

Student Informants. Interviews were conducted with 32 student informants from Years 7 to 12 attending one of five boarding schools located in Perth, WA. Chapter 5 revealed that three major themes emerged from the data collected from student informants, these were, 1) Decision Making and the sub-themes of Choice-Less Choice and Opportunity 2) Organisational Climate and the sub-themes of School Environment and Belonging, Culture Shock, Homesickness, Identity and

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 Rites of Passage, Code-Switching, Teachers, Academic Expectations, Residential Life, and
 Friendships and Peer relations, and 3) Relational Change and the sub-themes of Family Dynamics,
 Friendships at home, and Cultural Connectedness.

Local secondary school alternatives and wider social issues in local community settings played a central role in influencing informant's decision to explore secondary education options away from home. These decisions were reinforced by a perceived disparity between the standard and quality of local secondary schooling compared with alternatives located in metropolitan Perth. The influence of problematic social issues in the wider community on the school and learning environment at home verified to student informants the advantages of completing their secondary education at boarding school. However, participation in the decision-making process with family prior to attending boarding school was an integral element that influenced constructions of the transition experience for student informants. In this research, informants who were involved in a meaningful way in the decision-making process, constructed the prospect of boarding school as an opportunity and linked it with being part of a bigger grand plan in life such as gaining access to post-school destinations.

When at boarding school, constructions of the transition experience were influenced by a number of changes implicit in negotiating a new and larger school environment and being dislocated from family and familiar socio-cultural symbols and language conventions that orientated daily life and social scripts. For several student informants this experience was constructed as a cultural shock and adjusting to social and environmental differences such as social privilege, climatic conditions, diet, and the noise of the city often mediated this feeling. Coping with homesickness and managing academic expectations were significant aspects that influenced the transition experience of student informants. Teachers similarly played a significant role in how the transition was constructed. Teachers who had a sense of humour and took the opportunity to learn from individual student informants about their culture and where they were from, were perceived as available, supportive and easy to get along with. Conversely, those teachers which were intolerant of diverse educational experiences and insensitive to cultural values were perceived as unapproachable.

The opportunity to build a diverse range of friendships was seen as a benefit of the transition experience. In this research, student informants revealed that other Aboriginal boarding

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students were perceived as an important a source of support during the transition experience. Forming friendships with other Aboriginal boarding students was viewed as easier and more comfortable to initially establish by student informants. Similarly, other Aboriginal boarding students were perceived as more likely to actively facilitate opportunities to meet and make new friendships other students. In this research other Aboriginal boarding students helped alleviate key developmental and psychological needs experienced during adolescence such as the need to fitting in, the need to establish personal relationships and friendships and to build a sense of belonging and connectedness, while also relaying to student informants a sense of confidence and self-belief to that they too could successfully negotiate boarding school procedures and routines. Hence, other Aboriginal boarding students were important role models during the transition experience.

Family and peer relationships at home played a crucial role in influencing constructions of the transition experience. An unanticipated outcome of the transition experience was the necessity for student informants to negotiate changes in relationship dynamics with family and friends back at home. In this research, according to some student informants, boarding school had underpinned a sense of positive growth in relationships with siblings and parents as well as heightened the sense of value placed on family. However, several student informants revealed encountering social criticism for schooling away at boarding school by friends and peers back at home. This was seen as questioning their sense of belonging and challenging their membership and commitment to people, community, and culture. The loss of some friend and peer relationships at home that conflicted with the educational aspirations of student informant's was perceived as an unfortunate outcome of the transition experience.

The experience of functioning as a minority ethnic group in a new school environment underpinned for a number of student informants a heightened sense of awareness about the importance of identity, family and connectedness with culture. The transition experience for several student informants placed strain on aspects of cultural and social identity, with some indicating they believed they had to code-switch between the language, social and cultural parameters of two worlds. Student informants lamented dislocation from customary practices and traditional activities. Older student informants specifically identified the impact on participation in rites of passage ceremonies and a number of student informants relayed a sense of responsibility and obligation during school holidays to make-up for what they perceived as lost

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opportunities to advance their cultural knowledge. This discord underpinned reflection by student informants on their sense of connectedness with people and place, and for some reflection on the influence of history as they tried to make sense of schooling away from home.

Parent Informants. Interviews were conducted with 11 parent informants drawn from a diverse range of geographical locations, socio-economic circumstances, and family configurations. Chapter 6 revealed three major themes emerged from the data collected from parent informants, these were, 1) Access, Standards and Quality and the sub-themes of Declining Local Schools, Opportunity, and Worldliness 2) Parental Agency and the sub-themes of Parent-School Connection, Parenting Style, Communication, and Milestones and Siblings, and 3) Cultural Heritage and the sub-theme of Maintenance and Transmission.

In this research, parent informants were cognisant that boarding school would present a number of challenges such as homesickness, however securing the best possible secondary school alternative was constructed as a priority. The data suggested that education was seen by parent informants as the foundation from which their children could best negotiate the demands of society in the future. A salient aspect that influenced parent informant's consideration of boarding school for their children was that the standard and quality of secondary education pathways at local schools were perceived as inadequate. In addition, a feature of boarding school perceived by parent informants as valuable was the opportunity for their children to participate in meaningful interaction with a diverse range of world-views, people and social contexts.

The ability to maintain a role and sense of agency as a parent in the lives of their children while they schooled away from home was a prominent concern that influenced constructions of the transition experience for parent informants. In this research the data revealed that parent informants utilised different styles and strategies to provide emotional and moral support to their children. However, despite the use of diverse parenting approaches, parent informants revealed being more interested in the overall experience of boarding school for their children rather than only evaluating the transition experience in terms of academic achievement. The quality of individual relationships with staff members was often constructed by parent informants as a reflection of a boarding school as a whole. In this research, the opportunity to interact meaningfully with school staff played a crucial role in affirming with parent informants that the care and wellbeing of their children was a priority. Similarly, the opportunity to participate in

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decision-making was seen as reflecting a boarding school that valued parental involvement in the transition experience and education of their children. On another level, the absence of a child from the family unit instigated recognition of their own absence as parents in witnessing the occurrence of important milestones in the growth and development of their children. Congruent with student informants, several parent informants perceived that significant adjustments took place for the family unit and between siblings in response to the transition experience.

Congruent with student informants, parent informants wanted their children to retain a strong sense of connection, belonging and identity with cultural heritage throughout their secondary education. Parent informants did not perceive that it was the role of boarding schools to facilitate this sense of connection with culture, however a number of parent informants revealed that as their child increasingly focussed on meeting the academic and co-curricular demands of boarding school and steadily spent more time away from home and community, they worried that a sense of disconnection with cultural heritage may result. Hence, a number of parent informants asserted that an important element of the transition experience was finding the balance between participation in cultural ways of life, attendance at boarding school, and a parental desire to ensure a strong sense of identity and connectedness with cultural heritage was formed by their children. In this research, parent informants perceived that during school holidays it was necessary for them to organise cultural excursions as a whole family to counterbalance the impact of schooling away from home on their children's sense of self, identity and belonging. In addition, some parent informants reported posting books and other cultural texts as well as utilising the benefits of digital technologies such as iPods to help their children maintain a sense connection with culture and language while they were at boarding school.

Staff Informants. Interviews were conducted with 16 staff informants drawn from four boarding schools located in metropolitan Perth, WA. Chapter 7 revealed three major themes emerged from the data collected from staff informants, these were, 1) Indigenous Education and the sub-themes of Social Responsibility and Opportunity 2) Academic and Social Determinants and the sub-themes of Culture Shock, Homesickness, Friendships and Peer Support, Literacy and Numeracy, and Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Racism, and 3) Relationships and the sub-themes of Staff-Student Relationship, Staff-Parent Relationship, and School-Community Relationship.

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Staff informants linked a broader context of social disadvantage with the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal boarding students from regional and remote areas of the State. For several staff informants this perception was instilled by previous visits to regional and remote communities and recognition of wider social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing conditions. Similar to parent informants, staff informants perceived that a disparity existed between the standard and quality of secondary education in regional and remote communities with secondary schooling available in metropolitan Perth. Hence, in this research, many staff informants believed their individual boarding school community had an obligation and social responsibility to help improve experiences had by Aboriginal students and families in regional and remote communities with secondary education. However, this perception was informed by a diverse range of values and views towards supporting the educational needs of Aboriginal students.

A number of academic and social determinants were perceived by staff informants as influencing the transition experience for Aboriginal boarding students. Consistent with student informants, the data revealed staff informants believed the transition experience presented as a culture shock for many Aboriginal boarding students. In particular, staff informants emphasised the role of encountering new and diverse expectations and value systems in contributing to this feeling of culture shock. Similar to student informants, homesickness was perceived to be a difficult and omnipresent issue, however a number of staff informants believed that to minimise the influence of homesickness it was critical for Aboriginal boarding students to enter boarding at traditional transition points (i.e., Year 8), rather than delaying the decision to attend boarding school until the upper secondary school years, such as in Years 10, 11, and 12. Congruent with student informants, staff informants linked forging new friendships with a higher likelihood of a smoother transition experience. A particularly salient perception across the staff informant group was the positive benefits of establishing new friendships with older Aboriginal boarding students by new and younger Aboriginal boarding students. Similarly, consistent with student informants, staff informants associated having an older family member such as an older brother that had experienced boarding school or was at boarding school, with an increased likelihood that new and younger Aboriginal students would make a smoother transition to boarding school life.

However, in this research staff informants were particularly concerned about fundamental gaps in literacy and numeracy and the long-term implications of this on Aboriginal boarding

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student's wellbeing, self-esteem and self-concept as learners. A number of staff informants were unsure about the ability of their boarding school to meet the initial learning support needs of Aboriginal boarding students. Notwithstanding this, staff informants believed that relationships were a significant aspect, which influenced Aboriginal students' constructions of the transition experience. Congruent with the assertions of student informants, a positive staff-student relationship was perceived by staff informants as closely linked with the efforts of individual staff members to build rapport with Aboriginal boarding students. Staff informants emphasised the importance of forming relationships at both a personal and pedagogical level. Events that at occurred at home were seen by staff informants as having a significant influence on student the transition experience. To this end, staff informants believed that the most effective staff-parent relationship occurred when congruency existed between the encouragement students received from home and parents, and the support provided at boarding schools. In this research, the data revealed that a concern for a number of staff informants was the transition to post-school destinations or further training after Aboriginal boarding students had completed their secondary school education at boarding.

Meta-themes. The data revealed three salient meta-themes existed across the student, parent and staff informant groups, which influenced constructions of the transition experience. These were 1) a perceived disparity between the standard and quality of local secondary schooling compared with options located in metropolitan Perth 2) the perception that boarding school presented an opportunity to overcome such educational inequality, and 3) the perception that issues such as racism influenced Aboriginal boarding student's transition experience. These meta-themes are discussed next.

Across all three informant groups, the data revealed that the standard and quality of secondary education available in regional and remote areas of WA were perceived as not being equivalent to options available in metropolitan Perth. Recognition of this disparity was instrumental in student informants exploring the option to school away from home as well as parent informants sending their children to boarding school and staff informants linking Indigenous education in regional and remote communities with a broader context of social disadvantage. The prevalence of this perception means that it is an issue that is worthy of further clarification. Since 2000, Australia has participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA

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applies internationally determined baselines to assess the reading, mathematical, and science ability of 15 year old secondary school students to meet real-life challenges. Nearly 470,000 students from 65 countries around the world participated in the PISA (Thomson, De Bortoli, Nicholas, Hillman, & Buckley, 2011). In 2009, 353 schools and over 14,000 students from Australia contributed to the PISA of which 1,143 identified as Indigenous students. The PISA highlighted that geographical location had a significant impact on educational attainment in Australia and revealed that the mathematical, reading, and science literacy of all students attending a remote school was on average one-and-a-half years lower than their metropolitan counterparts (Thomson et al., 2011). Results of the PISA indicated that the mathematical, reading and science literacy of Indigenous students was on average almost two full school years lower than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Moreover, the reading literacy of Indigenous males was on average one full school year lower than that of Indigenous females. Not achieving baseline proficiency in the PISA is argued to place young people at significant risk of not only being unable to function optimally in the workforce, but also equally being unable to successfully transition into higher education (Thomson et al., 2011). The experiences of informants involved with the current research support the assertions of the PISA and suggest that the education system in WA is not adequately supporting the educational aspirations and learning needs of male Indigenous students in regional and remote communities.

Despite both government and the education system in WA having experienced the benefit of over a century of involvement with Indigenous education (see Chapter 1) and the 1984 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* (Department of Education [DoE], 1984) which stressed the hardship for Aboriginal families residing in regional and remote areas caused by having to send children away to continue their secondary schooling, the current research revealed that student, parent and staff informants believed it was still necessary for Aboriginal young people to leave their home community if they were to access an equitable standard of secondary education. The data suggested that 1) contending with an education system centralised around a capital city located in the south west region of the State (Beresford, 2001), and 2) the disheartening ability of the education system and governments to only achieve modest progress with the delivery of secondary schooling to regional and remote communities in WA (Beresford & Gray, 2006; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Zubrick et al., 2006), were key issues underpinning this perception for informants. Hence, a salient motif across the three informant

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groups was the construction of the transition experience to boarding school as an opportunity. Although subtle differences existed between each informant group in the meaning that was attached to the construct of opportunity, the data revealed that not only was boarding school seen as an opportunity to overcome that implications of formidable distances, geographical remoteness and limited access to secondary education, but that it was constructed as an opportunity to optimise life experiences for Aboriginal young people. For example, such as an opportunity to meet diverse and different people as well as to experience lifestyles and worldviews in addition to those available at home. However, the findings of this research also suggested that informants' construction of boarding school as an opportunity was mediated by how Aboriginal boarding students negotiated the experience of adjusting to changes which challenged understandings of self and identity, family and friendships, beliefs and values, sense of belonging with people and place, and connectedness with community, culture and spirituality, among other things.

The data revealed that student, parent and staff informants perceived issues such as prejudice and covert racism influenced the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal boarding students. As described earlier, discriminatory policies including amalgamation, protectionism, absorption and assimilation constructed upon ethnocentric assumptions enabled oppression, prejudice, racism, segregation to marginalise the purposeful efforts of Aboriginal families and parents to influence the experience their children had with education (Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia [ALSWA], 1995; Beresford, 2001, 2012; Beresford & Partington, 2003; DoE, 2002; Green, 1995; Haebich, 1988, 2000, 2008; Hetherington, 2002; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP], 2005). The detrimental impact on educational achievement and psychological wellbeing of overt or covert racism at the individual or institutional level in a learning environment for Aboriginal young people cannot be over stated (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012; Craven et al., 2005; Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Kickett-Tucker, 2009; Pedersen & Walker, 2000; Purdie, Tripocony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000; Zubrick et al., 2006). Yet, despite the lack of ambiguity regarding the implications of racism, the *Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey* (WAACHS) estimated that 21.5% of the 1,073 Aboriginal young people aged 12 to 17 years surveyed had experienced racism in the last six months (Zubrick et al., 2005). The WAACHS

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indicated that by the age of 17 years of age Aboriginal males (48.9%) were more likely to encounter racism than females (13.3%) and although racism was reported as occurring in a variety of social settings, racism tended to be less frequently encountered in more isolated areas of the State and home was reported as the most protected location from racism (Zubrick et al., 2005). Research has outlined the protective role that family and the Aboriginal community play in Aboriginal children developing a healthy and strong sense of self (Pedersen & Walker, 2000). However, pertinent to the circumstance of supporting Aboriginal boarding students while they are schooling away from home, the 2011 State inquiry into the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in WA reminds us that male Aboriginal adolescents are least likely of all young people to seek help with problems (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011). Moreover, it emphasised that three key factors were essential to constructing a positive school environment for Aboriginal children. These factors were for school environments to be free from exposure to social exclusion, racism, and bullying (Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia, 2011). The findings of the current research indicates that issues such as stereotypes, prejudice and covert racism require further attention and have implications for education policy and practice at boarding schools in WA.

8.3 Implications for policy and practice.

A key intention of operationalising an Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) framework was to acknowledge the impact of history and past injustices on the construction of understandings and meanings by Aboriginal people (Oxenham, 2000). Moreover, the purpose of outlining Indigenist methodologies was to emphasise a historical struggle for liberation from oppression and a political desire for self-determination to reclaim power by challenging the continued construction of Aboriginal people via hegemonic Western discourses, images and worldviews (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1997; Saunders, West, & Usher, 2010). Hence, in considering the implications of this research for policy, practice, and Aboriginal families residing in regional and remote communities, it is imperative to discuss the wider socio-political milieu surrounding Indigenous Education in Australia, when considering the policy and practice implications of this research.

8.3.1 Implications for policy.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the *Melbourne Declaration* launched by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) is the key document used to guide the educational goals of Australia for the next decade (MCEECDYA, 2008). The two overarching goals of the Melbourne Declaration are to 1) promote equity and excellence, and 2) for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens (MCEECDYA, 2008). The Preamble of the Melbourne Declaration describes Indigenous Education as an area of urgent priority and states that, “Australia has failed to improve educational outcomes for many Indigenous Australians and addressing this issue must be a key priority over the next decade” (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 5). However, a cursory inspection of the document notices that of the eight key commitments made by the Melbourne Declaration, improving outcomes for Indigenous young people is listed in seventh place out of eight key ‘commitments to action’ listed in the document. Similarly, some critics have argued that as a guiding policy it has regressed with the discourse in national declarations shifting from previously specific terminology such as ‘agreed goals’ as used in the 1989 Hobart Declaration to generalisations like ‘commitments to action’ in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration (Hughes & Hughes, 2009).

Accompanying the Melbourne Declaration is the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* for the 2010 to 2014 period (MCEECDYA, 2011). The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* is aligned with the six key national targets of the ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy implemented by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) aimed at reducing Indigenous disadvantage, these are 1) to close life expectancy within a generation 2) the halve the gap in mortality rates for children under five years of age within a decade 3) halve the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018, 4) to halve the gap in employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by 2018, 5) to provide access to quality early childhood education within a five year period for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year olds irrespective of geographical location by 2013, and 6) in terms of secondary schooling, to halve the gap in Year 12 completion rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with non-Indigenous students by 2020 (MCEECDYA, 2011). In outlining specific strategies of engagement and connection the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* document states, “The Australian Government and education

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providers will work together to develop options to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in regional and remote areas to access high quality secondary schooling while retaining links with their communities” (MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 14). It was evident in the present study that informants did not perceive that local schools presented as a viable option to access a high standard or quality secondary education. Moreover, while scholarships to boarding schools in Perth funded by the Federal Government were constructed as facilitating the opportunity to overcome the limitations of local schooling, the data provided by student informants in the current study indicated that the scale of the transition experience presented a number of challenges. In particular, it placed significant pressure on student informants’ sense of self and belonging, cultural identity and connectedness with people and place. A finding also echoed and emphasised by parent and staff informants.

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* document further outlines jurisdictional priorities as identified by each State and territory Government in Australia to close the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their same-aged peers (MCEECDYA, 2011). Western Australia identified in the document the priority of building on local and regional strategies to enhance the greater empowerment of local schools and also emphasises a priority to supporting, “the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in urban, regional and remote areas and the challenges individual school communities face producing improvements in their students’ education and well being” (MCEECDYA, 2011, p.33). However, in 2009, the Education Minister Dr. Elizabeth Constable indicated that over 2010, 2011 and 2012 the State Education Department would cut the provision of funding for Year 11 and 12 courses in a further 21 district high schools across regional and remote locations of WA. At the time Minister Constable suggested those families affected by this decision have a number of equitable options, 1) that children can be enrolled in the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE), which offers a K to Year 12 education to students identified as being in geographically isolated locations – and utilises a variety of communication mediums such as telephone, email, interactive conferencing, and television programs delivered by satellite, to deliver a secondary curriculum 2) for students to travel to the nearest senior high school, although this might entail for some families a 200 kilometre round trip each day, and 3) for students to access government country hostels and boarding facilities and become weekly boarding students, so they can attend a government school in a regional centre or in Perth.

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Only one of Minister Constable's three suggested options included the opportunity for parents to maintain the unity of the family, an issue that student, parent, and staff informants in the present study identified impacted significantly upon the family as a consequence of the experience of transitioning a child to boarding school. Moreover, the *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* conducted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) in 2000 emphasised that Aboriginal parents tended to not engage with alternatives such as Distance Education or School of the Air Programs. Many Aboriginal parents reported to the inquiry being unaware of these services, however significantly many Aboriginal parents also perceived that their own limited literacy and numeracy acted as a barrier to their children's participation in such programs (HREOC, 2000). Minister Constable's decision to cut funding for Year 11 and 12 courses was recently reversed by a State Government Standing Committee which also reprimanded the WA Education Department for a lack of engagement in consultative processes prior to making the decision. In addition, such a decision emphasised the discord between the aims of national Indigenous Education policy such as the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan*; existing evidence such as the 1984 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* and the more recent *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education*; and bureaucratic/policy decision makers at a State Government/departmental level and supporting assertions that the implementation of policies at the local level are often poorly conceived, crisis-driven and based on limited strategic planning (Beresford, 2001; Beresford & Gray, 2006; Beresford & Gray, 2012).

During his 2009 Australian of the Year speech Professor Michael Dodson questioned how it was that in a wealthy nation which outwardly identifies as a democracy and promotes to its citizenship freedom of speech and equality, that Indigenous Australian children remained so chronically exposed to social issues such as poverty and limited access to education simply because of where they live? Professor Dodson stressed that:

Education is something we've let slide miserably in recent decades. We've failed a lot of children in that time. And many of those children - a disproportionate number - are Indigenous children. We've been failing them a lot longer...the education revolution begins and ends with people...we need good minds and common sense brought to bear on it - not education theory or bureaucratic fashion...the shame is not in failing, it's in not trying as hard or as intelligently as we can (Dodson, 2009, p.3-4).

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The assertions of Professor Dodson resonate closely with the context of Indigenous education in WA (Beresford, 2001; Beresford & Gray, 2006; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Zubrick et al., 2006). As a State, WA routinely asserts how prosperous it has become through a booming resource economy, a circumstance not incongruent with the capitalist grounding underpinning its colonial history. In an important sense, moreover, Dodson (2009) echoes the sentiments of the 1984 *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia* that emphasised “a bureaucratic approach will lack the confidence and support of Aboriginal people and without capitalising on the Aboriginal culture itself, changes will have little relevance” (DoE, 1984, p. 336). Professor Dodson (2009) continued to assert the success of education at a government level should not be measured by the dollars and cents being spent on schools or the funding of Indigenous specific services, but rather measured by accountability to children’s literacy and numeracy fundamentals. Moreover, and in an important sense, to the ability of education to bestow the conviction to children that they can utilise the knowledge and skills they have learnt at school to discover their potential and to confidently negotiate the world ahead as they develop and grow (Dodson, 2009). An assertion supported by informants in the current study, whom perceived education as equipping Aboriginal boarding students with the skills and confidence to negotiate a complex and continuously changing world.

At the 2009 Dare to Lead National Conference in Adelaide, South Australia, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Dr. Calma (2009) emphasised that Indigenous education was at crossroads. He noted how the education systems of Australia are characterised by policy reform agendas that are constantly changed and modified; “one practice is thrown out and a new one brought in, as if change itself is a food thing and will lead to better education” (Calma, 2009). Professor Dodson (2009) equally stressed that the ‘start again syndrome’ that governments associate with Indigenous Education has little to do with congruency with existing evidence but everything to do with questionable government agendas, a finding that the State Government Standing Committee asserted when reprimanding the WA Education Department. Calma (2009) reminded us much of the discord experienced in Indigenous Education was underpinned by a historical and faulty supposition at government and departmental levels that policy reform will equate automatically to better educational outcomes and improved experiences with education for Indigenous children. Dr. Calma (2009) emphasised the benefits of

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partnership building and empowering the people who are affected by policies to be the ones that drive and shape policy, noting that:

We need to have our voices [Indigenous people] heard in schools because governments and non-Indigenous people design everything about the education environments where our children are schooled. They design the infrastructure, they develop the curricula, they set the times for school holidays and they design the measures against which our kids are assessed. We need to make sure that schools are places where our kids feel welcome and where our culture and knowledge is reflected. Our voices must inform some of these education variables (Calma, 2009).

Despite recognition of the importance of self-determination, Indigenous Education policy has maintained a close fidelity with Western centric discourse that emphasises sameness (Beresford & Beresford, 2006), rather than a discourse that recognises diversity and respect for autonomous agency and equivalence. Similarly, Australia has increasingly moved towards education policy that is in opposition to Indigenous knowledge systems, values and priorities (Nakata, 2002, 2007, 2010). For example, the value of individualism is promoted over collectivism (Dodson, 2007) and limited acknowledgement that for Aboriginal people to sustain positive wellbeing, languages and culture it requires, as student and parent informants in the current study aptly pointed out, connection with people and place (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2010; Garvey, 2007, 2008; Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, 2007, 2008; Ryan, 2001; Zubrick et al., 2005). A salient outcome of the current research for policy makers is that the transition experience to boarding school for Aboriginal students extends well beyond the immediate logistical issues of finances, physical relocation, and separation from family. Rather, student informants' experiences revealed the transition equally entailed careful consideration of dislocation from a deeply rooted sense of belonging intimately linked with maintaining cultural values and a sense of responsibility and obligation that is intertwined with membership to the collective and to kinship structures that are defined in terms of connection with ancestry, traditional lands, and spirituality.

Nevertheless, the language of economics instead of shared meanings is also increasingly shaping the rhetoric used in educational policy to describe important societal principles such as equity, equality, and social justice. This has aided policy practices and contemporary governments to shift away from directing a critical reflective lens towards modes of policy development and instead present an often seductive, reassuring, and neutral view of policy reform processes in Indigenous Education and to construct reform dissonance as normal, while equally suggesting

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Aboriginal people should readily welcome new policy and increased funding offered to redress perceived deficits. The imperative of such constructions often locates deficits in the domain of Aboriginal contexts, rather than with a broader context of history and the unsavoury elements in policy reform processes and entrenched power imbalances (de Plevitz, 2007).

Critically, student informants emphasised the importance of participation in decision-making processes and the influence on the constructions of the transition experience to boarding school. This finding supports literature that has extensively outlined the positive and protective benefits to the social and emotional wellbeing, identity, and the lives of young people when they are enabled by meaningful opportunities to exert control, power and influence through participation in decision-making processes (Fraillon, 2004; Kickett-Tucker, 2009; Osterman, 2000; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001; Purdie, Tripocony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000; Stumpers, Breen, Pooley, Cohen, & Pike, 2005; Westerman, 2010). A cursory inspection of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* indicates that the consultative process which informed the plan entailed an extensive and wide set of stakeholders (i.e., senior State/Territory and Federal Government officials, consultative bodies, leading Aboriginal educators, public consultations, written submission, and non-government organisations including industry, unions, parent organisations, and other professional bodies). However, at no point are Aboriginal young people mentioned. Congruent with the assertions of Dr. Calma (2009) the findings of the current research reiterate the benefits of building partnerships and empowering the people who are affected by policies to be the ones' that drive and shape policy. However, it is further asserted that this sentiment should be extended to the meaningful positioning of understandings and knowledge as constructed by Aboriginal young people or the individuals actually undertaking the experience, as fundamental to such processes.

8.2.2 Implications for practice.

It was evident from the data that the transition experience to boarding school not only presented a number of challenges for Aboriginal students and families, but equally for the operational practices of boarding schools in WA. As mentioned during the summary of findings provided at the beginning of this chapter, student, parent, and staff informants identified a number of supportive strategies and pedagogical approaches that positively assisted with the transition experience to boarding school for male Aboriginal students. However, it was also

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evident from informants that several points of tension still remains, with none more evident than the need for continued effort by boarding schools to ensure their school environment embraces diversity. A number of informants, in particular staff informants, highlighted how they believed instances of covert and overt prejudice, stereotyping and racism impacted on the transition experience of Aboriginal boarding students. This was a concern also perceived by several student and parent informants. It is important for boarding schools and educators to be aware that the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan* emphasises that to improve Aboriginal student's attendance:

Schools need to embrace diversity and explicitly value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and cultures to enables students to feel culturally safe at school. Increased engagement between the school, community and parents is a key factor in supporting regular attendance. A curriculum and pedagogy that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives will support attendance and retention (MCEECDYA, 2011, p. 16).

However, an inherent aspect of boarding school for Aboriginal students from regional and remote communities is that they are dislocated from culture, people and place, yet the link between academic achievement and learning about oneself during adolescence is often overlooked. Parent informants emphasised the crucial role that culture, people and place play in the healthy development of identity in their children. Similarly, research has outlined how the formation of a positive sense of self and identity while at school involves having the opportunity to access constructive attitudes, beliefs, experiences, images, and world views within a supportive learning environment (Byrne & Munns, 2012; Godfrey, Partington, Harslett, & Richer, 2001; Gower & Byrne, 2012; Kickett-Tucker, 2008, 2009; Purdie et al., 2000). A central tenet of this research has been the importance of connectedness with people and place, language and land, kinship and family, ancestry and spirituality to the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal young people (Garvey, 2008; Zubrick et al., 2010). Moreover, the significance of such connections to the sense of self and identity constructed by male Aboriginal boarding students while they are away from home and family. Hence, assisting staff at boarding schools to recognise and understand determinants that influence the development of positive social and emotional wellbeing by Aboriginal young people during childhood and adolescence represents a crucial area of further professional development.

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The current findings also suggest that boarding schools particularly need to consider how they can better support the cultural needs experienced during adolescence by male Aboriginal boarding students. For example, the need and desire identified by some older student informants to participate in rites of passage ceremonies was one tension revealed by the present study. While the findings of this research suggest that student and parent informants carefully negotiated this matter between themselves, it was evident that assumptions and misunderstandings influenced some staff informants' view of this cultural transition point for male Aboriginal boarding students. If boarding schools are to be places in which male Aboriginal boarding students feel a sense of belonging, safe and confident to express a sense of self as they develop and grow during adolescence, then an imperative for staff at boarding schools is to actively seek to understand the complexity and diversity of social realities that construct and give meaning to students' life-worlds. Hence, assisting staff at boarding schools to recognise and understand the significance of cultural and social expectations that male Aboriginal boarding students may face during adolescence represents another key area of further professional development.

The ambivalence towards diverse socio-cultural ways of being demonstrated by some staff informants and the awareness of other staff informants to instances of such ambivalence by colleagues has implications for staff recruitment and training at boarding schools. However, a dearth in training programs and professional development options currently exists across Australia in terms of specific training addressing the support needs of Aboriginal boarding students. A possible starting point is offered by the Australian Boarding Schools' Association (ABSA). The ABSA is a not-for-profit, non-government umbrella organisation that has a network of sub-divisions established in each of the States and Territories of Australia. The ABSA counts 90 per cent of boarding schools in Australia as members (ABSA, n.d). In 2010 the ABSA published a revised version of *Duty of Care: A Certificate Course in Residential Care* developed and written by Dr. Tim Hawkes. Topics covered include child protection laws, security and supervision, occupational health and safety, dealing with bullying, student diversity, Indigenous boarding students and meeting the needs of isolated children (Hawkes, 2010a). The unit addressing Indigenous boarding students begins by providing readers with facts and figures relating to Indigenous education, health and English as a second language and requires candidates completing the course to engage in reflective practice to help understand the support needs of Aboriginal students while at boarding school (Hawkes, 2010b). It then provides a number of points regarding some implications

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for staff caring for Aboriginal boarding students. The roles of Abstudy (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Study Assistance Scheme) and other government funded programs are briefly provided. This is followed by a number of self-assessed checklists, links to internet resources and a list of recommended readings (Hawkes, 2010b). Accreditation for completing *Duty of Care: A Certificate Course in Residential Care* can occur in three different ways, 1) boarding schools can select to pay the Australian Catholic University to monitor completion and attainment by staff of course requirements – this pathway can lead to the completion of a diploma or degree in residential care 2) boarding schools can engage the ABSA to accredit and verify that applicants have satisfactorily complete course requirements, and 3) boarding schools can choose to purchase the books and internally assess and accredit staff.

It is noteworthy, that the current registration and re-registration process for non-government schools in WA with boarding facilities is overseen by the Department of Education Services (DES) which checks compliance by boarding schools with legislation and education acts such as, the School Education Act 1999 – part 4 pertaining to non-government schools, School Education Regulations 2000, Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984, Racial Discrimination Act 1984, Equal Opportunity Act 1984, Working with Children (Criminal Checking) Act 2004 (DES, 2012). However, the DES process requires each boarding school to independently and internally develop, implement and evaluate policy and procedures that guide daily operational practices in their respective boarding houses. These include compliance with standard 4.5 that boarding schools “are not discriminatory and provide for a safe, health, secure and supportive environment of all enrolled boarders...” (DES, 2012, p.11). Compliance with standard 6.6 that boarding staff “have up-to-date informant, induction and training in all matters necessary for the safety and health of boarding students” (DES, 2012, p. 12), as well as compliance with standard 7.6 that boarding buildings and faculties “provide a pleasant environment for the promotion of health, safety, educational progress and wellbeing of its students” (DES, 2012, p.13). All of which, are signed off on by the Headmaster of a boarding school and submitted to DES (DES, 2012).

The purpose of outlining DES compliance requirements for boarding schools was to highlight that significant flexibility exists for boarding schools to develop their own or incorporate training programs such as *Duty of Care: A Certificate Course in Residential Care* into the recruitment and training of staff. Moreover, policy and training programmes developed within non-government boarding schools are autonomously controlled and designated by each school

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given that by their very own nature they are non-government and independent organisations.

Despite issues with referencing out dated national policy in Indigenous Education (i.e., it refers to the 1990 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*), the instigation of training programs such as *Duty of Care: A Certificate Course in Residential Care* would provide a starting point for boarding schools given the breadth of issues and considerations that it seeks to raise in the awareness of staff as they undertake the significant role of caring for the wellbeing of Aboriginal students as they transition to boarding school and are away from home and family. However the attainment of a certificate and the implementation of training courses such as *Duty of Care: A Certificate Course in Residential Care* should not be viewed in isolation, but rather as one aspect of a systemic whole school approach (i.e., students, staff, curriculum, school policy, wider community).

A specific challenge for boarding schools in WA is that geographically vast distances mediate the teacher-parent and home-school relationships. The findings of this research emphasised that family and parents provide a critical source of role models and represent a resource of support that highly influenced constructions of the transition formed by student informants. Hence, opportunities that enable parental and family involvement with boarding schools need to extend beyond current practices and in particular, beyond narrow Westernised assumptions about how parents and families should fit in with the operational practices of boarding schools. Rather, the data revealed that many parent and staff informants coveted the opportunity for greater engagement and to form relationships based on frequent communication and reciprocated interchange both at school and in the community. In recent years, the Federal Government has increased funding for scholarship programs for Aboriginal students located in remote communities in the northern parts of Australia, to attend boarding schools predominantly located in urban and metropolitan centres located in the southern parts of the nation. If boarding schools are to be promoted by governments as an alternative that circumvents limited secondary education options available in regional and remote communities, then an imperative exists for governments to facilitate greater opportunities for families and schools to form strong positive bonds. Literature has emphasised the significance of the teacher-student and parent-school relationships on the success and perceptions that Aboriginal young people construct of school (Appleyard, 2002; DoE, 2002; Gollan & Malin, 2012; Gray, 2000; Gray & Partington, 2012; Hayes, Johnston, Morris, Power, & Roberts, 2009; Lette, Tursan, D'Espaignet, Slack-Smith, Hunt, &

Nannup, 2009; MCEECDYA, 2011; Prout, 2009; Purdie et al., 2000; Reynolds, 2005). Whilst the provision of funding for scholarships to boarding school serves an immediate purpose, it does not address the complex social determinants which influence whether the experience itself is successful or not. In this context, the findings of the current research suggest that an essential area requiring further review is how parents and boarding schools are empowered to form stronger reciprocal relationships to minimise the conflict between school and home during the transition experience for male Aboriginal boarding students.

8.4 Strengths of the current research.

The consequence of a sustained period of intergenerational discrimination, oppression, prejudice, racism and segregation is that many Aboriginal people and communities are wary of trusting research processes and researchers (National Health and Medical Research Council, [NHMRC] 2003). A methodological strength of the current research was that it acknowledged the damaging legacy of past Western research practices and the role of psychology in this history. Moreover, the formation of an Aboriginal Advisory Group (Fielder, Roberts, & Abdullah, 2000; NHMRC, 2003) and the Aboriginal Terms of Reference (ATR) framework (Oxenham, 2000) formed an integral part of a methodological platform by which to challenge the dominance of Western research paradigms and norms. It also provided the foundation by which the practices of critical reflection (Drew, 2006; Walker & Sonn, 2010) and listening (Garvey, 2007) formed key aspects of the research process. Collectively, these actions shifted the power balance during this research from primarily being concerned with meeting the research guidelines of Western research institutions, to evaluating if research methods and practices fitted within the principles, standards and values expected by Aboriginal people, groups and society (Christie, 2006). Importantly, these actions enabled a respectful, reciprocal and collaborative research process to be established, and trust to be formed, as the complex matter of male Aboriginal boarding students' experiences and understandings were investigated. The qualitative design and the adoption of phenomenology, social constructionism and narrative interviewing used in this research were informed by a consultative approach with the Aboriginal Advisory Group. This choice of methodology enabled reflection on the relationship between social contexts and the interpersonal meanings and subjective understandings formed by individuals. Importantly, it privileged storytelling and culturally preferred knowledge exchange practices and communication styles such as yarning to become central aspects of the research process. Moreover, it minimised the inhibiting dialectic of

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the researcher and the researched, to instead promote the informant as the storyteller and the researcher as the listener that treats the life experiences and knowledge of others with respect and sensitivity.

A valuable aspect of involving student, parent, and staff informants was that the design of the current research enabled constructions of the transition experience for male Aboriginal boarding students to be explored from multiple perspectives. This feature helped the researcher to appreciate and understand the lived experience of transition beyond the immediate school setting and to consider the influence of wider social contexts that informed the construction of meaning. It also brought a greater depth and a rich diversity of understandings to how male Aboriginal boarding students constructed meaning around the transition experience. A benefit of multiple stakeholders to a qualitative research methodology was that the evidence for themes were supported by verbatim examples as they were experienced and perceived within the naturalistic setting of the informants. In particular, it provided in a meaningful way understanding about the diverse and complicated social interactions and notions of self, identity, belonging and connectedness that male Aboriginal boarding students from regional and remote communities balanced as they pursued their secondary education aspirations.

The current research is timely. As mentioned, in recent years the Federal Government has increased funding for scholarship programs for Aboriginal students located in remote communities in the northern parts of Australia, to attend boarding schools predominantly located in urban and metropolitan centres located in the southern parts of the nation. However, the well-meaning intentions of governments can at times be lost as they transition intentions into policy. Moreover, the meanings understood by policy-makers do not always reflect those shared by young people, and the experiences, lived reality and worldviews of those on whom a policy impacts. This research has provided the opportunity for student informants to voice their understandings and meaning around the experience of schooling away from home, family and community, a starting point often far removed from government processes and consultative practices. This research also raised awareness of the meaning of the experience as voiced by parent and staff informants. Importantly, this research provides strong testimony to the desire of student and parent informants from regional and remote communities to exert agency and a sense of control over their experiences with secondary education.

8.5 Limitations of the current research.

An issue for qualitative research is the generalisability of findings to other contexts and populations. However, the aim of this research was not to be representative of all circumstances and experiences but instead to provide a rich description of the diverse meanings, understandings and constructions of the transition experience as provided by informants from multiple perspectives. As the data was drawn from informants that voluntarily participated in the current study, it is possible that this informant sample was highly motivated as they had a vested interest in the research topic. Hence, it would be important for future research to consider the views and perceptions of those individuals less able, mobile and resourced to contribute to the topic of the present research. Another issue was the number of informants that were recruited by the current research. Initially, the researcher anticipated recruiting 10-12 informants per informant group (Morrow, 2005), with an overall number of 30-40 informants. However, the number of informants recruited was substantially above this estimation. While the quantity of data collected brought challenges in terms of data management and analysis, in the reflective mind of the researcher it would have been out of place with the wider aims of this research to have allowed an estimation to dictate the number of informants recruited. In particular, it would have been difficult to explain to student informants why some were interviewed and others were not despite volunteering to participate in the current research. Hence, the researcher felt it was appropriate to honour all informants that nominated themselves by providing the opportunity to voice their experiences and constructions of the transition experience. In this context, the recruitment of a larger informant sample was seen as ensuring that sufficient data would be collected and accounting for the potentiality that some informants may wish to withdraw from the research at a later point.

8.6 Future research directions.

The aim of qualitative research is to produce findings and benefits that are of value to the context from which the data was collected. Hence, future research could assess the applicability and utility of the current findings in terms of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and educational contexts. In particular, the findings of the current research need to be considered in other States and Territories, and education systems across Australia. Given the focus of the present study on male Aboriginal boarding students a gendered perspective of the transition experience would be an important future research pursuit. The saliency of prejudice and racism reported by staff informants' indicates these issues also warrant further attention. The sense of

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social responsibility reported by staff informants statements suggests that benefit exists in further exploring boarding schools perceived role in forging new and innovative relationships to meet the secondary education needs of Aboriginal students in regional and remote locations of the State (i.e., reciprocal teacher exchange and immersion programs, sharing of expertise and resources with regional and remote schools, provision of training and support for teachers and teacher assistants). In addition, the role of digital technologies to bridge and to overcome distance is also worthy of further exploration. Such as the creative and organised use of iPods and other technologies, as reportedly used by some parent informants in the current study, to help maintain connectedness with culture and language while Aboriginal boarding students are away from home (i.e., the role of mobile phones, Skype, email, and other social media). Similarly, further research is required into the cognitive, developmental, social and emotional influences on students during the transition experience to boarding school, as well as towards the development of support programs in boarding schools and for the parents of Aboriginal boarding students. Lastly, future research could also review the adequacy of government policy, consultation processes and funding arrangements in relation to Aboriginal boarding students and boarding schools.

8.7 Postscript reflection.

A statement by Fielder, Roberts, and Abdullah (2000) outlined the ethical and intellectual challenges for non-Indigenous researchers seeking to implement culturally appropriate ways to investigate social issues as experienced by Aboriginal communities:

The practical challenges for non-Indigenous researchers is clear: to develop equitable and constructive research practices that shift away from the patterns in the past. This will involve negotiation, understanding, perseverance and collaboration. Researchers will have to deal with the historical relationships that have bred a combination of distrust, anger, cynicism, fear, and disengagement – dealing with this legacy involves an intellectual struggle for both the researcher and the participant of the study (p. 353).

When I read such statements at the beginning of this research journey it initially primed me to think about ethical relationships and respectful research methodologies with Aboriginal young people. However, what it did not prepare me for was how to manage my own personal responses and affective states while conducting this research. As illustrated by Figure 6 in Chapter 3, in varying degrees and frequency, emotions and feelings such as anger, guilt, shame, relief, excitement, empathy, apprehension, sadness, confusion, worry, enlightenment, passion, and joy accompanied this journey. Such responses underpinned questions about potential biases I might

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hold as a researcher, as well as the place of psychological research and the role of the non-Indigenous researcher in Aboriginal contexts. However, key to confronting and constructively analysing these experiences and thoughts was the reiterative practice of critical reflection (Walker & Sonn, 2010) and importantly the instigation of an Aboriginal Advisory Group (NHMRC, 2003). Such endeavours were pivotal to challenging the familiar and taken-for-granted assumptions of Western research practice, constructions and meanings in everyday life about culture, power and politics, as well as negotiating and re-negotiating understandings as new relationships, dialogues, and ways of knowing, doing and being were encountered. Lastly, it is important to not overlook the ability of young people to inspire and shape research. Throughout this journey I have never stopped marvelling at Aboriginal boarding students' commitment to their education and at their resilience in the face of adversity. The distances alone that many commute to boarding school are profound. Such determination at such a young age accords respect. It is this role modelling that has equally guided my own personal commitment to education and practice as a researcher.

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Appendices

Appendix A: National Health and Medical Research Councils (NHMRC, 2003), Values and ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.

Core Value	Method of Addressing Core Value in Research Process
Reciprocity: <i>In the research context, reciprocity means recognizing and including partner's contributions, and ensuring that research outcomes include equitable benefits of value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or individuals. It requires the researcher to demonstrate a return (or benefit) to the community which is valued and which contributes to cohesion and survival.</i>	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, voices and outlooks by incorporating an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) as the pivotal structure in the research design and will consult with ATSIAG members at all stages across the research process. Continually review and reflect upon the research process and adjust it to be consistent with the aspirations, understandings, values and cultural knowledge practices of ATSIAG members, students, parents, families and the wider community. Ensure that rural, regional and remote communities will benefit from the research by the findings being disseminated not only to schools, but also with other bodies of influence such as government departments and services (e.g., DEEWR, DETWA, AISWA, CEO and Abstudy) who with this information can then make informed and targeted decisions on how to improve educational experiences and opportunities for future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Source opportunities to develop a new professional development and training programme to improve awareness of this experience with students, parents and school staff.
Respect: <i>Respectful research relationships acknowledge and affirm the right of people to have values, norms and aspirations. Essential to a respectful relationship is the recognition of the contribution of others and the consequences of research.</i>	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to correct traditional and cultural protocols across the duration of the research process and instances in which the researcher is unsure about the best way to proceed undertake consultation with ATSIAG members. Provide adequate consultation time for, and be inclusive of, ATSIAG members to be involved with decision making processes (e.g., via organized meetings, telephone calls, email updates). Be sensitive to and acknowledge that it is the right of all people to have values, attitudes and aspirations that are different to those of the researcher. Embrace and encourage these differences as a positive, valued and valid contribution that equally informs the overall research process. Look beyond the immediate and be conscious that all people, irrespective of age, status, gender or other perceived notions, have something valuable to contribute. Be aware that reasons which may be invisible to the researcher will exist for unanticipated/unexpected outcomes, actions or occurrences. Understand that it is not always appropriate for a non-Indigenous researcher to have knowledge of or exposure to certain Indigenous knowledge practices, understandings, constructs and meanings. Ensure that all involved are aware they can withdraw from this research at any point, without explanation or penalty.
Equality: <i>In the research context, equality involves valuing knowledge and wisdom, ensuring equality of partners, and ensuring the equal distribution of benefit.</i>	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embrace the fundamental right and dignity of all people to be different, while at the same time being equal. Recognize, respect and uphold the distinctiveness, heterogeneity and diversity of cultural, language, clan, skin and family groups both across WA as a state and also within smaller WA regions and communities. Ensure membership of the ATSIAG composes individuals that reflect the diversity of cultural, language, clan, skin and family groups in WA. Similarly embrace varying perspectives of ATSIAG members on education and issues confronted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children studying away from home and family. Equally value the unique wisdom, knowledge and experiences that different cultural, language, local and family groups and communities contribute, share and entrust during the research process. Make equally available to all, including those not directly involved but who have followed or

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

have interest in this research, the final outcomes so that they can be independently utilize.

- Apply final research outcomes to advance progress towards the elimination of educational inequality currently experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents, families and communities located outside of the Perth metropolitan area of WA.
-

Responsibility: *In a research context this involves using an approach that does no harm to individuals and communities; and which avoids having an adverse impact on others' abilities to comply with their responsibilities. Ensuring that individuals are protected, trust is maintained and accountability is clear.*

The researcher will:

- Be conscious that as a non-Indigenous person raised and educated in the dominant culture I am not exposed to the everyday lived experience, values, needs, protocols, expectations and aspirations that construct and guide the many Indigenous nations across WA.
 - Protect and value the maintenance of genuine respectful relationships built during the research process, above the establishment of academic reputation or personal aspirations.
 - Be alert to potentially unequal power relationships or their manifestation and work collaboratively and in consultation with both ATSIAG members and research supervisors to address this issue.
 - Be conscious not to coerce people, particularly students and parents but also ATSIAG members, to be involved with this research and provide as much information, space and time as is required by them to make an informed and independent decision about their level of participation.
 - Be mindful that coercion is a form of oppression and may compromise other significant relationships or roles that people have within their own networks or community which the researchers is not subject to, accountable to or necessarily dependent upon.
 - Ensure that all involved are aware they can withdraw from this research at any point, without explanation or penalty.
 - Follow previously researched and established WA specific methods during both the establishment and the data collection phases and will corroborated the appropriateness or adaptation of these methods through close consultation with ATSIAG members.
 - Prior to the involvement of people in this research, provide adequate information in a format that is preferred and familiar to potential participants, which will include an outline of the research motivations, ambitions, expectations and requirements, those others involved, contact details of ATSIAG members for consultation.
 - Give clear information and explanation on how the confidentiality of both people who participate in the research and the shared and entrusted information they provide, will be protected, stored and utilized.
 - If people request further information, give a clear and timely response which is in a format that is preferred and familiar to those whom request it.
 - Produce genuine and authentic research in particular, recognize that the usefulness of this research will be forfeited if the original information shared and entrusted to the researcher is abstracted or generalized beyond its original context and intention.
 - Ensure that ATSIAG members are satisfied with the research outcomes before submission for final assessment (review) and the publication of any results.
-

Survival and Protection: *This involves consideration of values based on solidarity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, respect for and protection of cultural distinctiveness and identity, as well as social cohesion.*

The researcher will:

- Respect the right of people to both protect their cultures and identity from practices that erode, assimilate, exploit, homogenize and undermine existing distinctiveness and diversity.
 - Include a section within the final report clearly celebrating and highlighting the cultural distinctiveness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across WA.
 - Ensure membership of the ATSIAG composes individuals that reflect the diversity of cultural, language, clan, skin and family groups in WA.
 - Recognise that the people sharing and entrusting their experiences and stories are the experts and the challenge for the researcher instead, is to capture and convey to the best ability the experiences, understandings and meanings that were shared and entrusted during the research process.
 - Demonstrate trustworthiness through closely following NHMRC (2003) guidelines for ethical research conduct, close consultation with the ATSIAG and conducting broader consultation with interested community members.
-

Spirit and Integrity: *This is the overarching value that binds all the others into a coherent whole. It has two components. The first is about the continuity between past, current and future generations. The second is about behavior, which maintains the*

The researcher will:

- Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a single homogenous group.
 - Recognize that an implicit part of spirit and integrity is participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making processes.
-

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

*coherence of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
values and cultures. Any
behavior that diminishes
any of the previous five
values could not be
described as having
integrity.*

SF2478053 Indigenous boarding students and ABSTUDY [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Page 1 of 2

**SF2478053 Indigenous boarding students and ABSTUDY
[SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]**

adriana.davila@centrelink.gov.au on behalf of mi.coordination@centrelink.gov.au

Sent: Monday, 11 October 2010 1:53 PM

To: David MANDER

Cc: mi.coordination@centrelink.gov.au

Attachments: SF2478053 Indigenous board~1.xls (1 MB)

Good Afternoon David,

Please find attached approved and cleared data output for your use. Note the use of this data is only for the purposes stated on your original request. Please provide any findings, reports, publications etc. that include or are based on the provided data to Centrelink at least 4 weeks before public release

Adriana Davila
Access Team
Performance & Information Management Branch
Information and Performance Division
Level 4, South Yellow, Caroline Chisholm Centre
Email: MI.Coordination@Centrelink.gov.au

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

Appendix C: Letter of Support from the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA.)



19 October 2007

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I write in support of the research proposal presented by Mr David Mander in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of a Doctor of Philosophy from Edith Cowan University.

David works for the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia as an Indigenous Student Liaison Officer in the Future Footprints programme which is funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training. This programme provides an additional support structure for Indigenous students from regional and remote areas of Western Australia who attend boarding schools in Perth. David's proposal for his research topic "Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students in Western Australia studying at a residential school" has grown out of his role at AISWA and also mirrors his commitment to ensuring that Indigenous students maximise their educational opportunities through a supportive tuition programme.

David's research is based on a 360° approach which will involve investigating the experiences of the students, their parents and their teachers. The outcome of such research will be invaluable for teachers in identifying good practice and in understanding not only the needs of their students but of the students' families.

With the present focus on how best to educate young Indigenous people, David's research will identify both the positives and negatives of education in a boarding school setting which requires significant separation from family and community.

I commend the proposal to you and in addition would recommend David as a worthy candidate for an ECU Postgraduate Research Scholarship.

Yours sincerely

(Mrs) Audrey Jackson
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mander Support

aiswa

PO Box 1917 Osborne Park DC WA 6906
Suite 1, 41 Walters Drive, Osborne Park WA 6906
T: (08) 9447 1022 F: (08) 9244 2793
www.aiswa.org.au

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement for Members of the Aboriginal Advisory Group

June 2008

Dear ,

Re: Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students in Western Australia studying at a residential school.

The overall aim of this research is to gain an increased understanding about how male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students from remote and rural regions of Western Australia construct meaning around the experiences they have at residential schools. This research will use a holistic approach to explore this issue by interviewing the three main stakeholders involved in this experience, these being the student, the parents and residential school staff members. In addition, the research has also been approved by the ECU Ethics Committee and is also under the direct supervision of:

- Associate Professor Lynne Cohen, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5575 Email: l.cohen@ecu.edu.au
- Dr Julie-Ann Pooley, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5591 Email: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au

In addition, a preliminary meeting has been held with the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) who has reviewed the proposed research and is supportive of this research being conducted in the independent education sector. Importantly, as recommended by the *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2003)* to ensure that genuine, non-harmful and culturally sensitive research is undertaken, an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) will be formed. Your participation as a member of the ATSIAG is **vital** to the quality, success and credibility of this research.

In your capacity as an AAG member you will be responsible for providing guidance on all aspects of this research, as well as critically commenting and challenging any incorrect assumptions. Similarly, as an AAG member it is important for you to recognize that you are in a position of **'trust'** and it is expected that you will at all times respect the privacy and right to confidentiality that all people involved in this research are entitled to. It is also expected that any information you come in contact with, will not be used in public discussion or used for any other purpose than this research. Owing to this position of 'trust' the AAG members will be asked to sign a 'Confidentiality Agreement' before participating in this research in any capacity.

Please feel free to contact myself, Associate Professor Lynne Cohen or Dr Julie-Ann Pooley on the contact details provided if you would like to discuss this research further before signing this form which will constitute as a 'Confidentiality Agreement'. Similarly, if you have any further questions or concerns about the research and would like to contact an independent person

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au . It is very important that you carefully read and consider the following information outlined below before signing at the bottom of this page. I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understand the information in this information letter explaining the research.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I have been given the opportunity to talk to alternative people who have knowledge of the research and been provided with their contact details.
- I understand that as an AAG member I am in a position of trust and it is expected that I will at all times respect the privacy and right to confidentiality all participants involved in this research are entitled to.
- I understand that any information I come in contact with will not be used in public discussion or used for any other purpose then the present research.
- I understand this information will be used to generate a final research report and that no information will be published (i.e., journal articles) without been given prior notice.
- I understand that I can have a copy of the final research report upon request.
- I understand that participation in the AAG is voluntary and that I am free to stop or withdraw from participating in the research at any time, without explanation, questioning or penalty.
- I freely agree to participate in this research and understand what I am being asked to do.

I..... (print name) hereby understand the above conditions).

Signature:

Date:.....

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research. Your contribution to this research will be greatly valued and is deeply appreciated.

Warm regards,

David Mander

PhD candidate

School of Psychology and Social Science

Edith Cowan University

100 Joondalup Drive

Joondalup Western Australia 6027

Tel: (08) 6304 3840 (post-graduate office)

Mobile: 0419 935 538

Email: dmander@student.ecu.edu.au



Dear Parent, Guardian or Family Member,

My name is David Mander and I am a student at Edith Cowan University (ECU). As a part of my university studies I am looking to do some research which is called: **‘Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students in Western Australia studying at a residential school’**.

What is the research about? I would like to learn about how male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students experience studying away from home at boarding schools.

Why do I need your help? I think that by listening to **your stories** about **your experiences** as well as **your child’s experiences**, this is the best way to find out how to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and rural regions of WA attending boarding schools in the future.

What am I asking? I am seeking your support with my research and permission from you to talk to you and your child about participating in this research.

What will happen? I would like to get to know you a little first and then organise a time to sit down and have a talk about your experiences as a parent. Our talks will be more like a relaxed conversations about whatever you feel comfortable sharing with me about your experiences as a parent of a student at boarding school. I will be audio-tape recording our talks (which means just sound not video recorded). The reason why I will audio-tape record our talks is so that I can listen carefully to what you are saying rather than trying to write notes as we talk. I do not work for any government department and I do not work for any school. There are no right or wrong answers in our talks it is just about what you think and have experienced.

What happens with the information you give me? All information that you give me during our talks will remain **‘strictly confidential’** meaning that no personal information (i.e., name, address) will be linked in any way with the information you provide during an interview, only me and my three supervisors will have access to it. In addition, all information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office at ECU. No one from a government department or your child’s school will see or hear what you say to me and I will not play your interview to anyone else, or talk about you to anybody. The information that you give me will be written into a final research report, which will be made available to you upon request. No information you give me will be published with your name attached to it or without you being informed first. Being involved with this research is voluntary; you and your child are free to withdraw anytime, without explanation, questioning or penalty.

What else do you need to know or do, if you want to participate in this research? You have already done the hardest part which is to read and think about this information letter. If you

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

would like to participate in this research give me a telephone call or email me on my contact details at the bottom of this letter any time that suits you or have a talk with the Head of Boarding or Indigenous Program Coordinator at your child's school, who will help organise a time and date for me to meet up with you. Alternatively, this research is being monitored by an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) specifically formed to provide counsel and guidance to me on all parts of the research. So you could also talk to them about this research if you want to, members of the AAG are:

Ms. Donella Brown	Ph: 93652812 Email: dmbrown@edmundrice.org
Mr. Kim Collard	Ph: 9296 0477 Email: kim@kooya.com.au
Ms. Donna Cox	Ph: 9192 7720 Email: donnacox@westnet.com.au
Mr. Michael Woodley	Ph: 9182 1497 Email: mwoodley@juluwarlu.pilbara.net
Ms. Layla Yu	Ph: 9192 2333 Email: yu@garnduwa.com.au

This research has also been approved by the ECU Ethics Committee and is also under the direct supervision of:

- Associate Professor Lynne Cohen, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5575 Email: l.cohen@ecu.edu.au
- Dr Julie-Ann Pooley, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU
Ph: (08) 6304 5591 Email: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au

Please feel free to contact them any time on the details provided above to discuss this proposed research further. Similarly, if you have any concerns, questions or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au .

If you agree for you and your child to be involved with this research, please complete the attached 'Consent Form' and return it in the supplied reply paid envelop addressed to me. I look forward to talking with you. Thank you for your time,

Warm regards,
David Mander
PhD candidate
School of Psychology and Social Science
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup Western Australia 6027
Tel: (08) 6304 3840
Mobile: 0419 935 538
Email: dmander@student.ecu.edu.au

Appendix E: Continued. Abbreviated Version of the NHMRC (2003) on a Green Sheet - for Parents

Torres Strait Islander PhD Research into Boarding Schools 2008-2010

National Health and Medical Research Councils (NHMRC, 2003), Values and ethics: Guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research

Listed below is my personal commitment to conducting, to the best of my ability, correct, safe and culturally sensitive research.


Core Value	Method of addressing Core Value in Proposed Research Process
Reciprocity	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by including an advisory group in the research design and consulting with advisory group at all stages of the research (i.e., ATSIAC and co-supervisory). Ensure that communities will benefit from the research and that the findings are disseminated, not only to community but with other bodies of influence (i.e., governmental bodies who can make decisions to improve conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples). Modify the research where necessary in line with the values and aspirations of community and families.
Respect	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be sensitive, aware and acknowledge that it is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have values, attitudes and aspirations that are different to those of the researcher. See difference as a positive occurrence and not negative. Be respectful to all individuals and work in consultation with ATSIAC and community. Share with ATSIAC and community the findings of the research in an appropriate and accessible manner.
Equality	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be different while at the same time being equal. Use the research to advance the education of individuals experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Be aware that to treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as an individual is neither good, only unethical but discriminatory.
Responsibility	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do no harm. Be accountable. Interpret advice given by the ATSIAC and community. Give timely feedback. Use careful judgement in making decisions. Acknowledge a responsibility in producing genuine and authentic research.
Survival and Protection	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise, value and uphold the diversity of culture and distinctiveness of culture between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the generation and authenticity of the research. Demonstrate trustworthiness through ethical conduct and the use of safe research and consultation with community.
Spirit and Integrity	<p>The researcher will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a single homogeneous group. Recognise that an implicit part of spirit and integrity is participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in a decision making process.

(Adapted from the NHMRC, 2003)

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

Appendix E: Continued. The Consent Form on a Red Sheet – for Parents.

Consent Form



Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students in Western Australia studying at a residential school.

Dear Parent, Guardian or Family Member,

Thank you for reading the information letter. I dearly look forward to talking with you about having a child at a boarding school. By filling in this form you are indicating that you would like to participate in this research. Please read the below dot-points before signing this document at the bottom of this page.

1. I (write your name) agree to participate in this research and can be best contacted on the following **telephone number, home address or email address:**

.....

.....

.....

Signing this document means that:

- I have been given a copy of the information letter explaining the research and had time to think about it.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I know that I can contact members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to talk about this research. I have been provided with their contact details.
- I know that the research will involve an audio-tape recording of our talks (which means just sound, not video recording).
- I understand that all the information provided will be kept strictly confidential. This means that **none of my personal information** (i.e., name, address) will be linked in any way with the information I provide during our talks.
- I know that none of the information I provide will be published without me being informed first.
- I understand that all the information I provide will only be used for the purposes of this research.
- I know that I can have a copy of the final report if I ask for it.
- I understand that participation in this research is not an expectation placed upon me by my child's school or any other education body.
- I know that if I have any concerns, questions or complaints about the research I can contact an independent person to talk about the research and I have been provided with the contact details for this person.
- I know that participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to stop, withdraw and leave at anytime, without explanation, or questioning.
- I freely agree to participate in this research and understand what I am being asked to agree to.

Signature: Date:



Dear Student,

My name is David Mander and I am a student at Edith Cowan University (ECU). As a part of my university studies I am looking to do some research which is called: **‘Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students in Western Australia studying at a residential school’**.

What is the research about? I would like to learn about how male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students experience studying away from home at boarding schools.

Why do I need your help? I think that by listening to your stories about your experiences is the best way to find out how to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from remote and rural regions of WA attending boarding schools in the future.

What am I asking? I am seeking your support with my research and permission from you, to talk to you to about your experiences of boarding school.

What will happen? I would like to get to know you a little first and then organise a time to sit down and have a talk about your experiences as a student. Our talks will be more like a relaxed conversations about whatever you feel comfortable sharing with me about your experiences at boarding school. I will be audio-tape recording our talks (which means just sound not video recorded). The reason why I will audio-tape record our talks is so that I can listen carefully to what you are saying rather than trying to write notes as we talk. I do not work for any government department and I do not work for any school. There are no right or wrong answers in our talks it is just about what you think and have experienced.

What happens with the information you give me? All information that you give me during our talks will remain ‘strictly confidential’ meaning that no personal information (i.e., name, address) will be linked in any way with the information you provide during an interview, only me and my three supervisors will have access to it. In addition, all information will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office at ECU. No one from a government department or your school will know what you say to me and I will not play your interview to anyone else, or talk about you to anybody. The information that you give me will be written into a final research report, which will be made available to you upon request. No information you give me will be published with your name attached to it or without you being informed first. Being involved with this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw anytime, without explanation, questioning or penalty.

What else do you need to know or do, if you want to participate in this research? You have already done the hardest part which is to read and think about this information letter. If you would like to participate in this research give me a telephone call or email me on my contact details at the bottom of this letter any time that suits you or have a talk with the Head of Boarding or Indigenous Program Coordinator at your school, who will help organise a time and date for me

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

to meet up with you. Alternatively, this research is being monitored by an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) specifically formed to provide counsel and guidance to me on all parts of the research. So you could also talk to them about this research if you want to, members of the AAG are:

Ms. Donella Brown	Ph: 93652812 Email: dmbrown@edmundrice.org
Mr. Kim Collard	Ph: 9296 0477 Email: kim@kooya.com.au
Ms. Donna Cox	Ph: 9192 7720 Email: donnacox@westnet.com.au
Mr. Michael Woodley	Ph: 9182 1497 Email: mwoodley@juluwarlu.pilbara.net
Ms. Layla Yu	Ph: 9192 2333 Email: yu@garnduwa.com.au

This research has also been approved by the ECU Ethics Committee and is also under the direct supervision of:

Associate Professor Lynne Cohen, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU

Ph: (08) 6304 5575 Email: l.cohen@ecu.edu.au

Dr Julie-Ann Pooley, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU

Ph: (08) 6304 5591 Email: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au

Please feel free to contact them any time on the details provided above to discuss this proposed research further. Similarly, if you have any concerns, questions or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au . If you agree to be involved with this research, please complete the attached 'Consent Form' and return it in the supplied reply paid envelop addressed to me. I look forward to talking with you. Thank you for your time,

Warm regards,

David Mander
 PhD candidate
 School of Psychology and Social Science
 Edith Cowan University
 100 Joondalup Drive
 Joondalup Western Australia 6027
 Tel: (08) 6304 3840
 Mobile: 0419 935 538
 Email: dmander@student.ecu.edu.au



**Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students
in Western Australia studying at a residential school.**

Dear Student,

Thank you for agreeing to help me with my research. Please carefully read or listen to the information below being read to you before signing this consent form at the bottom of the page. Your involvement in this research will be greatly valued.

I (print name) of (print name of school) hereby consent to participate in the research and understand that:

- I have read, or had read to me, and understand the information in the information letter provided explaining the research.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I have been given the opportunity to talk to alternative people who have know of the research and been provided with their contact details.
- I understand that involvement in this research will include an audio-taped individual or small group interview.
- I understand that the information provided will be kept strictly confidential and that no personal information (i.e., name, address) will link me with the information I share.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research.
- I understand this information will be used to generate a final research report and that no information will be published (i.e., journal articles) without been given notice before.
- I understand that I can have a copy of the final research report if I ask.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to.
- I understand that I am free to stop or withdraw from participating in the research at any time, without explanation, questioning or penalty.
- I understand that my involvement in this research is not an expectation of the school.
- I freely agree to participate in this research and understand what I am being asked to do.

Student signature:

Date:



Dear School Staff Member,

I am a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student at Edith Cowan University (ECU). For my final thesis I am conducting research titled **‘Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students in Western Australia studying at a residential school’**. The overall aim of the research is to increase understanding about how male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students understand experiences they have at residential schools. To achieve this aim I would like to talk with residential school staff members and I am seeking your support with my research and would like to invite you to participate in individual or small group interviews.

The principal of your school has agreed to allow staff members to participate in this research and a preliminary meeting has been held with the Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) who has reviewed the proposed research and is supportive of it being conducted in the independent education sector. In addition, the research has also been approved by the ECU Ethics Committee and is also under the direct supervision of:

Associate Professor Lynne Cohen, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU

Ph: (08) 6304 5575 Email: l.cohen@ecu.edu.au

Dr Julie-Ann Pooley, School of Psychology & Social Science, ECU

Ph: (08) 6304 5591 Email: j.pooley@ecu.edu.au

As recommend by the National Health and Medical Research Council to ensure that genuine and non-harmful research is undertaken an Aboriginal Advisory Group (AAG) has also been formed. The role of the ATSIAG will be to provide counsel and guidance on all aspects and stages of the research, as well as to critically comment and challenge any incorrect assumptions. Members of the AAG are:

Ms. Donella Brown Ph: 93652812 Email: dmbrown@edmundrice.org

Mr. Kim Collard Ph: 9296 0477 Email: kim@kooya.com.au

Ms. Donna Cox Ph: 9192 7720 Email: donnacox@westnet.com.au

Mr. Michael Woodley Ph: 9182 1497 Email: mwoodley@juluwarlu.pilbara.net

Ms. Layla Yu Ph: 9192 2333 Email: yu@garnduwa.com.au

Agreeing to participate in this research is completely ‘your choice’ and is no way linked to any expectations imposed by the school and will not influence any current or future opportunities

Exploring the Experience of Boarding School

at your school. All information provided during the individual or group interviews will remain 'confidential' meaning that no personal information (i.e., name, address) will be linked in any way with the information provide during an interview. In addition, all information will be safely kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office at ECU. The information collected during an interview will be used to develop a final research paper, which will be made available to all participants upon request. No additional documents will be published without participants being informed.

Please feel free to contact me any time, or Associate Professor Lynne Cohen or Dr Julie-Ann Pooley on the contact details provided above to discuss this proposed research further. Similarly, if you have any concerns, questions or complaints about the research and would like to contact an independent person regarding the research, please contact the University Research Ethics Officer, Ms. Kim Gifkins on Ph: (08) 6304 2170 or via email at: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au . If any negative memories or issues are evoked during interviews for students, parents and staff members I will immediately inform you and will assist participants to access suitable support (i.e., school psychologist).

If you agree to participate in this research, please complete the attached 'Consent Form' and return it in the supplied reply paid envelop addressed to me or alternative give me a telephone call or send me an email on my contact details provided below. I look forward to discussing this research with you in greater detail and providing you with more information at a time, date and location suitable to you. Thank you for your time in considering this research,

Warm regards,

David Mander
 PhD candidate
 School of Psychology and Social Science
 Edith Cowan University
 100 Joondalup Drive
 Joondalup Western Australia 6027
 Tel: (08) 6304 3840
 Mobile: 0419 935 538
 Email: dmander@student.ecu.edu.au



**Transition experiences of male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schools students
in Western Australia studying at a residential school.**

Dear Staff Member,

Please read the information below carefully before completing and signing this consent form. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research. Your contribution to this research will be greatly valued.

I..... **(print name)** of (print name of school) hereby agree to participate in this research and can be **best** contacted on the following telephone number and/or email address

I acknowledge that:

- I have read and understand the information in the information letter provided explaining the research.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have had these questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I have been given the opportunity to talk to alternative people who have knowledge of the research and been provided with their contact details.
- I understand that participation in this research will involve an audio-taped individual or small group interview.
- I understand that the information provided will be kept strictly confidential and that no personal information (i.e., name, address) will link me with the research results.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research.
- I understand this information will be used to generate a final research report and that no information will be published (i.e., journal articles) without been given prior notice.
- I understand that I can gain a copy of the final research report upon request.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to.
- I understand that I am free to stop or withdraw from participating in the research at any time, without explanation, questioning or penalty.
- I understand that my participation in this research is not an expectation of the school.
- I freely agree to participate in this research and understand what I am being asked to do.
-

Signature:

Date:

Appendix I: Certificate of Completion for the Cultural Competence for Non-Indigenous Mental Health Practitioners' program delivered by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association.

