Living roots, rebuilding trunks and forming new branches: how has exposure to the western education system influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region

Catherine Hillard

Southern Cross University

Publication details
Hillard, C 2011, 'Living roots, rebuilding trunks and forming new branches: how has exposure to the western education system influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region', MA thesis, Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW.
Copyright C Hillard 2011
LIVING ROOTS, REBUILDING TRUNKS AND FORMING NEW BRANCHES

How has exposure to the Western Education system influenced Aboriginal Identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region?

By
Catherine Hillard

B.A. Social Science (Youth Work) – University of Western Sydney NSW
B.A. Social Work – Charles Sturt University NSW

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

at
Southern Cross University
DECLARATION

I certify that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other University.

I acknowledge that I have read and understood the University's rules, requirements, procedures and policy relating to my higher degree research award and to my thesis. I certify that I have complied with the rules, requirements, procedures and policy of the University (as they may be from time to time).

Catherine Hillard

Signature........................................

Date.............................................
Abstract

The focus of my research is how exposure to Western education has influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala regions. As an Aboriginal woman who has been influenced and impacted on by the current education system, I deeply understand the need for exploring issues that will promote the self-determination and the cultural maintenance of Aboriginal communities.

For this study, a central theme is education. Therefore, it is important to examine the word, ‘education’, its history and the implications of engaging in the mainstream education systems. The current educational systems in Australia are based on the euro-centric versions of history where Western thought and systems are the centre and where thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and knowledge are discounted as non-progressive and therefore not relevant or useful to the mainstream culture.

Aboriginal peoples are not resisting acculturation but are resisting the policies and institutions that promote segregation, marginalisation and Aboriginal peoples' perceived inability to self determine their own lives and communities. Aboriginal peoples are interested in cross cultural education that provides new intercultural educational spaces and shared meanings and learning.
# Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1
Topic ....................................................................................................................... 4
My experience ....................................................................................................... 5

CHAPTER TWO: “PLANTING SEEDS”

Literature Review .................................................................................................. 13
History of Western Education and Aboriginal Education .................................. 13
Institutionalised Racism and Internalised Racism .............................................. 25
Aboriginal Identity ............................................................................................... 30

CHAPTER THREE: “REBUILDING TRUNKS”

Research Challenges
Colonisation and Cultural Appropriation ............................................................ 37
Language as a Research Challenge ....................................................................... 38
Epistemology ......................................................................................................... 39

CHAPTER FOUR: “FORMING NEW BRANCHES”

Research Methodology ......................................................................................... 41
Research Question ................................................................................................. 41
Philosophical Framework ...................................................................................... 41
Procedures ............................................................................................................ 45
Research Participants ........................................................................................... 49
Data Collection ...................................................................................................... 51
Restoring Your Spirit and Becoming an Honourable Ancestor.

Chapter One: Living Roots, Rebuilding Trunks and Forming New Branches.

Introduction:

“Clouds come floating into my life from other days no longer to shed rain or usher storm but to give colour to my sunset sky.”

(Tagore, 1951, p.113)

Aboriginal communities and people all across the country are working towards new ways of working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to heal from oppressive institutions, policies and practices. These are truly challenging and crucial times, with the exposure of trans-generational trauma and the recent government interventions in Aboriginal communities. While I was in Yirrkala, East Arnhem Land, in 2007, the Australian Government identified the poor socio-economic conditions and child abuse in Aboriginal communities and called for a 'national emergency' to address these ingrained and catastrophic issues. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, are reflecting on a multitude of issues relating to the present oppression, racism and low socio-economic indicators that exist in Aboriginal communities across the country. This plight includes examining how Aboriginal communities can be self sustaining and self determining. The desire and need for government to take responsibility for the past, present, and future is vital if self determination is to come to fruition. This has been highlighted by the recent Rudd government’s 'Sorry Statement' to the stolen generations (Sydney Morning Herald, 13.2.2008, online).
The 'stolen generation' and missionary schools were implemented as a direct result of the government’s assimilation policy, implemented in 1937. The assimilation policy allowed Aboriginal children to be forcibly removed from their families and communities. The Aboriginal children were to be educated in classrooms and taught the 'proper' English language and way of life. The assimilation policy caused unrepairable psychological, physical and emotional damage to Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal communities across Australia. The acknowledgment of these atrocities by the Rudd government was felt and welcomed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

My interest in Yolngu culture and Yirrkala developed after reading about the Bark Petition. The first Bark Petition was presented to the Federal Court in Canberra, but to this day there has been no formal agreement or negotiation process with Yolngu for the lease of their land. The Yirrkala bark petitions of 1963 are historic Australian documents now hanging in the Australian Federal Parliament. They were the first traditional documents prepared by Indigenous Australians that were recognised by the Australian Parliament, and are thus the first documentary recognition of Indigenous people in Australian law.

Yirrkala people of the Northern Territory lived a traditional lifestyle and had no contact with white man until bauxite was discovered on their land in the late 1950s. In 1963, the Yolngu of Yirrkala sent the Bark Petitions to the Australian House of Representatives asserting that the Yolngu owned that land and they protested the Commonwealth's granting of mining rights to Nabalco of land excised from Arnhem Land reserve. The result was an Australian Federal Parliament inquiry which recommended that compensation was owed to the Yolngu. Thus, the petition was the first recognition of native title. The Bark Petition captured national and international attention and was a testament to the Yolngu for their
role in the birth of the land rights movement. In what is now regarded as the first native title case, Justice Blackburn acknowledged that:

“The evidence shows a subtle and elaborate system highly adapted to the country in which the people led their lives, which provided a stable order of society and was remarkably free from the vagaries of personal whim or influence. If ever a system could be called ‘a government of laws, and not of men’, it is that shown in the evidence before me.” Justice Blackburn (Milirrpum v Nabalco, 1971, 17 FLR 141, p.267).

However, Justice Blackburn upheld the now discredited doctrine of terra nullius and the bauxite mine went ahead on Yolngu lands. The clans were told they didn’t own the land and had not owned it for the preceding one hundred and eighty years. It seems they had lost it on 26th January, 1788. The High Court of Australia overturned terra nullius in the famous Mabo land rights case in 1992 (Pelczynski, 1993, p.3).

Yolngu have continued to be active in the land rights struggle and the movement towards the recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty. The Chairman of the Yothu Yindi Foundation, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, interpreted for his father, the leader of the Gumatj clan, in the Milirrpum case and is now widely regarded as the elder statesman of Indigenous leaders. He has been the Chairman of the influential Northern Land Council since 1983, and was honoured as Australian of the Year in 1978. 1985 saw him awarded the Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his services to the Australian Indigenous community (Yothu Yindi Foundation, 2011, p.4).
On two different occasions in 2008, after the Northern Territory intervention was enforced, Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd visited Yirrkala where Aboriginal leaders took the opportunity to express their concerns about the intervention and its unknown impacts on the local people and the community. They included a letter of demand to remove income management and have the permit system and Racial Discrimination Act reinstated. There was a range of issues raised (e.g. lack of housing and soaring food prices). At the Garma Festival PM Rudd was presented with another Bark Petition outlining major issues, education was one of these issues that need support by the government.

One issue that has been given noticeable and extensive exposure in 2008 in the media is education and Aboriginal peoples’ participation and retention rates in the education system. Appropriate education is lacking within the education system and this impacts on all aspects of Aboriginal life. The need for culturally appropriate and meaningful education in Aboriginal communities is essential for Aboriginal peoples to lead empowering lives.

**Topic:**

The focus of my research is how exposure to Western education has influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala regions. As an Aboriginal woman who has been influenced and impacted on by the current education system, I deeply understand the need for exploring issues that will promote the self-determination and the cultural maintenance of Aboriginal communities.
My Worldview and Experience:

I became interested in research on education during my own educational experience. I completed a Bachelor of Social Work through Charles Sturt University (2003) and a Bachelor of Social Science through the University of Western Sydney (1996). Whilst studying these courses, I was introduced to the numerous theories and practices within the welfare and social work fields. I found these theories to be culturally inappropriate and limiting for Aboriginal peoples.

My childhood exposure to Aboriginal culture was limited to mass-produced Dreamtime Stories, as I was adopted as a baby into a non-Aboriginal family. My adopted parents finished their school education in the 1950's so their knowledge of Aboriginal culture was gleaned from the rather token resources of the time. Nevertheless, they had tertiary education and were opposed to the injustices that Aboriginal peoples had endured. There were no other Aboriginal peoples in my schools or community until I was about ten years old when one Aboriginal family moved into the local area. However, I was always seen as different because I was the only Aboriginal in a non-Aboriginal family. I was regularly taunted with racist remarks at school and in sporting events. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I was even aware that it was the colour of my skin and how Aboriginality was viewed and that this is what identified me as being different. After meeting my birth parents when I was thirteen, I became aware that I had my own Aboriginal culture, community and ancestry. I had no opportunity of experiencing my Aboriginal culture because my community was over eight hundred kilometres from where I was living. Through studying social science and social work I was introduced to minority groups and disadvantaged groups, which included Aboriginal peoples. I also did a subject on cultural diversity which briefly mentioned Aboriginal peoples.
After many years of study it became apparent that within the Social Work and Social Science curriculum there was a lack of acknowledgment of Aboriginal knowledge. The mainstream tertiary education system has very limited and little integration of Aboriginal knowledge, despite the presence of Aboriginal Education Units at these Universities. There was only limited understanding and exploration of processes for working with Aboriginal peoples and communities. As an Aboriginal person who was already facing the barriers of being a 'minority' within a mainstream course and society, I was extremely disappointed when I discovered that Aboriginal disadvantage, minority status, segregation and marginalisation within our country was not explored, debated nor seen as pertinent knowledge to our development as professional social workers or social scientists.

The lack of acknowledgment and teaching of Aboriginal knowledge has seemingly perpetuated the colonisation process and disillusioned me as an Aboriginal person, as I only had Western theory and practices to inform my studies. Consequently, I often found it difficult to commit to my studies and intended future occupation as a social worker. The content of social work and social science courses I studied were often not relevant or useful to me as an Aboriginal person who intended to work with Aboriginal peoples. The social work course content did not provide a professional praxis for working with Aboriginal peoples and/or Aboriginal communities. How could I develop a praxis or practice framework in which to work with any Aboriginal community if I could not engage in or study Aboriginal society and/or knowledge in my professional training? Social work is a discipline which works within societies with the disadvantaged, marginalised and disempowered and yet we were not studying nor engaging with the 'most marginalised' community in Australia. At best, I could work with Aboriginal peoples and promote a
model of self determination, whilst actively challenging the mainstream umbrella overseeing the service I would work for.

For this study, a central theme is education. Therefore, it is important to examine the word, ‘education’, its history and the implications of engaging in the mainstream education systems. The current educational systems in Australia are based on the euro-centric versions of history where Western thought and systems are the centre and where thousands of years of Aboriginal culture and knowledge are discounted as non-progressive and therefore not relevant or useful to the mainstream culture.

Western societies have decimated ‘traditional’ Aboriginal cultural practices and reduced this ancient knowledge to an exploitation of art, artefacts and ‘mythological’ (not scientifically proven) dreamtime stories. The attractive and marketable aspects of culture have been retained for use by the dominant culture in advertising and marketing the country to tourists, art dealers and collectors whilst, to date, there has been no significant recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty and the associated valid lore² (law).

The Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Jim Soorley spoke at the Community and Cultural Development conference in 1997, he stated that 'unless we make a clear statement, we are exploiting Aboriginal peoples’ history and their song and dance' and then added that 'the

---
¹ Traditional culture is underpinned by sacred belief systems and practices and harmony with the environment.

² Lore is a term used by Aboriginal peoples to reclaim Aboriginal peoples’ learning based on facts and tradition. On the other hand, Western law is a system of rules which bind the community and has more legal weight in today’s society. The reason I have referred to both terms is that today all people must abide by the Western “law”. Law overrides Aboriginal lore in this sense. I would argue that lore needs to be recognised for its own validity.
current Wik legislation is totally wrong and immoral and must be rejected. I feel that this statement exposes the former exploitation of Aboriginal culture, through its use for entertainment and capitalisation, while denying Aboriginal peoples their rightful connection to and ownership of their land'. The institution of the Native Title Act (Wik legislation) amendments in 1998 by the Howard Government, saw native title being wound back to strengthen the position of other tenures, while denying protection of Indigenous rights and interests in land (Koori Mail, 1997, ed.152, p11).

'Somehow our education system must bring to the Aborigine a realisation that his current way of life necessitates a concern for the future and in particular, a saving for the future' (Dunn and Tatz, 1969, p.101). I believe the attitude expressed in the above quote seemingly justifies the colonisation of Aboriginal Australia and shows a distinct lack of responsibility for past injustices and a total disregard for wealth inherent in Aboriginal knowledge, epistemology and ontology.

Aboriginal Art and dancers are often ‘displayed’ in the token sense at some important public ceremonies, but the Aboriginal Elders rarely are given the opportunity to explain the meaning or reason in the art, song or dance. The audiences rarely have any meaningful understanding of the Aboriginal peoples, the local culture/spirituality and the cultural meanings.

The welcoming ceremony of the Olympic flag, in 2008 in Canberra for the Olympic Games to be held in China, was a rare exception. Elders not only had a vital role in the welcome ceremony, but were given an opportunity to speak at length of their culture and the significance of the land to Aboriginal peoples. There are certain cultural centres in
areas such as Cairns and Alice Springs where all people can gain a greater understanding of Aboriginal peoples and culture but these are fee-bearing tourist attractions confined to limited areas and visitation by people.

A lack of desire to take responsibility for past injustices by current and recent governments is also due to the fact that the dominant culture does not want to challenge the status quo or give up power. As a result, Western people are often unable to see their own segregation, because they believe and assume everybody shares the mainstream view. Institutional and internalised racism are the direct result.

I was taught in my undergraduate degrees that following the invasion of Australia by the British, all that was left of Aboriginal culture was the devastating effects of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples. Through the stereotyping and labelling of Aboriginal peoples, psychology and social work theories have failed to take into account the role that colonisation has played in pathologising Aboriginal peoples, let alone acknowledging that Aboriginal knowledge and culture may have any worth in a colonial society. Aboriginal peoples are presented as a 'minority' group, 'dysfunctional' group who are somehow unable or unwilling to conform and because of this Aboriginal peoples are relegated to the societal 'problem' which needs to be addressed. My training in social work, social science fields at tertiary level also discussed Aboriginal peoples as belonging to 'traditional Aboriginal societies', negating present day Aboriginal peoples and contemporary Aboriginal culture. The constant reiteration of the poor socio-economic indicators in Aboriginal communities was patronising and pathologising. The content of the curriculum I was taught lacked the intelligence of Aboriginal knowledge, spirituality and communities.
In reality, a traditionally trained non-Aboriginal social worker would not be able to work with Aboriginal peoples from a level of ‘humanness’, as Aboriginal peoples were constantly exposed by the curriculum as ‘needing help’. Aboriginal peoples within educational institutions have been portrayed as somehow incapable of managing themselves as a culture and society, let alone have the ability or freedom to self determine their own lives and/or communities. However, for forty thousand years, before the arrival of the British Aboriginal peoples led an organised successful life where each person had specific roles and where the young people were taught about Aboriginal epistemology, ontology and tradition. Aboriginal peoples have been impacted on through colonisation although remarkably the spirituality underpinning the relationship to people, place and their environment remains.

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers juggle multiple identities and practice within a framework that is informed by the history of the oppression of Aboriginal Australians and the daily realities of disadvantage experienced by their own families and communities'. (Bennett and Zubrzycki: 2001, p.67) Ironically, society then promotes the need to alleviate these socio-economic problems through Western processes, thus compromising our Aboriginal identity. The inability and inherent right for Aboriginal peoples to self determine their own way of living, on a local level and have Aboriginal knowledge fostered and acknowledged by all Australians is a real struggle for Aboriginal social workers.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that
concern Indigenous people. Aboriginal rights are inherent because of these international instruments not just because Aboriginal peoples still exist (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007, A/RES/61/295). The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights gives all children the right to grow up and to develop physically and spiritually in a healthy, normal way, free and with dignity for who they are. Children have a right to a name and to be a member of a country – to be strong in their identity. (Declaration of the Rights of the Child Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 1386[XIV] of 20 November 1959, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Right)

The Western education system undermines Aboriginal peoples’ capacity to heal Aboriginal communities through denying Aboriginal peoples the right and access to educate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students about local Aboriginal culture and knowledge. This is consistent with Chambers and Pettman’s definition of institutional racism which asserts ‘racism is embedded in the political, economic and social structures of society and results in systematic discrimination and oppression of racial and ethnic groups’ (cited in Freedmen and Stark, 1993 p.317).

The Western education system indoctrinates people with Western values of competition, self interest and economic rationalism. Historically educational institutions where designed to acculturate people to adhere to the agenda of government. Well intentioned educational institutions have acculturated Aboriginal peoples, this is illustrated by the following quote: 'Again, regrettably, but realistically, we must, as educators find methods by which we may sow the seeds of competitiveness (to a degree at least) if the Aboriginal child is to win for himself recognition in our highly competitive society' (Dunn and Tatz, 1969, p.101).
Almost forty years after this text was written, this attitude still exists in educational institutions. However, subtly most educational institutions in Australia still colonise Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children through not teaching appropriate knowledge which will empower and foster Aboriginal identity and deconstructs the dominant Western ideology. Aboriginal peoples are not resisting acculturation but are resisting the policies and institutions that promote segregation, marginalisation and Aboriginal peoples' perceived inability to self determine their own lives and communities. Aboriginal peoples are interested in cross cultural education that provides new intercultural educational spaces and shared meanings and learning.
Chapter Two: Planting Seeds

Literature Review:

In this chapter I have examined the history of Aboriginal education and the history of Western Education. I have also investigated institutionalised and internalised racism and lastly I have investigated literature relating to Aboriginal identity. The knowledge bases and the worldview that have moulded the education system and how education is defined are also important matters to investigate when researching how exposure to Western education has impacted on Aboriginal identity and wellbeing.

History of Western Education and Aboriginal Education:

The original meaning of the word 'education', according to its Latin roots, comes from the word 'e-ducere' which is to lead out or bring forth, in other words leadership. Plato formed the academy, often described as the first European university, in ancient Greece to educate the statesman, as he had become disillusioned by the political leadership in Athens in 387BC. (School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of St Andrews Scotland, JOC/EFR August 2004) Plato wrote 'the Republic' to teach philosophy and the sciences in order to create 'better' statesman. A leader as defined by the Collins English Dictionary is a person who rules, guides or inspires others. (Collins English Dictionary, 1998) Plato's leadership was politically motivated to educate people as a result of his dissatisfaction with the government of the day. Today the education system is still driven by political motives. Leadership can also be defined by guiding or role modelling desired behaviour.

The Western education system often only teaches children that survival in a Western society is dependent on learning Western language, literacy and numeracy. Western
language, literacy and numeracy are essential basic skills and knowledge to learn in order to manage and work in Western societies. However education that is purely based on literacy and numeracy controls individuals in order to be assimilated smoothly into the economic order, demoralising human beings and deadening the human spirit. ' Some holistic educators prefer the more secular language that has developed in the literature of humanistic and transpersonal psychology (e.g. 'higher self' or 'self actualisation'), but the point is the same: an education that neglects the deep creative source of selfhood will result in a deadening, mechanical routine of schooling that negates rather than honours childhood.' (Miller, 2000, p.36).

'An Aboriginal worldview encompasses three concepts: an explanation for creation, an explanation for life after death and a blueprint for the rules and norms of Aboriginal societies'. (Dudgeon, Garvey and Pickett, 2000, p.2) In order to gain a greater understanding of these concepts, it needs to be sought on a local level within each Aboriginal community. In general, Aboriginal knowledge and identity teaches children the importance of interdependency and respect for people, place and the environment.

An Aboriginal worldview and cultural traditions nurture children and their spirit so that children have an understanding of, who they are; their place within society and their place within nature. Additionally, Aboriginal culture and knowledge can teach Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples about how to live within the world and stay connected to a universal spirit.

As human beings we are naturally born intelligent, loving and zestful. (Jenkins, 1982, p.49) However, the current educational institution instils competitiveness and inadequacy.
Fostering the human spirit through Aboriginal culture and tradition from an early age in educational institutions could assists people in every aspect of living. A human being that has a healthy spirituality and a connection to family, community and his/her environment is more inclined to work and lead from a ethical conscience (Miller, 2000, p.11).

As Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews don't encourage industrial and economic development, they are seen as 'anti-intellectual' and 'non-progressive' and therefore not useful. Attempts by holistic educators to expand the educational institutions and gain acknowledgment of the highest and truest purpose of education have been stifled by the dominant culture who have a vested interest in maintaining social, economic and political inequalities. The dominant Western culture has ignored Aboriginal knowledge to maintain the status quo and keep people in their place.

"When you consider education, I wonder what ideas and concepts are uppermost in your minds? Do you think of the accumulation of knowledge, facts, events, processes and skills? Do you think of time spent studying to pass examinations, do you think of the hours in the classroom, the whole school set up.... OR do you consider the improvement of the person, enhancing life-style so that life becomes fuller, more meaningful, and one is able to handle life's situations, meet challenges, make decisions and become more fully alive? I guess all of the above, in greater or lesser degrees, contribute to the building of the whole person..." (Rose Bauman, 1994, p.2).

I think it is imperative that we consider the questions proposed by Miriam Rose Bauman. Education it seems has essentially become a catalyst for maintaining the status quo with
the focus purely being on building up the workforce and ultimately the economy. The social and emotional wellbeing of individuals is hardly given any attention, let alone recognition of the benefits of Aboriginal education for all students within the education system.

The education system does not promote cultural diversity or offer educational models and processes that foster social and emotional well-being for diverse cultural identities. Systematic improvements are needed in all these areas and on all levels of education to recognise Aboriginal knowledge and acknowledge Aboriginal processes when teaching all people how to work within Aboriginal communities. It is also important to establish the values that are driving the education system, which seem to be more concerned with uniformity, economic rationalism and, by implication, control. “The economic rationalist reformers have recast themselves and the state as the servants of an 'economy...that obeys not immanent logic of needs, but instead the need for an immanent logic'.” (Pusey, 1991, p.178). However, educational qualifications are essential for gaining employment. Therefore, it is imperative that the most appropriate and relevant information known to date on Aboriginal knowledge and processes are offered to all students.

The current education systems touches on Aboriginal culture and attempts to add an Aboriginal perspective where possible, but the curriculum still caters, in the main, for the middle class students of Western extraction (Bennett, and Zubrzycki, August, 2002). The Aboriginal history is vaguely taught, so the Aboriginal student struggles to understand why s/he is not important in the education planning. This lowers the self esteem of the Aboriginal students. In addition, if students fail to reach the benchmark of the education system in which they are taught, then the students may suffer low self esteem. In the
traditional Aboriginal society, children were taught by the older members of their tribes, who confidently developed the skills they needed for survival (Bennett, and Zubrzycki, August, 2002).

Today, Aboriginal students are generally being placed into schools which are designed by Western educated people for Western students. The curriculum gives little more than token recognition of other cultures. For example, until the mid 1980's most school libraries housed books depicting Aboriginal peoples as being tribal. There was no recognition of the thousands of urban Aboriginals or a true depiction of invasion and colonisation.

Another aspect the education system needs to further explore is identity and institutionalised racism. This can be investigated through education on 'whiteness studies'. Education rarely touches on the dominant culture being an oppressor and that individuals are participating in a damaged culture. Non-Aboriginal peoples are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral and normal. 'Many, perhaps most of our white students in the United States, think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see whiteness as a racial identity' (McIntosh, 1998, 46). The teaching of whiteness studies will enlighten non-Aboriginal peoples to see the invisible and feel passionate about correcting the imbalance of power.

The knowledge gained while attending Western educational institutions will impact on how people function and participate in the workforce and ultimately function within themselves and within the broader society in general. Eva Cox, defines that an economic rationalist society has resulted in an increase in 'the lone greedy figure of economically
rational man' (Cox, 1995, p.3). In Western culture there is a perceived reality and a need to control our environment and lives and life circumstances. 'The distribution of wealth is undergoing change with a diminishing middle class and an increasing binary in the distribution of wealth, or wealth and poverty' (Coleman, 2002, p.18).

Appropriate and culturally relevant education and employment will assist in bridging the gap between the social strata and improving the low socio-economic status of Aboriginal peoples. Fortunately, this can change as culture is active and fluid and individuals participate in culture through their actions, projects and career, which in turn serve to develop culture. Validation of Aboriginal knowledge and processes in the education system is vital for improving employment opportunities that are culturally relevant (Bennett, and Zubrzycki, August, 2002).

Racism, classism, sexism and discrimination are experienced by all people and are still a harsh reality today. Western education perpetuates an economic and social hierarchy which in turn reinforces these types of discrimination. Through, changes in curriculum such as implementing relevant Aboriginal education and whiteness studies this will assist to deconstruct and bridge the gap between the social strata (Bennett, and Zubrzycki, August, 2002).

There are many benefits in developing curriculum which contains Aboriginal knowledge. Aboriginal knowledge embraces the collective rights and interests held by Aboriginal peoples. This knowledge includes close interdependence between knowledge, land and other cultural aspects, oral transmission of knowledge and rules regarding secrecy and sacredness, which govern the management of knowledge. Aboriginal ecological and
spiritual relationships to country and people are the backbone of the learning process.

When educating both children and adults, learning relies upon the reciprocal duty of this interdependent nature. Aboriginal education is a way of life. “Knowledge is not considered independently from its products and expressions or from actions” (Rigney, 2008, p.39).

Aboriginal knowledge, culture and traditions in education have been limited and either romanticised or undermined. Culture is not stagnant and moving forward is about taking the positive aspects of both Western and non-Aboriginal cultures and creating shared learning’s and shared meanings. Additionally, children need to be educated about the resistance movements, prominent leaders, significant social and political changes and political activism that occurred throughout Aboriginal Australia history e.g. Pemulwuy, Albert Namitjira, Shirley Smith, Edward “Eddie” Mabo, Evonne Goolagong, Truganini, Mandawuy Yunupingu, Lionel Rose, Charles Perkins, Burnam Burnam, Christine Anu, David Gulpilil, Gary Foley, etc (Newbury, 1999, p.4).

The changes that have already been made in Aboriginal affairs since invasion show the resilience and living spirit that has survived in Aboriginal peoples and culture. Acknowledging history can facilitate and raise consciousness of past injustices and highlight the hidden barriers and the pathways needed for changes in the education system for Aboriginal peoples and ultimately all people.

The invasion of the British in 1770 was when the British declared the land to be unoccupied and unowned. Therefore the land could be colonised under the legal doctrine of ‘terra nullius’ which persisted in law until 1991 when the Mabo case set it aside. Eddie Mabo and four other Torres Strait Islander people claimed in the High Court of Australia
that their island, (Murray Island), had been continuously inhabited and exclusively possessed by them, the true owners. The impact of ‘terra nullius’ was, for the dominant settlers, to equate Aboriginal dwellers to little more than the dominant species of flora or fauna and could be treated in much the same way. Interestingly, Professor Bin-Sallik said 'stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as being genetically inadequate, intellectually inferior and being of a child-like race were transferred from 19th century thinking into 20th century government policy'. (Koori Mail, 2008, 426, p.15).

The history of Australian government policies provides evidence of the oppression, dislocation and second tier status of Aboriginal peoples. Australian government policies illustrate the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples and knowledge. Historically policies related to Aboriginal peoples in Australian history are as follows:

**Protection:**

In 1937 the Aboriginal Protection Act was passed in NSW, formalising the creation of segregating full-blood Aboriginal peoples to reserve areas, away from the remainder of the population. The paternalistic attitude to the segregated Aborigines saw the Aborigines as children who needed constant supervision and guidance. Most half-caste children were given to white foster parents with the hope that they could become steeped in white culture. Segregation was a punishment of full-blood Aborigines who could not, by virtue of colour, merge with the dominant culture of fair skinned people (Newbury, 1999).

At this time, The NSW Aborigines Act was introduced as a result of crises in public schools. The European community could request exclusion of Aboriginal children from public schools. Aboriginal schools were established (22 in 1910, increasing to 40 in 1940).
The Aboriginal Schools syllabus stressed manual activities, this served the dominant white
culture in creating a class of semi-educated low paid labourers, with limited employment
prospects and the teacher was usually the untrained wife of the reservation manager
(Newbury, 1999).

**Assimilation:**

In 1937, Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities moved from ‘passive’
protection to ‘assimilation’ under the justification that all people are equal and should be
treated that way. Protection Boards gradually became Welfare Boards, underpinned by the
ethos of assimilating all but full-blood Aborigines into the broad Australian community.
Part-Aborigines were to be assimilated into white society regardless of their wishes.
Aborigines not living a tribal life were to be educated while all others remained on
reserves (Newbury, 1999).

By 1940, the NSW Welfare Board gave the responsibility of educating Aborigines, to the
Department of Education which took control of reserve buildings and began to provide
trained teachers. Towards the end of 1944 it was gazetted that *children of any Aborigine
securing an Exemption Certificate are to be admitted to the ordinary public school.* In
1946, a medical certificate had to be provided by Aboriginal children who wished to attend
public schools. (Reconciliation Australia, 2010, Share Our Pride, 1900- World War II
Timeline- online).

Up until the 1950’s there are early records from the archives of the New South Wales
Department of Education that show there was ‘common agreement that the intelligence of
Aboriginal peoples is below that of the white population’ (cited in Fletcher, 1989, p.274).
This position served well to reinforce that Aboriginal peoples were not as capable or intelligent as their non-Aboriginal competitors. Also, at this time formal schooling was initiated in the Northern Territory for Aboriginal children. The lack of appropriate facilities was rationalised by the claim that Aboriginal children beyond the age of 10 couldn’t keep up with white children anyway. NSW assimilated Aboriginal children into its local schools if all other parents agreed. The right to veto admission of Aboriginal children into local NSW schools was withdrawn in 1960 (Fletcher, 1989, p.57-59).

The Assimilation Policy continued well into the Twentieth Century where it was formally accepted by State and Federal ministers in 1961. Unfortunately Assimilation ignored the traditions and culture of the Aboriginal peoples who invariably were considered inferior when judged against the norms, cultures and values of the colonial power. The traditional education of passing education from one Aboriginal generation to another was severely impaired by protection and assimilation. Assimilation was condescendingly perceived as a reward for submerging Aboriginal cultural identity in favour of the identity of the dominant group. Assimilation drew its rationale from the White Australia policy. While the preference at this time was for British migrants, others were accepted on the understanding that they should shed their cultures and languages and be assimilated into the host population so that they would rapidly become indistinguishable from it (Newbury, 1999).

Integration and Self Determination and Self Management:
Reservations had been built and established by white men ignoring the Aboriginal way of living. Those not living in reservations worked on camps or farms where they were industry skilled but cheap labour and where they ironically had to help their oppressors to
take over and cultivate their land. In 1967, when there were approximately 300 reservations nationally, Aboriginal peoples received further recognition of their civil rights. Since then they have been free to live in reservations, to follow their traditions living in the bush or to integrate themselves into the modern Australian society. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act, they achieved some land rights. Reservations and missions gradually became communities with greater local self-management (Fletcher, 1989, p167).

**Outstations:**

Under the McMahon and Whitlam governments, there was a policy shift from Assimilation to Self-Determination. In the early 1970’s, in remote Arnhem Land locations, self-determination was expressed in the social movement to what are known as outstations. This is when groups of Aboriginal peoples chose to move from central townships back to their traditional lands. The movement allowed Aboriginal peoples to regenerate their culture within a modern context and establish their own relationship to the dominant culture. However, there were not adequate services and resources for these people (Fletcher, 1989, p198).

**Reconciliation:**

In August, 1991, the Federal Government gave all-party support to legislate a process of reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and the broader Australian community. The thrust of the process was threefold:

1. Coordination between Government and ATSIC to address specific Aboriginal social justice issues.
2. A decade of public awareness to educate non-Aboriginal Australians about Aboriginal culture, history, dispossession and addressing continuing social justice issues.

3. Extensive community consultation to determine whether the process of reconciliation could be advanced by a formal document.

(Norman, 2003, p.2)

Corroboree 2000 declared: “If reconciliation is to be achieved, it will be based on an honest and deep understanding of the truth of our shared history and respect for each other. This will require new approaches to, and additional activities in, education across formal schooling, the training of professionals, and community awareness programs.” (Norman, 2003, p.10).

**Aboriginal Education Consultative Group:**

The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc (AECG) is an independent, community based Aboriginal organisation established in the 1970s as an incorporated body to provide NSW government and other agencies with advice on the educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal communities. In NSW, for example, AECG Inc. is an Aboriginal community-based organisation made up of volunteer members who are involved in Local and Regional AECGs throughout the state. The NSW AECG Inc. is recognised as the principal source of advice on behalf of Aboriginal communities on issues relating to education and training (Fletcher, 1989, p.201).

A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (1996-2002) and the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
initiative (NIELNS) outline the current driving developments in Aboriginal Education to date. One of the difficulties in translating policy into practice in the field of Indigenous education is the complexity of issues. Included in the range of issues that need to be addressed are health, attendance and participation, community involvement, provision of Aboriginal teachers, provision of appropriate curriculum, reduction of racism, moves to overcome poverty, more effective evaluation policies and a lack of funding. Additionally, the NIELNS identified that strategies need to be employed such as utilising the skills of Aboriginal education workers to improve attendance levels, providing mentoring, leadership of Elders and community leaders, providing structured workplace opportunities and school to work pathways, adopting best with these complex issues and that each school individually and its constituent personnel.

(Godfrey & Wyatt & Partington, 2001, p.3).

**Internalised and Institutionalised Racism:**

"Making money can be one thing. Building bridges can be the other one. All it takes is understanding now, to make that dream come true. Racism is a disease in society. We're all equal. I don't care what their colour is, or religion. Just as long as they're human beings they're my buddies” (lyrics written by Mandawuy Yunupingu).

Institutionalised racism still exists and has permeated the lives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to such an extent that institutionalised racism is now invisible and unidentified. The ways that institutional and internalised racism impact on the lives of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples today needs to be identified, in order to develop education that will empower the next generation. One way to move forward and as
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples is to investigate how the past history has impacted on our present lives.

It is imperative to gain greater understanding of the history of colonisation and the oppressive relationships that have been externalised and internalised by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Firstly, a conceptual framework of colonialism can be defined as, 'The colonised are to be dominated economically and politically and therefore subordinated to, and then dependent upon, the more powerful colonising country' (as cited in Perley, 1993, p.119). In addition, Blauner notes that the coloniser usually exploit the land, the raw materials, the labour and other resources of the colonised nations (as cited in Perley, 1993, p.119). Finally, differences in power, autonomy, and political status are formally recognised, and the coloniser establishes mechanisms to maintain that domination

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group....They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's". (McIntosh, 1998, p.24).

The education system often perpetuates institutionalised and internalised racism. Institutionalised racism is facilitated by colonialism, imperialism and globalism. Government organisations, such as educational institutions, operate to maintain the status quo. These government and non government institutions often provide misleading or selective information obtained by the dominant culture. The literature and curriculum in most education systems is limiting and colonising of Aboriginal peoples. Consequently,
this perpetuates racism by distorting the general population’s worldview of history, reality, and identity.

Internalised racism is when people from minority groups are colonised to believe they are less than, by the dominant culture (Tim, 2002, p.2). The dominant paradigm teaches people how to define themselves and others and ultimately how to live. Some examples of internalised racism for Aboriginal peoples are:

- racism has made us think of ourselves or each other as stupid, lazy, unimportant or inferior;
- it has made us criticise or verbally attack each other; and
- it has made us feel hopeless, despairing and angry, which can make us vulnerable to alcohol and other drugs to ‘medicate’ the feelings, etc. (Tim, 2002, p.4).

More recently scholars have discussed the impact of lateral violence on Aboriginal communities. Lateral violence happens when people who are both victims of a situation of dominance, turn on each other rather than confront the system that oppresses them both. Lateral violence occurs when oppressed groups/individuals internalise feelings such as anger and rage, and manifest their feelings through behaviors such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns and blaming.

ATSIC Commissioner Mick Gooda said "lateral violence" needed to be addressed, and that he was supported in his stance by Indigenous leaders. Mr Gooda defined "lateral violence" as "the organised, harmful behaviours that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group, within our families, within our organisations and within our communities. “It is described as internalised colonialism -- the expression of rage and
anger, fear and terror, that can only be safely vented upon those closest to us when we are being oppressed,” he said (Koch, 2011, p.1).

The denial of patriarchy and white male Christian heterosexual privilege by non-Aboriginal peoples, covertly indoctrinates non-Aboriginal peoples to the advantages white males gain from women and Aboriginal peoples disadvantage. (McIntosh, 1998, p.5) Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples have suffered the effects of colonisation. Privilege, power and respect have been given on the basis of an individual’s gender, sexuality, race, and religion and socio-economic status. Western culture is dominated by white, Christian, heterosexual males and their ideologies of life and living.

'My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow them to be more like us' (McIntosh, 1998, p.6). It can be seen, therefore, that for Aboriginal peoples to gain stability and security within the dominant culture, it is expected that individuals act accordingly and adhere to the status quo.

There is no denying the fact that historically and presently Aboriginal peoples have been forced to contend with racist policies, practices and beliefs ingrained in colonialism. Investigating whiteness studies can further our understandings of the impacts of the colonisation and the way it has given privileges and permission for white people to move freely up and down the social hierarchy that was both created and developed around race.
Races that are other than ‘white’ have been stigmatised, stereotyped and oppressed in order to maintain this status quo. In the 1700’s the term ‘white’, was defined as anyone without a drop of African or Indian blood’ (Rogers & Bowman, 2003, p.10).

This evolution has created a way of thinking about the world that has been accepted as the undeniable truth. In our mis-education we have believed the stereotypes and judgemental narratives about racial groups that we fear are different from our own race. ‘Race is a false classification of people not based on any real or accurate biological or scientific proof. Instead, it is a political construction to unite Europeans in order to consolidate strength, increasing their ability to maintain control and dominance over non-white people’ (Rogers & Bowman, 2003, p.11).

Greek philosophers had a profound impact on the development of these types of educational institutions, philosophies and societal governance. Aristotle’s notion of dualism leads to our present ways of thinking. He formulated a worldview that people places and things were fixed and either right or wrong. In his writings on ‘The Republic’ he believed in the higher world of unchanging ideas and if a person knew these ideas then he would know the truth (Kreis, 2009, p.2). Consequently, he also developed the notion that the highest rank should belong to philosophers, who were also kings, followed by the courageous, and the rest, who must have desire, enforcing the desire to conform.

Internalising the ideology of the dominant Western system is oppressive to Aboriginal peoples. For example, being taught and therefore, learning a scientific version of the evolution of ‘mankind’, suggest that Aboriginal peoples are ‘primitive’ and not as advanced as Western people (Seamon & Kenrick, 1992, p.36).
**Aboriginal Identity:**

‘Aborigine’ means one of the first inhabitants of a country; one of the people living in a country at the earliest known period (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1991). ‘Yolngu’ essentially means ‘people’ and Yirrkala is the area where the Yolngu live. Aboriginal nations such as ‘Bundjalung’ refer to the area and not the race. Yolngu and Bundjalung people have been continuously occupying the land for 40,000 years and predated the earliest organised civilisations by some 30,000 years and have retained a vast repository of ancient knowledge, tended and shared for thousands of years. Therefore, Aboriginal knowledge has existed for in excess of forty thousand years and is essentially ancient knowledge for all people (Pelczynski, 1993).

The federal government’s definition of Aboriginal peoples is: 'An Aboriginal is a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as Aboriginal and is accepted by the community in which he/she lives, as being Aboriginal' (State of New South Wales through the State Records Authority, 2008, p.9). This definition does not take into account Aboriginal peoples’ spiritual and ecological beliefs surrounding identity and what has happened to the generations of people forced to move from land, broken families, clans and stolen children. This caused irreparable damage to people’s identity, because later it became difficult to be accepted by the community often because they did not know their families, where they came from, who their clans and lands were because of the policies of forced assimilation (Pelczynski, 1993).

Since the beginning of colonisation and in a patriarchal Australia, white middle class heterosexual males were privileged with the resources and power to decimate Aboriginal
peoples and culture. The colonisers imposed a mentality, that to be black is to be inferior in every way. The distinction between people's skin colours and differences in culture remains an issue to this day. Discovering and investigating our Australian and Australian Aboriginal cultural history is a consciousness-raising process and without it we only know part of our history, otherwise Aboriginal peoples' identity is still open to manipulation. The colour black and the associated adjectives such as dark, depressing, evil instil subliminal messages and have stigmatised Aboriginal peoples for centuries. Alternative schools such as Steiner Schools perpetuate this negative image of the colour black.

'Now submerge yourself in black; you are completely surrounded by black—in this black darkness a physical being can do nothing. Life is criven out of the plant when it becomes carbon. Black shows itself alien to life, hostile to life; when plants are carbonised they turn black. Life then can do nothing in blackness. And the soul? Our soul life deserts us when this awful blackness is within us. Black represents the spiritual image of the lifeless. Rudolf Steiner' (Steiner, 1992, p.35).

In the book, Women, Education and the Power of Story, Ngarrangu Jardu, Reconstituting women's identity through Bugarrigarra, the Power of Storytelling and Spiritual Ecology, Pat Mamanyunj Torres, 1998, looks at reconciliation and reconstructing women's identity through ancestral and historical personal stories. Torres acknowledges the growing understanding of the value in Indigenous ecology for sustainable living. Torres challenges the notion of power and how it exists. Torres says that "the storytelling of Bugarrigarra knowledge brings back personal power to women and enables us to reconstruct our self concepts, free from interpretations of middle class Western male constructions of what is an Indigenous woman or what constitutes womanhood in a Western culture.
'To know your stories, personal and cultural, is to know who you are, who you are related to and the depth of your relatedness. Although the stories still exist, they too have suffered from the impacts of invasion and colonialism. Others still have been subjugated through Western knowledge structures and constructions so that they are no longer recognisable as our stories or we don’t recognise ourselves in these stories'. (Martin, 2004, p.3).

Social work and Western education provide fragmented approaches, when addressing identity and wellbeing in Aboriginal communities. Wellbeing and identity has been divided into areas such as mental, physical, cultural, emotional, financial and spiritual. There are specific government and community services to address these areas independently of the others. The fragmentation of Aboriginal identity inhibits Aboriginal peoples’ capacity to heal, promoting only the individual’s need to take self-responsibility.

There is disregard for the functions of community, spirituality and its relatedness. The ‘Australian Nursing Council Inc. produced competencies for the beginning nurse that require respect of and care for the spiritual needs of individuals/groups. Despite these policies, research has now identified that spiritual care is ill-defined and poorly developed in the literature and the confusion around it is evident (Ramsay, 1998, p.10). This limits the capacity of holistic health models and practices. Aboriginal peoples can seek to emancipate ourselves, not only from external constraints, but also from the constraints that we, as Aboriginal peoples, have internalised as part of our identity. This can be achieved through education systems and by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.
The Western system has considered identity, education, family, community and our environment as separated entities. Policies and models have been developed to address the individual needs within organisations that govern these separate entities. Alternatively, identity and education cannot be separated, especially in the minds, body and soul of Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal peoples’ identity has been formed from the thousands-year old teachings of the creators and ancestors in the dreaming where the people cannot be separated from the land, animals, plants, skies, waterways and climate. Aboriginal epistemology and practices interconnect identity, education, family, community and our environment. Aboriginal epistemology and practices need to be recognised by the education system, but this will only happen if there is a true commitment by government to improving the social situations of Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal history informs us that the creators are the originating sources of lore. The creation stories tell who our ancestors are and how we belong, thus giving Aboriginal peoples identity. The ancestors, around the time of creation took on a physical form through people, animals, plants and waterways. Since the place of the creators is fixed, then they will always be, even if other things (such as people) are not. The ancestors can be seen in the landmarks in every Aboriginal country, showing the close relationships Aboriginal peoples have to the skies, land, plants, animals and waterways’. (Martin, 2004, p.3).

In the documentary, Kanyini, Bob Randall offers a beautiful and simply way of understanding Aboriginal identity and connectedness from an Anangu perspective. He
talks about the four lines from the ancestors that Aboriginal peoples belong to. He first talks about Tjukurrpa, the lore, belief system and culture. Secondly, Kurunpa the soul, spirit and spirituality. Thirdly, Ngura the land and place. Lastly, Walytja the kinship and family. Randall, then describes the colonisation process and how the introduction of animals, religion and the removal of Anangu from country severed the lines of an Aboriginal person’s identity and life (Kanyini, 2006, Film by Melanie Hogan).

Bob Randall explains how the Tjukurrpa was interfered with through the introduction of the Western belief system and culture (Randall, 2006). He talks about the domination of the Western culture and how through imposing Western beliefs and culture has undermined Anangu beliefs and culture. He says 'by doing this you are saying that your way is better than mine' (Randall, 2006). The introduction of religion, removal from the land and institutionalisation of Anangu into Christian schooling undermined Kurunpa, Anangu spirituality. He talks about terra nullius, taking away the Ngura, the land and introducing new animals that changed the habits of the native animals and interfered with hunting and the food source. Lastly he describes the massacres and the forced removal of Aboriginal children, the 'stolen generation' and how this interfered with the line between Anangu people and their Walytja, kinship system and family. Randall says that the current education system is not working and that the old ways need to be incorporated into the new way of schooling. The new way doesn't make Aboriginal peoples feel proud and have the proper responsibilities. (Kanyini, 2006, Film by Melanie Hogan).

From the earliest years of education, language and shared learning experiences should be used to inculcate through cultural understanding. The recipients of Aboriginal knowledge and culture through shared learning’s and meanings, be they Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal,
would be rewarded with increased self esteem, better preparation in life skills and choices with a greater appreciation of Aboriginal spirituality, sustainability and connection to people, place and their environment. Aboriginal peoples continue to selflessly share and educate non-Aboriginal peoples on the value of our common ancient knowledge.

It is clear that the processes and ideologies that underpin colonisation formulate unequal and oppressive relationships. The development of educational institutions and the participation of Aboriginal peoples have indoctrinated Aboriginal peoples with the Western colonial ideology and worldviews. However, a more contemporary Aboriginal identity will include influences of a Western colonisation that have been acquired such as occupation, socio-economic status and recreational activities. In saying that, Aboriginal peoples need to evaluate what presently influences their identity and whether it is positive or negative to their identity and wellbeing.

In the book, Changing Places: re-imaging Australia, Cameron has collected papers written by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal poets, artists and scholars on 'sense of place'. He presents a greater understanding the correlation and importance of Aboriginal identity and an ecological identity. In more recent times there has been an explosion of Aboriginal activity through personal stories such as Sally Morgan's 'My Place', Aboriginal art, dance and music which all express an Aboriginal sense of place. However the notion of 'We are the land' is rarely understood (Cameron, 2003, p.16).

The songlines, totems and dreaming that are essential elements of Aboriginal culture and can not be summarised into a piece of literature which can be universally adopted and understood on any meaningful level to provide a sense of place and belonging. This
inability to appropriate Aboriginal knowledge and culture has puzzled non-Aboriginal peoples since the time of invasion. In the opening line to ‘The land is Always Alive: a History of the Central Land Council’, Kumantjayi Ross states that ' Aboriginal spirituality, culture and society can be defined by one word: land' (Ross in McElvoy & Lyon, 1994, p.112).

Secondly, we must understand and acknowledge the oppressive government policies that have impacted on Australian Aboriginal communities and people to date, that still force Aboriginal peoples to assimilate and not actively participate in educational institutions. It is also important to recognise the resistance and types of activism many of our Aboriginal leaders have been involved in and continue to be involved in which have significantly influenced the changes in government policies.
Chapter 3: Rebuilding Trunks

Research Challenges:

Colonisation and Cultural Appropriation:
There is a common sentiment among Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal academics and researchers in general that Aboriginal peoples have been researched to death. Therefore it is important to differentiate between literature that has been written by well-intentioned archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists and even photographers who rushed to Aboriginal communities to document the livelihood of a “dying race” and research that has been conducted by Aboriginal peoples themselves (Rigney, 1996).

As a result of the extensive research by non-Aboriginal peoples there have been numerous studies, books and papers on Aboriginal peoples. Many, however, are discriminatory, oppressive and biased as the information has been analysed through euro-centric lenses and appropriated into the Western system (Victor, 2001, p.16). I found that as an Aboriginal woman who had not been raised in the communities I conducted my research in, I needed to be aware of my own euro-centric lenses and approach to presenting my research in a Western educational institution.

Another research challenge is the colliding worldviews of the Western world and Aboriginal people’s worldview. An example of this is time constraints. “In Aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time. The idea of all things being in constant motion or flux leads to a holistic and cyclical view of the
world…It results in a concept of time that is dynamic but without motion. Time is part of the constant flux but goes nowhere. Time just is. (Leroy Little Bear, 2000, p.5).

This Aboriginal philosophy is pertinent when explaining the conflicts associated with conducting research in Aboriginal communities. Working within Western societies often means a person is bound by time frames and deadlines. When conducting interviews in Aboriginal communities it was important to ensure the safety and comfortability of the person being interviewed, this meant waiting until the time was right for an interview and gathering information only when it was offered.

Language as a Research Challenge:

Language embodies that way a society thinks
Through learning and speaking a particular
Language, an individual absorbs the collective
Thought processes of people (Leroy Little Bear, 2000, 78).

The biggest challenge I faced while conducting my research in the community of Yirrkala was the language barrier. This was not a problem in the Bundjalung region as it is an urban/rural area in Northern New South Wales, which has been colonised for a lot longer and all people in the area speak English. However, there are still a number of people in the area that can speak the Aboriginal language fluently. The topic of my research was how exposure to Western education has influence Aboriginal identity. It was difficult to describe and fully understand the complexities of Yolngu identity, without having been raised in the community. It is also problematic to determine the extent of information that
is lost due to translation and interpretation. It would have been of great benefit to have been able to have spoken Yolngu. However the people were extremely accommodating and patient in helping me understand some of the language and nuances in Yolngu that related to my research. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that Yolngu and English are languages that are derived from two antithetical worldviews. Therefore the understandings and relatedness of the research to Yolngu culture at times were not always straightforward and very time consuming.

**Epistemology:**

Another challenge was that almost all Aboriginal epistemology and Aboriginal knowledge have been passed down orally. This makes it extremely difficult to adhere to the academic requirements of citation. Unfortunately, much of what I have learnt and am writing in this paper will lose some of its meaning, as words on paper are not the same as sharing the experience, spiritual exchange and awareness learnt from this process.

Another barrier that needs to be explored is differing epistemologies. History has left a legacy to the detriment of everyone, that being that Western ways of knowing are held up as 'the only’ way of knowing and all other cultural epistemologies are interesting but illegitimate. Again, further investigation into how this notion has evolved needs to be explored, in order to deconstruct this type of absolute thinking.

Advances in education and knowledge bases have developed new philosophies such as quantum physics, which is only recognised because it fits within a Western framework and language. Again, this view is more aligned with Aboriginal ways of being and knowing. Quantum physics can be defined 'as a fluid, non static, ever changing energy flow with
every interdependent form of life in our universe, animate and inanimate' (Francisco, 2008, p.6). Acknowledging the interdependence's of people, places and things removes the need for human control and the associated desire for certainty.

Oral traditions should be a legitimate scientific paradigm, as there is a shared experience where there is a spiritual connection between people, places and things whilst also encapsulating philosophical and moral beliefs that guide a way to live. There is richness in this type of education that can be shared with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples within the education system.
Chapter Four: Forming New Branches

Research Methodology:

This chapter outlines the foundational basis of using an Indigenous approach, the
methodological practices revised and reviewed and how cultural protocols were identified
and respected throughout the research. Research that is performed and informed by
Indigenous people is called, Indigenist research (Rigney, 2008). Throughout the thesis,
where appropriate, I will be using first person reference, as I am an Aboriginal woman
with an Aboriginal perspective. It is important to select methodologies that are culturally
sensitive, relevant and which are preferably qualitative by nature (Martin, 2004). An
emphasis on 'Stories' as the primary validation tool was used to ensure cultural integrity
was maintained.

Research Question:

How has exposure to the Western education system influenced Aboriginal identity for
people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region?

Philosophical Framework:

While participating in the research process I found it important to revise and review the
purpose and goals of the research. One methodological practice I aspired to participate in
was Indigenist research, "which attempts to support the personal, community, cultural and
political struggles of Indigenous Australians to carve a way of being for ourselves in
Australia which there is healing from the past oppression and cultural freedom in the
Aboriginal and Western methodologies are extensive and often incompatible. Most Aboriginal peoples do not seek out scientific ways of controlling or predicting life and human behaviour. Within Aboriginal worldviews is a 'philosophical humility' that acknowledges how powerless humans really are in comparison to the vast and incomprehensible forces of nature (Ross, 1996, p.15). Any endeavours to predict or control these forces are considered to be 'dangerous illusions' and are not actively sought or desired outcomes of science. This is why most Indigenous cultures rely on subjectivity as the means by which you can come to understand yourself and the world around you.

'Aboriginal culture relies on subjectivity as the means by which one can come to understand your world. It is commonly held among Aboriginal peoples that you can only speak from personal experiences.' (Ross, 1997, p.35).

As Aboriginal knowledge, culture and tradition are deeply rooted in ancestry, kinship, tradition and language (all of which relate to the person's understanding of their individual responsibilities to themselves, the group and their land but are not separate entities, as we understand them through Western knowledge), this process continues throughout individual's own personal developmental stages. It is then more understandable that an Aboriginal person only really speaks from their own personal experiences. ‘Basic belief system’ or ‘worldview’ guide the researcher in “ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” and therefore also in the methodology implemented in the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.42).

As a researcher it is important to me to be aware of my own ontology and epistemology, so I do not impose my worldviews and beliefs on to the people I interviewed and taint the
data. I understand Indigenist research is governed by three fundamental and inter-related principles which I followed:

- Resistance as the emancipatory imperative – Aboriginal research is undertaken as part of the struggle of Aboriginal Australians for recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty and self determination.

- Political integrity – Aboriginal peoples have to set our own political agenda for liberation and there must be a social responsibility between the research and the political struggle of Aboriginal communities.


Rigney refers to 'resistance as the emancipatory imperative', which could be perceived as reacting to others. Resistance can also be viewed as reactive, however it can also be viewed as a choice and an action which is therefore proactive. However, throughout the research process I used resistance as the emancipatory imperative in a proactive manner by concentrating on oral tradition and directly quoting the stories and experiences of the Aboriginal peoples I interviewed. I believe it is important when forming new branches that they are branches that are representative of the voices of the Aboriginal peoples involved in the research process. Indigenist research is not about predicting or controlling the research process but rather listening and honouring the people.

Another methodological practice that was most useful was Dadirri. Dadirri, as an Aboriginal process, assisted me to conduct my research and ontology. Dadirri is “a special quality, a unique gift of the Aboriginal peoples, is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness.
Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. It is something like what you call contemplation.” (Rose Baumann, 2002, p.4).

Many of my own teachings and learning occurred during conversations by impromptu visits, living in the community and working at the bush hospital with the Elders from the community. “Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course-like the seasons” (Rose Baumann, 2002, p.5).

Throughout my time spent in both communities I respected the fact that Elders have, as Miriam Rose Ungunmerr stated, “spent many years learning about the white man’s ways; we have learnt to speak the white man’s language, we have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways” (Rose Baumann, 2002, p.3). Through the process of Dadirri I listened to the people I interviewed and acknowledged the lived experience, ontology and epistemology. The emphasis of the research was placed on ensuring that cultural integrity is maintained though honouring the 'stories' by directly quoting the Aboriginal peoples interviewed.

Aboriginal epistemology is centred upon oral traditions, incorporated into the voice of self and is the voice of the cultural collective. That is, included in the voice of the human race are teachings that have been passed on from Elders and ancestors (Victor, 2001, p.36).

It is obvious to me that the nature of my research has and will be guided by my own lived experiences. I feel it is important to honour the personal stories of the people I interviewed
through quoting their stories, however I can only write from my own personal experiences and perceptions influenced by participating in the research process.

Through the experience of traveling to Yirrkala, I learned more about two way learning and experienced more of how these two very distinctly different worldviews collide. As Yolngu often says ‘we live in two worlds’. I now see the importance of using two-way learning processes in the methodology. This skill that Yolngu have mastered involves dissociative acculturation of teaching Yolngu epistemology in English and sharing their culture through language and other cultural practices.

It is important to remember that the text written will limit “the level of understanding because it cannot portray the storyteller’s gestures, tone, rhythm, and personality” (Archibald, 1997, p.21). Part of the challenge will be to analyse and record the data while being mindful to honour the stories without appropriating people’s stories. Blaeser, states the “insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonisation and conquest” (Blaeser, as cited in Archibald, 1997, p.21).

Procedures:

Before conducting my research I clearly explained and provided an information sheet to give to the Bundjalung Elders Council and the Yirrkala Dhanbul Lands Council. The letter explained the reason and purpose for conducting the research and what I hoped to achieve through conducting the research. I also provided my understanding of the local protocols and my openness and willingness to respect the local protocols while living in the community and while conducting the research (see Appendices i).
Before participating in the fieldwork I had to receive ethical clearance from the university. The process was extensive and personally challenging. To receive ethical clearance from the Graduate Research College at Southern Cross University I had to complete a full ethics submission which outlined the research topic and how I proposed to conduct my fieldwork with the communities where I was conducting my research. I completed the full ethics submission which was submitted to the Ethics Board at the Graduate Research College and a letter of approval was sent back to me which needed to be signed and returned (see Appendices ii).

The Yolngu are the traditional owners of north east Arnhem Land. They are also recognised as owners of this land under Australian law through the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT) 1976. Therefore, every person must apply for a permit through the Northern Land Council to enter Arnhem Land. Additionally, people must apply to the Dhanbul Land Council to gain a permit and permission to stay at Yirrkala. However, before going to Yirrkala I sent a letter to the local school in Yirrkala to show that I would respect the protocols (see Appendices iii).

I was taught that Western, Yolgnu and Bundjalung education and internalised racism are not separated entities. The impact that internalised racism has had on Aboriginal identity cannot be separated from an inter-connected experience of life and living. Therefore, in order to address the issue of analysis of the data collected and formulate the findings related to the initial purpose of the research, it is important to share the whole of my experience throughout the process of participating in the research.
As a social worker I was taught that the personal is political, and it is obvious to me that for empowerment of Aboriginal peoples participating in the education system, this needs to be identified. While in Yirrkala the government named the poor socio-economic conditions and child abuse in Aboriginal communities and called for a ‘national emergency’ to address these ingrained and catastrophic issues. This unexpected government intervention had a dramatic influence on the process of how I gathered data and conducted my studies.

At the time that the intervention was implemented, I had also been involved in Aboriginal leadership programs through the Office of Indigenous Policy and Co-ordination in Canberra. As a result of this I was asked to participate in a workshop in Cairns with Sue Gordon, the Chairperson for the Emergency Response Team, and a number of other Aboriginal peoples from other organisations across the countries.

Before attending the leadership workshop in Cairns, I talked to a number of people from the Yirrkala community about their concerns and any questions posed regarding the intervention. Attendance and participation of Aboriginal children in the education system was one of the issues identified by the government. Although the pressing issue was child abuse and Aboriginal children’s welfare, one of the questions proposed was the freedom and capacity Aboriginal peoples have to meet the needs of the children in the community. For example, with limited employment and limited educational qualifications, ‘How can Aboriginal peoples realistically provide the basic needs of adequate housing and food?’

The Emergency Response Team visited Yirrkala a week after the workshop in Cairns to talk to the Yolngu leaders about the intervention. The Yolngu Leaders welcomed the
opportunity for discussion and community development. Yolngu informed the government representatives of the lack of funding for school programs which offer opportunities and incentives for young Yolngu. There was also discussion about providing school based traineeships, as an incentive to increase retention rates at the local Yirrkala school.

Another example of surrendering to the natural process which ultimately leads to informal learning’s was through the fortuitous attendance at the Garma festival. After arriving in Yirrkala I was informed that the Garma festival was to begin in the following two weeks. This automatically rearranged any plans I had anticipated. However, I was invited to attend the festival, which turned out to be exactly the preparation and introduction I needed into Yolngu culture and life. I also had the opportunity to speak to a number of academics as well as non-Aboriginal peoples about my topic and as a result, also later spent three weeks in the bush volunteering to assist setting up a bush hospital. During this time I had to be multi-skilled and quick to learn as I was given a wide variety of tasks.

These experiences were invaluable to the research and data collection because I built a strong rapport and cherished relationships with the women, who I used as a focus group for my research. In conclusion, the data obtained was through both structured and formal interviews and through natural processes that lead to informal learning’s.
Research participants:

The data for this research came primarily from two different sources. One was participating in and conducting interviews with Aboriginal women and men, over 20 years of age, who have been through the Western education system and have completed their Year 10 Certificate. I formally interviewed four people from Yirrkala and four people from the Bundjalung area. All interviews were conducted according to an open ended style of questioning. I developed a set of questions which I used as a guide for the interviews (see Appendices iv) however it was important to respect the stories I was listening to and allow the interview to unfold naturally. All participants signed an informed consent form (see Appendices v).

The people who were formally interviewed also granted permission to use her/his name in this thesis. This was important to me as I believe the teachings that were shared need to remain with the person telling their story. This also ensured cultural integrity and diffused the misconception that all Aboriginal peoples can fit under the one cultural umbrella.

In addition, (as my second source) I interviewed women and men over 20 years of age who had limited experience going through the Western education system. I consulted with the action group at Yirrkala School and used the group as a focus group. I also consulted the local organisations, to enhance processes and protocols. This process guided me towards the most suitable people to spend time with and to consult. The second source was through oral tradition and observing and participating in cultural practices. In this process Yolngu introduced me to principles, values and ideologies of Yolngu and Bundjalung culture. I also spent over a month in the bush with, at different times, from six to twelve women who mostly consisted of Elders from the Yirrkala region. Additionally, I have lived in the
Bundjalung region for over ten years now and at various times been privileged to talk to and spend time with a number of the Elders and custodians who have educated me on the local area and its rich source of ancestral knowledge.

From the Bundjalung region I interview people from women and men of different ages to gain a broader perspective of differing experiences. The people interviewed were Judy Atkinson, Greg Telford, Dave Williams and Leighana Williams from the Bundjalung country. From the Yirrkala region in East Arnhem Land I interviewed another four people, Djappirri Mununngur, Djulwalpirri Marika, Yirrkari Mayuru and Mutilnga Yunupingu. This is by no means an exhaustive list but the representation of people covered a diverse range of experiences of the education system and they respectively shared their own education. I also informally interviewed many other people from both countries and this also contributed to my understanding and findings around internalised racism and education for Bundjalung and Yolngu.

Talking to the Elders of the community constitutes the will and perspective of many community members, as opposed to the Western perspective of individual perspectives. The Aboriginal community is a collective and the Elders are the compilers of stories, ancestral knowledge and experiences of the community, these needs to be acknowledged and respected. Therefore speaking to the Elders constitutes a wide cross section of the community's perspectives, beliefs, stories and values.
**Data Collection:**

The analysis of the two data sources, revealed a fundamentally different way of experiencing education. This was both challenging and enriching for me. I was introduced to teaching through experience and listening rather than asking questions and talking. I also used the more Western formal way of gathering information through interviewing and asking question related to the topic. Due to the complexities of the research question I found myself being guided by the community to participate in events and outings that proved to be fortuitous. Through these informal and natural processes I gathered valuable information which contributed to learning and data collection.

The narrative interviews were taped. Verbatim transcriptions of the audio taped narrative interviews were completed and complied by myself. Conversational fillers, such as um', er', mm' etc., and non-verbals, such as laughter, crying, sighing, long pauses after a question and tones depicting emotions such as anger, were also included in the transcriptions. The transcriptions produced a rich qualitative data set. To ensure emotive tone was not lost in the categorisation and coding of the narratives, a manual thematic analysis was conducted, rather than using a qualitative data analysis program. Conducting a manual analysis required complete immersion in the data and the re-reading of the transcriptions more times than would be required if a computer program was used. The manual thematic analysis involved identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns and themes within the data, and coding and categorising those themes and patterns into a matrix as a guide to include them with the quantitative data in the results. There were five phases to the thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).
Phases of thematic analysis and description of the process:

- Familiarising with the data
- Transcribing data
- Reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas
- Generating initial categories, using research schedule and identifying other potential categories
- Categorising interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each category
- Searching for themes.
- Defining and naming themes
- Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
- Incorporating data into results.
- Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples and incorporating extracts of narratives into results

Analysis is not a linear process of simply moving from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more a recursive process, where movement is back and forth through the phases, as needed. It is also a process that develops over time and should not be rushed (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997).
Chapter Five: Living Roots

Research Analysis:

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the geographical area, a profile of the communities researched and documented the research data. The data documented is a collection of personal stories and experiences from Elders and other adults in the community who have been through the Western schooling system. Talking to the Elder’s of the community constitutes the will and view of many community members. As opposed to the Western ideology which views only the individual. The local Aboriginal communities researched act as a collective and the Elders are the compilers of stories and experiences of the community in which they belong. This Aboriginal epistemology needs to be acknowledged and respected. Therefore speaking to the Elders constitutes a wide cross section of the community perspective, beliefs, stories and values.

This chapter is named living roots, as the stories and oral tradition are the foundation of the people, the land and the culture. The knowledge and stories that are shared are built on a foundation of a strong and proud ancestry. This ancestry has stories that were gathered reflect 40,000 year old epistemology and ontology. The stories collected also reflect some of the changes over the past 220 years of colonisation and highlight the changes needed in educational institutions.

There were many similarities and also differences between researching a remote community and researching an urban rural community. Institutionalised racism, identity formation and techniques that supported healing happen through wide and varied circumstances. I interviewed a number of people formally and informally and was offered
invaluable experiences and learning's. I feel honoured to have met such proud and resilient people and to have the opportunity to share time and listen to people's stories and experiences. Although there is no standard practice for referencing personal communication with Elders, I have quoted some of the content of the interviews as 'Living Textbooks'.

While I am aware that I chose a broad topic, I also feel that I have gained a broad spectrum of knowledge and become more aware of the barriers that have prevented and are still preventing the empowerment of Aboriginal peoples to date. I set out to focus how has exposure to the Western education influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region, in addition I discovered the ways that people have been resilient and/or resisted or challenged institutionalised and internalised racism. There are overt and covert forms of racism in today's society. Living within a dominant culture as an Aboriginal person is just one form of oppression.

The experiences and stories shared demonstrated how institutionalised racism is perpetuated through Western educational institutions. The stories highlighted low levels of education, poor health, high unemployment and poverty. Subsequently, some people turned to quick fix, feel good solutions such as drugs and alcohol. Some people expressed feeling inferior and powerless so in turn, they acted out violent behaviour towards themselves, their families and the society in general. In the Aboriginal communities I researched, it was evident that old wounds and disputes between clans and families are still active and continue playing out as part of a damaging cycle. More recently this type of behaviour has been termed this lateral violence.
Aboriginal peoples are acutely aware of the issues associated with living in a contemporary society and the possibility of losing their ancestral heritage. The school in Yirrkala has a vision statement to maintain their own culture:

Yolngunydia yothu marrtji gurarrthirri marrma’yu romdhu Dhuwayu ga Yirritjaju. Dhiyangunydia gakal’yu yu yukurra dhukarr-lakarama yol ngayi ga wanhanguru Ngayi nha nhanngu gatjpu ga nha nhanngu birrkayunara ga nha ngayi yurru dhanu’yun mulkuru rom, ga nhaltjan ngayi yurru girri-ngamathirri ga djarr’yun ngunhiyi mulkuru rom.

Ngilimurru marnggiku nhamirri walala girri-ngamathirrina mulkuruwu gakal wu ga dalthirrina ralpathirri dhiyaku romgu, nganapurru ngunhi gatjpu nganapalmirriwu djamamirri yamana.

_Yolngu children grow up with two laws, Dhuwa and Yirritja. This foundational knowledge moulds who a person is, where that person comes from, what their vision is, how they think, how they will be able to deal with contemporary life and whether they will be able to sort out and anaylse the new ideas they encounter in their lives in a balanced way._

As teachers we must be prepared for operating in the contemporary world in a strong and balanced way so that we will be able to achieve the visions and aspirations of our Elders (Copy of the Nambara Schools Council Vision Statement).
To gain a greater understanding of the diversity of the identified two regions of this study, I first researched the community profile on each region. There are distinct similarities and differences between them that influenced the research (e.g. language barriers, geographical isolation and access to local resources).

**Community Profiles:**

**Bundjalung-Northern Rivers:**

The Bundjalung region covers a large geographical area. The boundaries of the Bundjalung region go as far south, to Grafton, west to Tenterfield and Beaudesert and as far north as Southport. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, census showed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the region was 3.4% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics *Population distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*). There are 16 different language groups in the Bundjalung country. In the 1830’s the government encouraged settlement around the North Coast. Aboriginal missions were then established in the 1930’s, people were taken from there tribal lands and expected to assimilate into the European lifestyle and adopt Christianity forcing people to abandon their beliefs and culture. Many people were forbidden to speak their own language (Nayutah & Finlay, 1988).

Without the land or language it is no wonder that some people have lost their identity and culture. In saying that, there still are a number of people in the area that can fluently speak their Bundjalung language. There has also recently been a language program implemented at Goonellabah Public School, which runs for 10 weeks (2-3 sessions per week). It always amazes me how resilient Aboriginal peoples are. Bundjalung people are proud people and
have maintained many of the dreaming stories and language. Unfortunately, as a result of colonisation there is conflict between different families and tribal groups about boundaries and cultural responsibilities.

In 2006, the North Coast Area Aboriginal population is estimated to be 17,940 (8,903 males, 9,037 females), comprising 3.7% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics Population distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006). The North Coast Aboriginal population has almost double the proportion of children (under 15 years of age). Approximately half (50.4 per cent) of the North Coast Aboriginal population is estimated to be aged under 20 years. Persons aged 65 years and over comprises 2.9 per cent of the Aboriginal population compared to 18.8 per cent of the overall North Coast population (Australian Bureau of Statistics Population distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006).

The Bundjalung people in the North Coast region generally are in a low socio-economic bracket. Therefore, Bundjalung people are 2-8 times more likely to be victims of abuse, 4 times more likely to be under welfare protection and 6 times more likely to be foster placements, Aboriginal peoples make up 2% of the Australian population but 40% of the children in corrective institutions identified as Indigenous. Other statistics show the catastrophic situation of Aboriginal wellbeing and as 80% of the Aboriginal population is less than 35 years of age this clearly indicates an unpromising future (Anthony Franks, 2001 Area Health Lismore, Aboriginal Health Promotion).

I have participated and worked within a number of Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal projects over the last six years in the Bundjalung region. Working with the
Elders and listening to their concerns, one thing became evident. The Elders worry that young people have lost their identity and way. The Elders try to encourage the young people to be proud of their Bundjalung identity. Our Aboriginal Elders are inspirational as they continue to resist the oppressive structure of the dominant culture while actively working to make changes and gain recognition of Aboriginal culture. The Elders remain passionate about the importance of pride in our Bundjalung identity and culture and the need for cultural maintenance programs in order to stay grounded in our culture and ancestral heritage.

**Yirrkala/ North East Arnhem Land:**

Yirrkala is the largest Yolngu community in North East Arnhem Land with a population of around 800 people. A mission was established in Yirrkala in 1935, when first limited contact with Europeans occurred. Yolngu literally means “person” in the language spoken by the people. The culture is among the oldest living cultures on earth and dates back 50,000 years. The culture is still maintained and strong due to the relatively late contact with Balanda or narparki (Europeans).

Yolngu life is divided into the two moieties (kinship groups). These moieties are Dhuwa and Yirritja with each of these being represented by a number of different groups, each with its own lands, languages and philosophies. A complex kinship system connects the Yolngu groups, ruling fundamental aspects of their life such as ceremony and marriage rules and responsibilities. Yolngu speak a dozen dialects from the language group, Yolngu Matha and English is the second (or thirteenth) language for many. “Language is more than language, more than mere cultural identity; it is the social order and self-belief, and
the backbone of a distinct philosophy. For fluent speakers, it's not a relic, but a way of shaping the future.” (Franca, 2002).

Yolngu Elders first began to lose control of the clans in the 1970s and 1980s. Missionaries had taken the young Yolngu and sent them away to be educated in mainstream Western education. Their city teachers empowered the young Yolngu to return to their land and lead their communities. The missionaries set up village Councils and instructed the Yolngu in how to manage them, but when the missionaries withdrew from the communities, the Elders were expected to be capable of leading within these structures. After the dislocation of young people from their community, who then returned with a Western education, young self-appointed Yolngu led in place of the Elders. It was a time of great input by outside government officials and agencies. 'Influences outside the family and clan were being felt. Both Yirritja and Dhuwa people were being moved around by white people'. (Trudgen, 2000, p.24).

As Yolngu and Bundjalung culture has difference from a Western culture, it is important to first understand what these differences are. An investigation into oral tradition and a deeper understanding of cultural protocols introduced me to a new way of teaching and learning. Through studying Aboriginal epistemology and through my own life experience I have been taught and told that “the ancestors can be seen in the landmarks in every Aboriginal country, showing the close relationships Aboriginal peoples have to the skies, land, plants, animals and waterways”. (Martin, 2004, p.6) However, through conducting this research, I gained a greater understanding of the undeniable songlines imprinted on Aboriginal peoples’ identity, which have been formed from the thousands-year old
teachings of the creators and ancestors where the people cannot be separated from the land, animals, plants, skies, waterways and climate.

**The Role of Elders:**

Elders are the most important component of the Aboriginal communities, as they guide, educate, lead and govern the people and community. By virtue of merit, and/or having experience and in many cases age, Elders are the keepers and protectors of valuable life lessons that are essential to the well being of future generations. They are the peacemakers and educators in the community. The poor socio-economic conditions, alcohol abuse, unemployment and high rates of suicide greatly distress the Elders and are seen as major contributing factors that prevent young people from achieving a self determining and self managing community.

Many of the participants discussed that there is a need for leadership, Eldership and role modelling in community. Bundjalung have established an Elders Council, which is representative of the whole Bundjalung region. Elders from the clan groups and areas sit on the Elders Council. However, in Yolngu this involves someone to who other people listen and a person who can create consensus, (that is, a sense of ngayangu wanggany and mulkurr wanggany). The Yolngu translations of language are very different from Western translation. Ngayangu wanggany and mulkurr wanggany describe characteristics of a group rather than of an individual. ‘Ngayangu’, meaning ‘feeling, emotion’. ‘Wanggany’ meaning ‘one’ and ‘mulkurr’ meaning ‘head’. Therefore the English translation would be ‘feeling, emotion one and head one’ whereas, in Yolngu these are properties of a group or a means of consensus produced by interactions between individual members of the group.
The Stories:

Yolngu- Yirrkala

Mutilnga Yunupingu is a traditional healer and elder in the community. Mutilnga discussed the ways that people can change and what she felt young people needed throughout their education (for example, through “rom markigunhamirri Yolngu”. “Rom” means lore, laid down by the ancestors, culture, customs, and customary way of doing things. “Markigunhamirri” means straight way, good way and Yolngu means ‘person’. Therefore, the English translation would be ‘to teach people the straight, good way through following the ancestors, culture and lore’. Mutilnga said that rom markigunhamirri Yolngu makes people grounded spiritually and culturally. There are many traditional ceremonies, customs and lores that are practiced to live according to rom markigunhamirri Yolngu. To consistently do this Mutilnga discussed that people need to have discipline, patience, respect and humility.

Mutilnga went to the mission school; however, she left at an early age. The missionaries had a profound impact on her as she still holds a strong Christian belief. The identification for many of the older generation identified the church can be understood by observing the similarities between the dreaming stories and biblical stories.

While the young don’t necessarily disrespect the older people for following the teachings of the missionaries they see the practice as irrelevant to everyday life and do not participate in the church. I can respect and understand each side’s perspective; I have seen what damage the missionaries have done to Aboriginal communities by removing children and forcibly teaching Aboriginal peoples euro-centric ideology within the education system. I can also see that the Christian religion has many similarities to Aboriginal
dreaming and teaches people about faith, morals and values. Mutilnga believes in the power of prayer and talking to the ancestors for guidance and support.

The Elders of Yirrkala are desperate to see their children healthy, happy and strong. The Elders have their own pain and also carry a deep sadness, grief and often feelings of despair around the future of their children due to the alcohol abuse, violence and an obvious lack of direction. There is often violence between families that happens as a result of following the customary lores. However, much of the violence is a direct result of alcohol abuse. Children are exposed to these incidents. The children rarely talk about the violence as after an incident has happened it is seen by the adults as over and to be forgotten. Mutilnga talked about dhanharamiriw, which is, the unseen feelings of the spirit. She suggested that acts of violence also occur due to people feeling that someone is wrongfully treating them, when in reality this is not so. These feelings could be a result of past trauma, lack of trust or jealousy. Mutilnga gave an example of a man who thinks that another man is trying to steal his wife from him. Mutilnga said that people need to talk about their feelings, to stop the violence and the impact it has on the community (Mutilnga Yunupingu, 2007, 2-7).

The health and wellbeing status of people in Yirrkala remains an issue of the greatest importance. It is also important to recognise that the education of young Yolngu cannot be separate from the socio economic conditions of Yolngu, in order for Yolngu to have the ability to operate in a contemporary world in a strong and balanced way and achieve the vision and aspirations of Elders. This is compromised if education does not involve dealing with the socio-economic problems. Education needs to incorporate healing programs in the curriculum.
Djappirri Mungurgurr is a well respected leader in the community who works for the Women’s centre and also was a part of implementing the community patrol service at Yirrkala. As a Yolngu woman, she is multi-skilled and a strong leader. Djappirri emphasised the need for vision. She said, ”children need to see into the future for what they want for themselves”. Djappirri holds strong values of determination and pride to achieve what she has wanted in her own life. She has had strong and encouraging role models and strength of mind to achieve her own personal goals. Djappirri expressed that you have to allow yourself to be successful and take the steps needed to achieve your vision for the future. Djappirri sees that education is ‘two ways’ and that you need to educate the mind and the spirit. If you are a person that has vision and wants to be successful, the community recognises you are working to be a leader. Djappirri explained that success is gaining that recognition and not necessarily the rupia (money).

Metaphors and allegories are often used by Yolngu to explain internalised racism, trans-generational trauma and the effects on Yolgnu. Interestingly, there are with many of these stories parallels to other ancient cultures. Djappirri discussed how the old people talked to her about the ways that Yolgnu culture was impacted on by colonisation through an allegory of a rope. She told the story of when Yirrkala was first contacted by white people. The old people had told her that an unknotted straight rope was a symbol of the line to the ancestors but when white people first made contact with Yirrkala the rope began to unravel and become knotted. Djappirri also referred to every painful and oppressive situation thereafter which would cause further knots in the rope.
Similar to the allegory by Djappirri many people have experienced challenges and problems in their lives. Djappiri, told how people need to start to untie these knots one by one to free themselves and regain a clear direction. In order to do this, Djappirri suggested that people need to have a vision for their future and talk about what they see as their “individual knots as only that one person can see and feel”. Learning to sit down and talk with other people about how we are feeling is a good way to heal from hurts. On the other hand some of these knots can be severed through education and restructuring the way all people and individuals think. For example, references to black people are constructed through Western ideology to conform with the Western existing hierarchy. Djappirri says the ‘knots’ that need to be slowly untie are the knots tied up with grief, anger, and sadness caused by colonisation, people dying, people going to prison, physical and sexual abuse, families splitting up due to violence, alcohol and drug abuse and the grief of what has been taken away from people such as land, culture and family members.

Djappirri identified that there is no support for children from Yirrkala to participate in higher education. Yolnu find it difficult to leave the community and don’t want to be forced to leave for schooling. The Yirrkala School only caters for primary and secondary students, therefore for Yolngu to continue on with their studies they would have to leave their country. Djappirri discussed how the relationship system is still in place but there has been a breakdown in communication and respect for the relationships. She gave an example of how community should all be coming together to make decisions, as this is the custom and lore that has been in place for thousands of years. Although, this is no longer happening due to Yolngu being drunk or not interested, Djappirri stated “If you think individually you cut yourself off from others”. (Djappirri Mungurgurr, 2007, 10-9).
Yirrkarki Maymuru manages land care in Yirrkala and is a well respected elder and leader. Yirrkarki also went to Yirrkala School and he said that he was taught bilingual and educated properly, so that he could translate either way to Narparkgi (white people) or Yolngu. He stated that in the 1950’s and 1960’s Yolngu were educated properly and didn’t use swear words. Yirrkarki feels that Yolngu should learn to speak English first, so that children have the skills and are strong and equipped enough to deal with the criticism. Yirrkarki told me that he travelled and worked in many different places around Australia and for this he did get criticism from both Narparkgi and Yolngu. He said that he was qualified through doing “public speaking in a white man’s world. He would then speak to Yolngu and say to them that he should be given the leadership at home and use the skills that he learned while he was away because he could better understand Narparkgi and show other Yolngu that they can work”.

Yirrkarki wants young Yolngu to know that they are the future Elders and leaders in Yirrkala. Again he reinforced that Yolngu “can’t think independently, Yolngu need to put minds together and think as one Yolngu, and not let Narparkgi split up clan groups”. Yirrkarki said “Yolngu do garma”. Garma implies many things for Yolngu, as a practice and as a place. Garma happens when people with different ideas and values come together and negotiate knowledge in a respectful learning environment. He said ‘Garma is about what Yolngu are showing people that will be good for young Yolngu and will drive their spirit so they feel proud’. As an elder, he can see Yolngu should never be driven by rupia or alcohol.

Yirrkarki explained that the “brain should be motivated by making spear and painting; you don’t think about grog and are motivated by looking at community and family”. Yirrkarki
said “that Yolngu uni is within our community, by showing others ‘look I can do this for the good of me and the community’ what can you do?” . This is Yolngu life education, the action of fulfilling your role and responsibilities to family.

Yirrkarki also can see that there are many conflicts and problems that occur within clan groups and between family members. He said that sometimes this happens because families have moved to Yirrkala as a result of the mission days and now some Yolngu, feel they have more rights to country than the new families that only recently moved to the area. Yirrkarki talked about Yolngu processes for dealing with conflict and resolving problems. He said that there are still customary practices to deal with conflict. Yirrkarki said that in the old days Yolngu would also resolve conflicts immediately through getting together and talking about the conflict, “Raypirri Rom” (discipline traditional lore). The Rayparri Rom workers are literally peacemakers in the community.

Rayparri Rom first started at Miwatji Health at Yirrkala in the early 1990’s, following a report by Mr Djerrkura. His vision was of Yolngu communities taking responsibility for their own problems, by reinforcing the customary law which has been in Yolngu culture since our ancestors. Raypirri Rom workers are on call 24 hours a day and must deal with the problems when they arise, through:

- Being available for community members in need of assistance in domestic violence situations;
- Settling down drunken family members;
- Sending children home once the oval lights have been turned off;
- Constant communication with the night patrol through the radio;
• Follow up work with members of the community and
• Following through with referrals to relevant agencies.

(Miwatji Health Service, 2006, online).

Yirrkarki has said to his son as his father said to him, “if you want to be an aggressive person you have to live with the consequences, I am not going to step in to help you. If you do the wrong thing, you have to live with the consequences and never touch anyone to cause harm. “ Yirrkarki expressed that the painful things you see teach you.

Yirrkari feels that some Narparkgi come to Yirrkala for the dollar and don’t believe Yolngu can do what Narparkgi do or train Yolngu to do Narparkgi things. He would like to see more young Yolngu learning Narparkgi things but be as Yolngu. He said that many Narparkgi look at art and only see a picture and not the cultural meaning behind it. He told me how his father went to university and he was there three months to teach about art but he never got the time to teach people about what was behind the art.

Yirrkarki sees that being bilingual is about interpreting language by your values and translating what you learn in Yolngu to English. Yirrkarki finished by saying that “Yolngu just want to be Yolngu, just who you are but Yolngu need gamma (work)”. (Yirrkarki Maymuru, 2007, 20-9).

Djulwalpirri Marika is a prominent leader in the community and works at the Dhanbul land Council. I enjoyed talking to Djulwalpirri as he is a powerful speaker who captivated and inspired me. I could see how he would be a good spokesperson and an influential person. I spoke only briefly to him but he expressed many of the same things that other
people had said. He spoke about “Dhuwalmyimuk Yolngu” (way you act, good, person). He talked about values that show leadership and role modelling behaviour such as humility, respect, being gentle and sharing. 'You need to be guided by your lore and culture, who you are as Yolngu'. Metaphorically, Djulwalpirri describes waves as emotions and life. Sometimes it is rough and sometimes it is calm. The sea is never still and waves constantly change as time passes.

Djulwalpirri briefly discussed family responsibilities and commitments. Djulwalpirri express concern about many of the young people that attend the school who come from outstations and if there are funerals or other business the children will return home for months at a time. There is no process to account for, or flexibility by the Department of Education of the responsibilities of Yolngu such as 'sorry business'. When someone dies in the community it is important that all family are involved in the process of ‘sorry business’. Sadly and too frequently, mourning and sorry business is increasingly occurring in the community. Children’s capacity and ability to focus and participate in their studies is constantly interfered with by their cultural responsibilities. This needs to be acknowledged and the Department of Education needs to take this into account. (Djulwalpirri Marika, 2007, 21-9).

The nature of the relationship between people, land and ancestors in Yolngu culture is undoubtedly evident. During my time at Yirrkala I received many learnings and opportunities to be involved in community. I spent a month at the site at Gulkula with 10 to 20 elder Guntj women and children who were there as part of a pilot project named ‘The Healing Place’ Dithan Yolnguha. It is funded by the Yothu Yindi foundation. The project aimed to establish a bush hospital. At Dithan Yolngunha, Yolngu women led by
artist and senior healer, Gulumbu Yunupingu, are treating Aboriginal peoples through proven traditional healing practices, using medicines from the 'bush pharmacy' and time-honored cultural practices and traditions. The target group are people who are suffering from ailments such as depression, drug addiction and cancer. Dilthan Yolngunha is situated on the Gulkula site, which is a ceremonial and sacred place for Yolngu. Gulumbu says that 'When we were children, we been learning and observing, listening and watching, and now we're doing it out here. This is for heart, soul and mind to have more strength and to heal our people here that were sick.' (Gulumbu Yunupingu, 2007, 3-9).

Historically and to this day Yolngu have ways of healing, mourning and celebrating through ceremonies and customs, such as wailing, dancing, crying, releasing anger and singing. As Gulumbu expressed how as kids they learnt culture and it keeps them strong and will remain to keep them strong while they still practice these customs.
Bundjalung-Northern Rivers

Bundjalung Prayer

Ngali na jugun  We belong this country
Ngali garima mala jugun  We look after this country
Wana janma mala gunu gala jugun  Don’t do wrong around here this country
Ngali wana janja mala jugun  We don’t harm this country
Ngali na mala jugun  We belong to it this country
(Uncle Linky Roberts).

Greg Telford established a service in Lismore called ‘Rekindle the Spirit’. He is currently a consultant facilitating healing workshops for men and women around drug and alcohol issues, violence and sexual abuse. Greg believes in investigating how our attitudes have been altered by colonisation and the cultural aspects of our heritage. In many communities, Greg has noticed that people often want to take advantage of the expendable and luxurious lifestyle advertised in Western cultures. These include alcohol, money and material possessions and many people will only use cultural aspects if it serves to meet their needs or agenda. Greg encourages people to take personal responsibility for their problems and sees that everyone has the capacity to live a good life if they are willing to go deep, share their pain and take the steps to make changes.

Greg left school when he was 14 years old as a result of being kicked out home and needing to get a job to support himself. Greg said when he was young he never saw that university was accessible or an option. Greg grew up in a violent home and consequently became a perpetrator of violence himself with the “catalyst of alcohol”. Greg said to me
“We don’t grow up or start out as little kids dreaming about growing up and knocking around your partner, smashing up houses, fighting coppers and getting locked up”. Greg grew up seeing his father hit his mother and says how he hated it but yet he still turned out the same way. After years of drinking and violence Greg saw that alcohol fuelled his suppressed lack of trust, grief and anger turning it into violence. He went to a rehabilitation centre, stayed sober and started working on changing himself. Greg continues to make a commitment to improve on his personal development and go to 12 step meetings.

Today Greg has a Master of Indigenous Studies and works with others by telling his story and sharing his experiences and allows others to do the same. Greg believes that self development and sharing should start early. Greg feels that the earlier children learn to take responsibility, see the consequences of their actions and follow the right path, then the better decisions they will make as they get older. Greg told me how his children have never seen him drink and his relationship with his children is loving, open and healthy. He said that his 16 year old son came home from school and said to him that he learnt today that ‘TEAM’ means ‘Together Everyone Achieves More’, and I could hear the pride in his voice as he told the story (Greg Telford, 2007, 20-5).

Professor Judy Atkinson is the Head of College at Gnibi, Southern Cross University. Judy is politically and locally actively addressing Aboriginal issues. She is renowned for her development and implementation of a Masters of Indigenous Therapies course, at Southern Cross University. Judy also left school at the age of 14, in year 8, to enter the workforce. Judy says that her mum and dad always encouraged education and felt it was important. Judy remembers her experiences at school as both positive and negative. She told me how
there were only her and another Aboriginal kid at the school and that they were made to sit next to each other. Judy never understood the reasoning behind this and at times felt uncomfortable and never accepted at the school.

Judy told me how she never grew up or learnt about her Aboriginality. She said 'I never felt a sense of belonging in the Aboriginal community growing up'. Judy acknowledges that primary school equipped her with reading and writing skills. She was an avid reader and felt confident and capable of completing the tasks set for her at school. She recognised that she was quick to learn.

From a young age Judy expressed feeling a strong sense of social justice and was passionate about learning. Due to the expectation of her parents to get a job Judy left school. She was married in 1966 but Judy remained interested and involved in social justice initiatives such as the civil rights movement. Judy actively participated in voting clubs around the time of the referendum and maintained her interest and passion for learning.

Judy explained that 'a significant turn in her life happened as a result of a domestic violence situation with my partner'. Judy had attempted suicide a number of times and she remembers 'sitting under a tree contemplating what to do with my life and deciding that I wanted to live MY life and do something with it'. The following day Judy turned up at the university and was told that she could do a bridging course which would then qualify her to enter an undergraduate degree.
Judy says that her introduction to Aboriginal education in a formal sense was at university, where she completed a course called ‘Aborigines and Education’. This was Judy’s initial academic education on Aboriginal peoples and culture. After completing her undergraduate years and then going on to complete her PhD, Judy travelled around the country and stayed in a number of Aboriginal communities. This process of learning encouraged Judy to have a stronger sense of identity and belonging. Today Judy describes her identity as “the three I’s: Indigenous, Invader and Immigrant”, as these are all parts of her ancestry and bloodlines.

Judy is a major contributor to changes in the education system. Judy finished the interview by telling me a story on one particular way that she sees education. She said ‘education can be stimulated in many ways. One day I was sitting on a train looking out the window and noticed that someone had written Biko on a wall. When I got home I went to the library and looked up the word Biko and learnt that Biko was the name of political activist in South Africa that stood against apartheid. I feel that learning happens in many different ways in our lives’. (Judy Atkinson, 2007, 12-6).

Dave Williams is in his mid forties and currently works at Gnibi at Southern Cross University, coordinating the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme program. He is also undertaking an undergraduate degree in Adult Education. Dave told me how he didn’t like school because it was rigid and he didn’t like the rules compared to his home life. After infants he went on to primary school where he was automatically placed into a special class in which he stayed until the end of primary school. Dave never understood why he was put into the special class, along with the other Aboriginal kids. He told me that the
other kids in the special class had either been physically or intellectually challenged. Dave still feels he was disadvantaged by being put into that class. He feels that given the equal opportunity to compete with rest of the year he would have had more interest and enjoyment at school and may have even continued on with his schooling to HSC level.

After primary school Dave went on to high school where he was placed into a normal class with the rest of his peers. He said 'I was quite capable of competing with the kids and did so, well.' Dave felt like the education system had let him down and he still doesn't like the idea of school as a result of his previous experiences. He can see now how other kids who had the same experience as he had fell into the system, left school early and turned to grog. 'I never really had anything against white fellas and had both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal friends'.

Dave said that when he went to school he didn’t know much about his Aboriginality as his mum and dad didn’t talk about it. He thinks that the reason for this was the ‘welfare factor’. However, he knew that he was Bundjalung and knew that he was ‘black’. Dave said when he was in primary school he 'knew about colour and that I was ‘black’ and other kids were ‘white’ but I had no concept of racism. It wasn’t until I was older that I experienced racial slurs and hurtful stereotypes'. 'I remember learning about Captain Cook and saw the pictures of black fellas with spears. I identified with the black fella with a spear and the white fellas would say to me “look Dave, there you are”.

Dave says he learnt about his Aboriginality in his mid teens. 'I learnt that I was Bundjalung from spending time talking with my family, extended family and community about
Aboriginal affairs, organisations and Councils'. Dave says 'I knew that the old people were on committees and were trying to promote cultural awareness, our existence in this area, the Bundjalung language and they would be applying for funding to maintain all this stuff'. After school Dave was offered an apprenticeship in Sydney and he stayed at an Aboriginal hostel where the koori boys would introduce themselves and say where they came from and give their tribal names. He knew he was proud to say that he was Bundjalung.

Working at the university and employing tutors for students is part of Dave’s role. He said that it frustrates him, as Aboriginal peoples are the best teachers on Aboriginal knowledge. Nevertheless, he said that to date he has only 5 Aboriginal tutors and 80 non-Aboriginal tutors. Dave feels that Aboriginal studies should be compulsory in all educational institutions. He said that the subject, Aboriginal Studies, is at some high schools in the region but Aboriginal studies are held as an elective, whereas he feels it should be compulsory. Dave sees a number of non-Aboriginal students that complete the Indigenous Studies unit at the university and their responses are always positive and they are often shocked by what they have learnt about the reality of Aboriginal affairs and history. He feels “they should have learnt about these things at school”.

Dave knows the importance and reality of having a white education and history. “In today’s society we need to able to read and write”. Some people talk about going back to the old ways but as Dave puts it, “we are a Westernised country and people but we should combine the two”. He expressed his Aboriginal education taught him that 'we stick together, show a lot of respect for each other and once you know where you come from,
you have a whole new sense of being in the world'. Combining culture and working together can happen if we treat each other as we would like to be treated.

Dave says to encourage and teach our youth about culture we could use ‘initiation’ as a concept - not the customary practices but the concept, going from birth to adulthood. Dave says that this might help youth today to have the expectation and vision for a productive future. Young people today have lost their sense of identity. 'Our children aren’t being taught the significance and values attached to the Aboriginality. Today, I maintain my cultural identity through working in an Aboriginal organisation working for Aboriginal peoples. I assist Aboriginal students and show them that there are black fellas working in these positions'. (Dave Williams, 19.6.2007).

Leighanna Williams is an intelligent 23 year old woman. Leighanna was encouraged by her parents to finish her schooling and as a result, she left school in Year 12. She says that she really enjoyed her schooling experience and mixed well with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Her friends today are both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Leighanna explained that she had little education in school about Aboriginal history and knowledge. She said there was an elective in year 12 on Aboriginal culture but she chose not to undertake the subject. She says though she would have liked to have learnt more about Aboriginal knowledge and culture throughout her schooling.

Leighanna says that the only time her Aboriginality was obvious to her and others was when there were Aboriginal events and the Aboriginal kids had to be a part of organising the event. She said that 'you could tell that many of the non-Aboriginal kids didn’t know
what Aboriginal events meant or symbolised'. Leighanna explained that it was compulsory to learn Japanese but Aboriginal studies were only an elective, she felt that this should be the other way round. She believes that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children should learn about Aboriginal history and culture, so that people get over their racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal peoples.

Leighanna says that as she is getting older she wants to learn more about her Aboriginal history. When I asked her how she identifies she replied 'a strong black woman who wants to succeed'. To Leighanna 'being black means that you are family and culturally driven and being black also means you will find it harder to succeed in society'. Leighanna is a driven young woman, so she feels even though it may be harder to succeed in a Western world, it will only make you stronger in the end.

Leighanna explained 'I identify as Aboriginal not Bundjalung because there are some people who say you can't work in this organisation because you are not Bundjalung or you can't get housing because you are not Bundjalung and some of the people try to push their perceptions of being Bundjalung onto you'. She goes on to say 'I think this happens with every tribe'. Leighanna said that 'it is humiliating to see how much people fight against each other instead of fighting the government, who initially took stuff away from us'. She said she doesn't want to get involved with land Councils as there is too much politics and fighting. Leighanna said she doesn't want to engage in power and control issues. Leighanna still chooses to work for Aboriginal organisations as that is where she says she feels more comfortable and is undertaking a degree in business

(Leighanna Williams, 2007, 19-6).
In conclusion, there are a number of similarities between the expressed needs and vision of Aboriginal peoples in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala regions. The distinct differences identified between urban and remote areas were lack of employment opportunities in remote areas and loss of culture practices and knowledge in rural areas. The Elders talked about role modeling, leadership, personal responsibility and the need for relevant and appropriate cultural education that promotes a healthy self esteem and cultural identity. Listening to people’s personal stories was inspirational and a privilege.
Chapter Six:

Discussion:

"Do you want to be an honourable ancestor?" (Aboriginal Elder)

In this chapter I have discussed the various issues and strategies regarding education and Aboriginal identity, which were identified by the participants of the research. I have covered the major issues and suggestions mentioned by the interviewees to address these issues. The major issues identified were: Early intervention, institutionalised and internalised racism, leadership and healing from the hurts. I have also drawn conclusions along with recommendations for future research in the area of education, identity and wellbeing.

Early intervention:

As mention previously, participants in the study are not resisting acculturation but are resisting the policies and institutions that promote segregation, marginalisation and participants in the study perceived inability to self determine their own lives and communities. Aboriginal peoples are interested in cross cultural education that provides new intercultural educational spaces, honoring Aboriginal knowledge and shared meanings.

Participants in the study have begun to see that early intervention in schools with children, as a major strategy to breaking the generational cycle of violence, poverty and oppression. As a result of the recent governments’ intervention strategies it is paramount we investigate approaches and models to provide early intervention in educational institutions.
After attending a leadership workshop in Canberra, I learnt that 80% of the Aboriginal population is under 35 yrs old. This statistic is alarming and very telling of the future for Aboriginal peoples if changes do not occur within Aboriginal communities. Teaching all children about their culture, ancestry, consequential thinking, sharing stories, identifying institutionalised and internalised racism will ultimately provide young people with a stronger sense of belonging, foster spiritual and emotional growth, develop independent thinking, encourage goal setting and vision for the future for all people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

If the dilemma is this Aboriginal cultural richness is overlooked by the wider community or dismissed as not relevant or accessible, how then do we make the benefits of this cultural richness accessible to people in the wider community? One answer could be to start early in children's schooling to instil a basic respect on interest in the environment and Aboriginal knowledge. The education system can provide a medium for accessing rites of knowledge and teaching respect for people and place. This early exposure while young children's opinions about the world are being formed is vital.

Dave suggested that 'to encourage and teach our youth about culture we could use initiation as a concept - not the customary practices but the concept, going from birth to adulthood.' In order to promote a meaningful engagement and connection to Aboriginal culture and identity, so that a deep psychological significance is established, it would need to be developed from early education and with particular preparation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children to perceive knowledge beyond what is immediately tangible to the senses. 'In all cultures it seems that whatever it is that is holy will only be felt as holy if it is hard to reach, if it requires layers of access, waiting, levels of approach, a gradual

These changes need to be two-tiered, on a macro and micro level, social/political and individual. Aboriginal peoples are still fighting for the basic rights to be recognised in the education system and the need to improve retention rates and increase Aboriginal people’s levels of education. However, we need to look to the past before we can move forwards and rectify the mis-education and injustices committed in the past. Rectifying past injustices and revising education can happen on a political and individual level.

Aboriginal consultants need to be employed to develop relevant Aboriginal curriculum related to the local Aboriginal knowledge which should also be firmly set in the curriculum and be implemented as compulsory subjects in schools across the country. Local Aboriginal beliefs and cultural practices vary according to region. The collection of stories relating to the local land, people, animals and ancestral beings offer knowledge which shape both Bundjalung and Yolngu law, its history, future and present.

Dave felt strongly about “Our children aren’t being taught the significance and values attached to our Aboriginality”. An understanding of Aboriginal spirituality influences identity transformation. For example, as mentioned previously, Yolngu believe in ngayangu wanggany and mulkurr wanggany describing characteristics of a group rather than of an individual. ‘Ngayangu’, meaning ‘feeling, emotion’. ‘Wanggany’ meaning ‘one’ and ‘mulkurr’ meaning ‘head’. Therefore the English translation would be ‘feeling, emotion one and head one’ whereas, in Yolngu these are properties of a group or a means of consensus produced by interactions between individual members of the group.
Djapirri discussed how the relationship system is still in place but there has been a breakdown in communication and respect for the relationships. She gave an example of how community should all be coming together to make decisions, as this is the custom and lore that has been in place for thousands of years. Although, this is no longer happening due to Yolngu being drunk or not interested, Djapirri stated “If you think individually you cut yourself off from others”.

Mutilnga talked the importance of rom markigunhamirri Yolngu, which makes people grounded spiritually and culturally. “Rom” means lore, laid down by the ancestors, culture, customs, and customary way of doing things. “Markigunhamirri” means straight way, good way and Yolngu means ‘person’. Therefore, the English translation would be ‘to teach people the straight, good way through following the ancestors, culture and lore’.

Yirrkarki explained that the “brain should be motivated by making spear and painting; you don’t think about grog and are motivated by looking at community and family”. Yirrkarki said “that Yolngu uni is within our community, by showing others ‘look I can do this for the good of me and the community’ what can you do?”.

Raymattja Marika, one of the teachers and traditional owners says ‘non-Aboriginal peoples do not use enough metaphors’ and discussed the image of garma, two way learning. (Cameron, 2003, p.250) Gulumbu says that ‘When we were children, we been learning and observing, listening and watching, and now we’re doing it out here’.
Leighanna explained that it was compulsory to learn Japanese but Aboriginal studies were only an elective, she felt that this should be the other way round. She believes that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children should learn about Aboriginal history and culture, so that people get over their racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal peoples by way of education.

The stories shared by Bundjalung and Yolngu about the local country and culture were shared through art, language, dance, woman and men's sites, ceremony and Elders leadership. This knowledge could be shared in the education system through stages of a child's development, rites of passage and life events such as marriage, death and life cycles. Both Bundjalung and Yolngu talk about cultural maintenance as an important part of a child's growth and development. These stories, knowledge and cultural practices need to be further documented and subsequently implemented appropriately into curriculum, with permission from traditional owners. Through the use of mediums such as art, dance, sites (where appropriate), language, song and ceremony local Aboriginal culture and knowledge could be presented into meaningful curriculum on a daily basis throughout infants, primary and secondary schooling in local areas.

As discussed previously Aboriginal worldviews embody issues of family, relationship with country, traditions and lore which all come together to provide a framework in which each person relates to each other and their environment. This understanding needs to be incorporated into the development of meaningful curriculum, healing models or programs within education systems, in order for education to be appropriate and constructive.
Institutionalised and Internalised Racism:

There needs to be a commitment by government to implement policies that promote education on the impact of institutionalised and internalised racism on people. Firstly, we need to understand the origin of education and race and start to breakdown the myths and misconceptions. Secondly, appropriate Aboriginal education in curriculum throughout infants, primary and secondary schooling will assist in augmenting the dominant Western education system. Lastly, this could be supported by compulsory 'whiteness' studies in secondary school.

Denial of the fact that racial oppression exists by non-Aboriginal Australian's has directlylaboured the problem to always remain with Aboriginal peoples to confront and address. Uninformed or insensitive people have, and can easily, subscribe to the notion that racism and colonisation are problems of the past. Through not acknowledging these issues, this, indeed, perpetuates the problem. This uniformed attitude is not surprising given the lack of mass media information on history and Aboriginality, coupled with the cursory Aboriginal history taught in schools. Accurate and localised Aboriginal history such as massacres, mapping, timelines associate with history and activism and local Aboriginal epistemology would be welcomed and long overdue. Most non-Aboriginal peoples are taught more about the ANZAC landings of 1915 than the invasion of 1770-1778.

Dave said that when he went to school he didn’t know much about his Aboriginality as his Mum and Dad didn’t talk about it. He thinks that the reason for this was the ‘welfare factor’. Acknowledging history and the associated social injustices, needs not to project blame. Instead, acknowledging history and social injustices can make room for righting the
wrongs of the past and embrace healing programs and education that honours cultural difference and breaks-down social inequalities.

In order, to provide education to our children that fosters healthy identity and helps all children to develop a social consciousness then non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal children in secondary schooling should be exposed to whiteness studies. This would be an invaluable tool for breaking down internalised and institutionalised racism and decolonising Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal minds.

Through the ages and developments of different philosophies such as religion and economics, European and English sub cultures also suffered intolerable prejudice and discrimination. A prime example of this is boarding schools in upper class England. The institutionalisation of young English men was destructive and has trans-generational effects and left a legacy of mis-information and inequality. Non-Aboriginal peoples are active in resisting class, gender, age and sexual oppression. To heal and recover from these structural barriers, people of all cultures need to tell their stories and gain a greater understanding of how the dominant system has impacted on both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Education that investigates the origin of race and poses the questions such as what people like about being a white person and what people don’t like about being a black person and vice versa, could be useful in the breakdown of institutionalised racism.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples suffer from the impact of colonisation and carry negative cognitive processes and feelings from internalised oppression and internalised racism. Sharing stories and spending time with each other, just listening to each other
could be a process which could be incorporated into the school curriculum. The process of sharing time daily would offer children the opportunity to trust, build relationships and vent any suppressed emotions or discuss any issues of concern. Traditionally, Aboriginal peoples have processes for discharging emotions such as dance, wailing, physical work and other techniques and processes used at ‘the healing place’ in Yirrkala. Sharing supports the foundation of close relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (Jackins, 2002).

**Aboriginal knowledge and Shared Meanings:**

Yolngu and Bundjalung people talk about shared meanings. In addition to mainstream curriculum there needs to be further recognition and implementation of local Aboriginal knowledge and healing models in the education curriculum which will enhance shared meanings. All cultures have their strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses are often highlighted and the strengths are often overlooked. The values and spiritual intelligence offered in Aboriginal culture can be appreciated by many cultures. For example, the value of respect for people, place and the environment can be respected and adopted by all people. Similarly, Western culture was originally based on Protestant Christian principles which in essence also valued and promoted respect for people, place and the environment. Yolngu talk of ‘Garma’, as an analogy of practicing shared meanings. Raymattja Marika explains garma as ‘the river of water from the sea (in this case Balanda knowledge) and a river of water from the land (Yolngu knowledge) mutually engulf each other on flowing into a common lagoon and becoming one.....The process of garma is marked by lines of foam along the interface of the two currents.....this marks the interface between the current of Yolngu life and Balanda life’ (Marika, Ngurruwutthun and White, 1990). For Yolngu this is representative of balance. Yolngu see education is learnt through ‘two ways’. In
saying that, it is important to learn English, numeracy and literacy as it is necessary knowledge to have in a Westernised society.

**Healing in Curriculum:**

Mutilnga talked about dhanharamiriw, which is, the unseen feelings of the spirit. She suggested that acts of violence also occur due to people feeling that someone is wrongfully treating them, when in reality this is not so. These feelings could be a result of past trauma, lack of trust or jealousy. Trans-generational trauma is the transfer of the impacts of historical trauma and grief across successive generations of a race of people. Trans-generational trauma has only recently been recognised in relation to Aboriginal peoples in Australia due to the work of Indigenous academics and therapeutic practitioners who, through their experience and writing, have illustrated the nature of intergenerational and trans-generational trauma (Raphael, Swan and Martinek, 1998, Atkinson, 2002, Milroy, 2005).

Recent government actions have highlighted the devastating trans-generational effects of colonisation in Aboriginal communities (such as the poor health and living standards, low life expectancy, high rates of youth suicide, sexual and domestic violence). However, Aboriginal peoples need to break the cycle of oppression and increase our own personal and social well being. Greg believes that self development and sharing should start early. Greg feels that the earlier children learn to take responsibility, see the consequences of their actions and follow the right path, then the better decisions they will make as they get older.
Social problems such as, suicide and alcohol abuse are of great concern to many people in the Yirrkala and Bundjalung regions. The Elders discussed the importance of growing up with a vision for the future. Mutilnga discussed how this vision for the future needs to be guided by the local customary and ancestral lore. Learning about the customs, dreaming, language and kinship systems teaches children values, their roles and responsibilities expected of them by the local Aboriginal culture. This knowledge is not isolated to just Aboriginal peoples. In both areas people discussed the irreversible impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal peoples today. Both Yolngu and Bundjalung people recognise the advantages of living in a Western society, but both can also identify the lingering oppressive structures (such as racism, classism, homophobia, sexuality and physical, mental or intellectual disabilities) that continue to disadvantage people.

In order to work towards equal opportunity and create a collective consciousness, all people need to share their culture and personal stories. All the people interviewed showed resilience and the desire to actively encourage leadership and role modelling for their community and family.

Leadership is not about authority or power as all people can be leaders. If you are leading a healthy lifestyle and you are happy then you are a leader. In doing this you are a leader to young people in the community. Yolngu go further to say that a leader has a clear vision inherited and guided by your dreaming and ancestral knowledge. Leaders will also role model good behaviour and a healthy lifestyle through being grounded in cultural knowledge and practices. If these qualities are fostered and honoured the person will be someone with whom the community will consult and have the community’s interests at
heart and speak from Ngayangu wanggan and mulkurr wanggan (one feeling, one head).

All children need to learn and be encouraged to become leaders.

There needs to be respect for difference by allowing others to freely decide for themselves their life path and value system. Both Aboriginal peoples from Yirrkala and Bundjalung discussed their personal experiences of internalised racism from their own families and communities. For example, community members fighting over issues related to tribal boundaries or land ownership.

Djapirri discussed how community people that showed leadership through taking personal responsibility in their own lives and maintain a vision for personal and community empowerment will encourage young people to do the same. Aboriginal peoples need to use the system as an emancipatory tool to resist colonising practices that are detrimental to Aboriginal peoples’ culture and wellbeing. The practice of disassociative negative acculturation which is 'cultural change for the purpose of enhancing differences with the contact culture' is empowering for many Aboriginal people (Rudmin, 2003, p.56). Rigoberta Menchu gives an inspiring example of this practice through her book and ability her to learn Spanish, study and resist acculturation through education. Cultural maintenance is essential in the process of disassociative acculturation. Aboriginal peoples that were interviewed were not resisting acculturation but were resisting the policies and institutions that promote segregation and marginalisation.
Conclusion:

The Western education system has impacted on Aboriginal peoples in positive and negative ways. However it was identified that there is a distinct lack of Aboriginal knowledge in the curriculum and curriculum that educates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples on how the dominant culture operates and separates minority groups. Bundjalung and Yolngu culture is rich in knowledge and healing processes, these resources are not being utilised due to the lack of commitment to fund curriculum development and Aboriginal healing programs, to the detriment of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal knowledge and healing processes need to be incorporated into the education system to promote a healthy level of esteem for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Both Bundjalung and Yolngu welcome shared meanings as part of the research into Aboriginal culture and curriculum development.

There are distinct differences between Bundjalung and Yolngu and shows the need for why Aboriginal knowledge in curriculum must be researched and implemented on a local level. Yolngu people are a perfect example of how a healthy self esteem and pride in your cultural identity will support a person in life. Yolngu people are a small percentage in the country however have had a profound voice and presence in the media, in Australian history, in music, in film and in advocating for Aboriginal rights. How you feel about yourself will influence how you act in the world.

Aboriginal communities must be allowed, guided by their respective local cultures, the opportunity to identify and develop models and practices to establish a positive and healing school environment from early childhood through to adult educational institutions. This is a crucial part of allowing the respective Aboriginal community and its local people
to heal and grow. Ultimately, this vision of incorporating local Aboriginal people's epistemology into the education systems is not only for Aboriginal peoples. It is a vision of education for all people participating in the local education institutions. Aboriginal peoples have sat patiently waiting for this recognition and ability to independently control their own lives and communities.

It is clear from the interviews that both Yolngu and Bundjalung people felt a strong of otherness within the Western education system. Some of people interviewed and myself included did not realised it was due to the colour of my skin until after early childhood. This coupled with lateral violence within the community creates an environment which is not conducive to a successful and empowered lifestyle. It is recognised that a healthy self esteem and pride in cultural identity will support a child's success at school and as a direct result their future directions.

Educational policies that include Aboriginal knowledge and that is supported on a national level but developed and implemented at a local level are imperative to achieve desired outcomes. Aboriginal knowledge in curriculum must be implemented in infants, primary and secondary schooling. As discussed in the interviews all students could benefit from an understanding of the local Aboriginal identity, which is responsibility and connection to land, animals, waterways, place and family. Responsibility for family and the environment can promote respect and consequential thinking, which will enhance a child's development. All people that were interview expressed the need for Aboriginal knowledge in curriculum and gave examples of what could be taught. Aboriginal knowledge and shared meanings needs to be developed and implemented in a non paternalistic manner and
consistently taught through the years of schooling in conjunction with rites of passage and the stages of child development.

In conclusion, there needs to be more research in developing curriculum that incorporates local Aboriginal knowledge and culture, whiteness studies and healing programs. I feel that through implementing education that fosters children's loving, intelligent and zestful spirits prepares young people for life, builds responsibility in themselves, their family and the country that they live in. In doing this educational institutions will be much more progressive and representative of a truly participatory democratic society that honours our young people and our future. The earlier both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children are exposed to Aboriginal culture as valuable and useful knowledge, the faster will the knots begin to unravel and scars begin to heal.

*What we learn and Practice We Become.* (Dr. Albert Ellis).
Bibliography


www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4705.0


Bennett, B and Zubrzycki, J August, (2002) Hearing the Stories of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers: Challenging and educating the system, Australian Social Work


Cameron, J (2003), Changing Places: re-imagining Australia, Longueville Books, Double Bay, NSW Australia


Coleman, W (2002) Running Economics Down: Fact and Fantasy in the Presentation of Economists in the Media, School of Economics University of Tasmania


Fletcher, J (1989) Clean, clad and courteous : a history of Aboriginal education in New South Wales, Sydney


Franks, Anthony (2001) Aboriginal Health Promotion-Lismore NSW Australia


Kanyini (2006) Film by Melanie Hogan, Hopscotch Entertainment


95


Martin, K, Indigenist Research: Paradigm and Theory, draft theory chapter 2004


Rose Baumann, M (1994) NINTH ERIC JOHNSTON LECTURE, Aboriginal Education, Occasional Paper No. 46


The Macquarie Dictionary (1991), The Macquarie Library Pty Ltd
Thoughts of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle,


Living Textbooks:

- Judy Atkinson, 12.6.2007
- Greg Telford, 20.6.2007
- Dave Williams, 19.6.2007
- Leighanna Williams, 19.6.2007
- Djulwalpirri Marika, 21.9.2007
- Yirrkarki Maymuru, 20.9.2007
- Djappirri Mungurgurr, 10.9.2007
- Gulumbu Yunupingu, 3.9.2007
- Mutilnga Yunupingu, 2.9.2007
Appendices i

Information Sheet

Title: How has exposure to the Western education influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region.

My name is Cathy Hillard and I am a Bundjalung woman from the Minjungbal region in the Tweed Valley. I am of South Sea Islander, English and Irish descent. I have completed a Bachelor of Social Work through Charles Sturt University and a Bachelor of Social Science through the University of Western Sydney. Whilst studying these courses, I was introduced to numerous theories and practices (based within the welfare and social work framework) which I found to be culturally inappropriate and limiting for Aboriginal peoples.

Through studying these courses I became acutely aware that (within the curriculum of Social Science and Social work) there is a lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal knowledge and limited processes for working with Aboriginal peoples. As an Aboriginal person who was already facing the barriers of being a minority within a mainstream course, I was extremely disappointed with my experiences within the academy. The lack of acknowledgement and teaching of Aboriginal knowledge seemed to me to perpetuate the colonisation process and disillusioned me as an Aboriginal person, as I only had Western theory and practices to inform my studies. Consequently, I often found it difficult to commit to my studies and intended future occupation in social work, as the content of the courses I was doing was frequently not relevant or useful to me as an Aboriginal person.
The purpose is to research how exposure to the Western education has influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region. I aim to participate in and conduct interviews with Aboriginal women over 20 years of age, who have had experience with the Western education. In addition I will interview women over 20 years of age who haven’t been through the Western education system. I will only be interviewing women, if it is culturally appropriate. I would like to conduct and consult a focus group with local organisations and local people, to enhance processes and protocols.

I am writing to you to ask permission to visit and work on a research project. If I am to visit your country I will have:

Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung Elders:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung lore:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung land:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung people:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung culture and
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung futures

I will show this respect by asking permission before making visits to Yirrkala. I will care for the lands, animals, plants and waterways. I will not move or take any objects from Yirrkala or Bundjalung country. I will not walk around the country unless I am taken by Yolngu or Bundjalung people. I will not use or take Yolngu cultural knowledge or practices unless I am given permission. I will ask permission and present all information I may use for my masters to Yolngu and Bundjalung people throughout all the stages of my masters. I will bring no alcohol or drugs to Yirrkala or Bundjalung region. I will recognise
any learning I receive from Yolngu and Bundjalung. I will keep Yolngu and Bundjalung informed of what I am doing in my masters research. I will answer any questions Yolngu and Bundjalung would like to know about me or my Masters’ degree. I will share what knowledge I have in any way to assist Yolngu and Bundjalung meet their vision for their future.

Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and your confidentiality is assured. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw and to discontinue participation at any time. You may also elect not to answer any questions asked.

My research is being conducted under the supervision of Judy Atkinson who is a member of Southern Cross University’s. If any issues or questions are raised as a result of your participation in this research please contact Judy Atkinson on (02)66203 003 or jatkinso@scu.edu.au

Researcher: Cathy Hillard
Ginibi – College of Indigenous Australian Peoples
Southern Cross University
Telephone: 0428 536959
Email: chillard@bigpond.com
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The Approval Number is ..........
If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the HREC through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms Suze Kelly, (telephone [02] 6626 9139, fax [02] 6626 9145, email: skelly1@scu.edu.au)

Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.
HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC) NOTIFICATION

To: Professor J. Atkinson/C. Hillard
    Gnibi
    judy.atkinson@scu.edu.au c.hillard@bigpond.com

From: Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee
      Graduate Research College, R. Block

Date: 12 March 2007

Project: How has exposure to the Western Education influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region?

Status: Approved subject to the standard conditions and special condition/s. Approval Number ECN-07-25.

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HREC)

The Chair of the HREC has indicated that this research project is to be approved following discussions and amendments to the original application which was submitted first in December 2006.

This research is now approved subject to the usual standard conditions. Please note these. There is also a special condition.

This approval will be ratified at the April meeting of the HREC.

Special Condition
1. The latest application was delivered to the Secretary of the HREC on the 6 March 2007. The researcher, C. Hillard, was to forward the most current information sheets and consent information to the Secretary.

The Secretary has not received these documents as yet (12/3). Please ensure that they are forwarded to the secretary as part of the compliance to these special conditions.

Conditional approval will lapse one calendar month from the date of this memorandum if the special conditions have not been fulfilled, and thereafter the University will not accept any further responsibility in regard to the research.
**Standard Conditions** (in accordance with the Guidelines of the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans) referred to as The National Statement (NS).

1. **Monitoring**
   
   **NS 2.33**
   
   *An institution or organisation and its HREC have the responsibility to ensure that the conduct of all research approved by the HREC is monitored by procedures and/or by utilising existing mechanisms within the institution or organisation which will ensure the achievement of the goals for monitoring as determined by the institution or organisation and the HREC.*

   **NS 2.36**
   
   *An HREC may recommend and/or adopt any additional appropriate mechanism for monitoring including random inspections of research sites, data and signed consent forms, and/or interview, with their prior consent, of research participants.*

   (a) All ethics approvals are valid for 12 months unless specified differently. The researchers must renew ethics approvals if research continues beyond 12 months.

   (b) Generally, that the principal investigator/person responsible (usually the Supervisor) and the researcher/s **provide a report every 12 months** on the progress to date or outcome in the case of completed research specifically including:

   - The maintenance and security of the records.
   - Compliance with the approved consent protocols and documentation.
   - Compliance with any conditions of approval.
   - Any changes of protocol to the research.

   *Note: Compliance to the reporting is mandatory to the approval of this research.*

   (c) Specifically, that the principal investigator/person responsible and/or associates **report immediately** and notify the HREC, in writing, for approval of any **change in protocol.** (NS 2.37)

   (d) That a report is sent to HREC when the **project has been completed.**

   (e) That the principal investigator/person responsible and/or associates **report immediately** any event that might affect ethical acceptance of the research protocol. (NS 2.37)

   (f) That the principal investigator/person responsible and/or associates **report immediately any serious adverse events/effects on participants.** (NS 2.37)

   (g) That, if this research is conducted in a country other than Australia, all research protocols for that country are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

2. **Complaints**

   **NS 2.39**
An institution or organisation with an HREC shall establish mechanisms for receiving and promptly handling complaints or concerns about the conduct of an approved research project.

All Participants MUST be advised in writing that:

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval Number is ECN-07-25. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Ethics Complaints Officer:

Ms Sue Kelly  
Ethics Complaints Officer and Secretary  
Human Research Ethics Committee  
Southern Cross University  
PO Box 157  
Lismore, NSW, 2480  
Tel: (02) 6626-9139 or fax (02) 6626-9145  
Email: sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

All complaints, in the first instance, should be in writing to the above address. All complaints are investigated fully and according to due process under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans and this University. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

Sue Kelly  
Secretary & Ethics Complaints Officer  
HREC  
Ph: (02) 6626 9139  
sue.kelly@scu.edu.au

Associate Professor Baden Offord  
Chair, HREC  
Ph: (02) 6620 3162  
baden.offord@scu.edu.au
Appendices iii

Letter- Yirrkala School

My name is Cathy Hillard and I am a Bundjalung woman from the Minjungbal region in the Tweed Valley. I also am of South Sea Islander, English and Irish descent. I am writing to you to ask permission to visit and work on a research project about how exposure to the Western education has influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region. I have spoken to people from your region and read books about how to care for, protect and respect your lands, lore and people.

If I am to visit your country I will have:

Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung Elders:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung lore:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung land:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung people:
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung culture and
Respect for Yolngu and Bundjalung futures

I will show this respect by asking permission before making visits to Yirrkala. I will care for the lands, animals, plants and waterways. I will not move or take any objects from Yirrkala or Bundjalung country, without permission. I will not walk around the country unless I am taken by Yolngu or Bundjalung people. I will not use or take Yolngu cultural knowledge or practices unless I am given permission. I will ask permission and present all information I may use for my masters to Yolngu and Bundjalung people throughout all the stages of my masters. I will bring no alcohol or drugs to Yirrkala for Yolngu and
Bundjalung. I will recognise any learning I receive from Yolngu and Bundjalung. I will keep Yolngu and Bundjalung informed of what I am doing in my masters research. I will answer any questions Yolngu and Bundjalung would like to know about me or my master’s degree. I will share what knowledge I have in any way to assist Yolngu and Bundjalung meet their vision for their future.

These protocols are to guide the research I will be doing in Yirrkala and Bundjalung country. Through following these rules I hope our connections are strong and will remain strong. If there is anything else that I may need to do, can you please contact me.

Thank you

Cathy Hillard
Appendices iv

Questionnaire:

How has exposure to the Western education influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region?

1. What made you go to school?
2. What made you leave school?
3. How was your experience throughout your schooling? and how did it make you feel?
4. What was the content in your schooling like? And could you relate to it?
5. How much do you know of your, our Aboriginal history compared to white Australian history?
6. What does being an Aboriginal person mean to you?
7. How would you describe your identity?
8. How has your experience in the Western education impacted on your identity?
9. What have you learnt from a Western education?
10. What have you learnt from your Aboriginal education and culture?
11. What is your spirituality?
12. How do you maintain your cultural and spiritual practices when going to school or work?
13. How has your Western education influenced your values and life?
14. If you had a perfect school and curriculum what would it look like?
Appendices v

Letter- Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in this research Project.

Research: Education and Identity- How has exposure to Western Education influenced Aboriginal identity for people in the Bundjalung and Yirrkala region?

Researchers Name: Cathy Hillard

chillard@bigpond.com

0428536959

I agree to participate in the above research project. I have read and understand the details contained in the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and I am satisfied with the answers.

I agree to my interview being recorded on either audiotape or hand written notes.

I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time and I have been fully informed that prior to data analysis, any data that has been gathered will be destroyed if I decided to withdraw from the research.

I understand that neither my name nor any identifying information will be disclosed or published, except with my permission.

I understand that the Southern Cross University Ethics Committee has approved this project.

I am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time after the interview, on the above contact details.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the Southern Cross University Human Resource Ethics Committee (HREC). The approved number is.........

If you have any complaints or reservations about any of the ethical aspects of your participation in the research, you may contact the HREC through the Ethics Complaints Officer, Ms Sue Kelly, (ph: 02 66269 139 Fax: 02 66269 145, email: skelly@scu.edu.au).

Any complaint made will be treated in confidence.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this form to keep.
I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study. I am over the age of 18 years.

Name of Participant:..............................................

Signature of Participant...........................................

Date:.................................................................

I certify that the terms of the Consent Form have been verbally explained to the participant and that the participant appears to understand the terms prior to signing the form. Proper arrangements have been made for an interpreter where the participant cannot speak, as their first language.

Signature of witness (independent of the researcher, where possible):..............................

Date:.................................................................