Culturally responsive possibilities: leaders' voices in remote Indigenous schools

by

Stephen Andrew Corrie

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List of acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER	Australian Council for Education Research
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
CRS	Culturally Responsive Schools
CRSL	Culturally Responsive School Leadership
DoE	Department of Education (Northern Territory)
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy
PISA	Program of International Student Assessment
RWI	Read, Write Inc.
SAE	Standard Australian English
SIP	School Improvement Plan

Use of terminology

Throughout the thesis the below key terms will be used:

- Indigenous – persons who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both.
- Remote Indigenous Schools – schools designated as remote or very remote as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a). These schools have predominantly Indigenous students who speak local languages before English (Morrison et al. 2019).

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to remote Indigenous school students across Australia and declare you deserve an education that reinforces your language and culture, affirming your identity as the capable and competent people you are and have always been.

Abstract

The leadership practice of school principals in remote Indigenous communities is enacted at a site of contradiction and contestation (Guenther & Osborne 2018b). On one hand, leaders are expected to provide educational opportunities that liberate students, yet on the other hand their professional behaviours, effective practice and autonomy can be constrained by highly prescriptive, neo-liberal imperatives and political rationalities (Ball 2016; Eacott 2018; Lingard 2018b). Despite the efficacy of a school leaders' role in impacting learning environments, current educational achievement data indicates that approaches adopted in remote Indigenous community schools have not worked (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020; KPMG 2017; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Ockenden 2014; Unsworth 2013; Welch et al. 2015).

A growing body of international scholarship that is yet to take hold in Australia reveals new practice possibilities for the educational trajectories of First Nations students in settler colonial countries (Bishop 2007; Castagno & Brayboy 2008; Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Sleeter 2011a; Villegas & Lucas 2007). Culturally responsive approaches are largely under-theorised in Australia and while providing hope, are missing completely from the lexicon of the Northern Territory Department of Education (Morrison et al. 2019). This research contributes to filling this void through qualitative research that sought to answer the question 'what are the leadership possibilities for culturally responsive practice in remote Indigenous schools?'

To understand new educational leadership possibilities in remote Australian Indigenous contexts, this research utilised international studies in culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and national scholarship in culturally responsive pedagogies (Morrison et al. 2019). Specifically, the study builds new theory from the conceptualisations of community-centred leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and student lifeworlds (Moll et al. 1992; Morrison et al. 2019) as offering potential for alternative leadership practice that may contribute to the transformation of remote Indigenous education.

To capture the voices and lived experiences of leaders who work in remote Indigenous schools across the Northern Territory, an ethnographically informed research methodology was used. Discourse analysis was employed to examine multiple interviews with principals who lead these school sites and was combined with analyses

of site observations, school improvement plans and annual performance reports. Data highlighted that despite the impact of external demands, agency does exist to utilise leadership performativity to bring convergence between departmental and community imperatives in a way that is educationally inclusive. Four findings emerged that offer scope for educational leadership practice re-design in remote Indigenous contexts. First, culturally responsive school leaders co-construct school policy; second, they privilege local language, cultures and pedagogies; third, culturally responsive school leaders develop culturally responsive teachers and finally, culturally responsive school leaders pursue community engagement as being of high relational and educative value.

Stemming from this research are two new educational leadership practice tools that support remote school leaders to create the enabling conditions to connect learning to students lives in meaningful ways. These tools include a continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility and a re-framing of the role of educational leaders in remote Indigenous school contexts. I claim these tools have implications for theory, policy and practice through expanded understandings of what it means to be an educational leader in a remote Indigenous school, providing new gateways for educational reform.

Declaration

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, are clearly acknowledged.



Stephen Andrew Corrie Date 28 /04 / 2021

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The thesis is now written…it’s time to make this journey count!

Prologue

The school vehicle was full. Beside me as I drove was Warren, a Nungali man who I was working with at the local school. In the back were eight primary aged Indigenous students who had just participated in a sporting carnival against our neighbouring schools. The closest school was 50kms away and the furthest, while only 110kms in distance, was regarded as extremely remote as the dirt roads leading to the community were as rough as they come.

Warren had become a friend and on this day he asked me a question that is etched into my memory with vivid clarity. He asked, 'Steve, what is it with you white guys and mowing lawns and washing cars?' He had seen other school principals come and go from his community before my time and this set of behaviours perplexed him.

While only knowing each other for a few months at this stage, we conversed with an ease that often comes when people have known each other for a lifetime. We trusted each other, which no doubt led to a question that Warren later told me he'd always wanted to ask of a 'white fella' but never thought he should. As innocuous as this question may seem on some levels it highlighted in that moment that Warren and I originated from two distinct cultures which included worldviews that were often at odds with one another.

Two years earlier I was working as a school principal in a different region of the Northern Territory and myself and my wife, Katrina, discussed over many weeks whether we should actually be working there or not. The community was great, the staff at the school worked hard and the students were wonderful. Our dilemma was not with the school or community. Instead, regular reflections on our work had us questioning whether we were providing an empowering education for our students or were we providing a colonising form of schooling that simply perpetuated the existing social stratification?

Reflecting on these experiences with the benefit of hindsight I see a well-intentioned yet highly inexperienced school leader who was simply trying to do the very best he could. I operated from a 'what works,' instrumentalist and pragmatist orientation as I did not have the theoretically informed pedagogical curriculum or leadership knowledge that I do now. I functioned at the practitioner level and simply tried to get it right for the students, the community, our staff and the department. Interestingly, my approach cohered with many

other non-local educators and school leaders, who, like me, had come to 'the Territory' from 'down south', where most of us replicated aspects of how schools function according to our own Western, urbanised models of educational experience and socio-cultural mores.

It is scary to now reflect on my own teaching and leadership practice during this first school term 'out bush'. The night before I began, I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned, wondering if the students would arrive in the morning. Would they listen to me? How would I handle any behaviour concerns? If something went wrong, what was I to do? Myself and Katrina, who was just as inexperienced as me, were the only university-trained teachers at the school. I did what most teachers in an unfamiliar situation do and fell back on my own educational and socio-historical experiences and understandings. I taught lessons in the way I had been taught during my own schooling. When I look back, this approach was far from responsive to the cultural and contextual needs of the students. Instead, this was a metropolitan style of education enacted in an Indigenous community and served on a white platter! These reflections now make me cringe.

I couldn't work out why the students struggled to pronounce my name. They kept saying 'Steeb' when my name was 'Steve'. Months later when a linguist was working in the community a casual chat revealed the fact that the local language did not contain the letter 'v'. Slowly but surely, I was beginning to better understand the landscape in which I was supposed to be a leader.

As an educator new to the challenges of leadership it is hard to know what constitutes 'normal'. As such, I regarded whatever challenges emerged as standard for bush schools and was not attuned to questioning departmental directives. I simply got on with the job, doing the very best I could. That was until we needed a third teacher, which opened my eyes to how departmental structures can impact you both personally and professionally.

At the school, Katrina had thirty-six students from reception to year two and I had thirty-six students from year three to seven. In order to access any 'non-contact time' it meant one of us looking after a school of seventy-two students alongside one of the local assistant teachers. Needless to say, we opted not to take release time on most occasions as it proved too difficult to manage.

With an attendance of 98% or above every day the school was bursting at the seams. We requested a third teacher and were informed by the Northern Territory Department of

Education that we needed to maintain both our enrolment and attendance over a six-month period for this to occur. Both were maintained so we were now able to seek an additional educator. We were excited as this was going to be great for the school given that each class would be reduced in size, plus this would extend our own limited social world. All we needed now was a house for the new teacher and an opportunity to discuss the role with interested candidates.

On a staffing front, we were not inundated with interested applicants. Instead, departmental recruiting provided only one possible candidate. Jess was from Melbourne, had just completed her teaching degree and was keen for adventure and the chance to save some money. Going bush satisfied her criteria, yet brief phone conversations prior to her arrival had me unsure how she would handle life in a remote locality where being a single female held many challenges beyond her appointed role.

The new house was promised to be built over the Christmas school holiday period. I checked in throughout the break to see how it was progressing but was unable to get a firm answer from our regional office. Upon our return to the community we discovered that no work had been done at all. We now had an extra teacher and only one silver bullet style caravan to live in. Sadly, no-one had informed any of us prior to the start of the new school year. Needing to work out a new plan on the spot, Katrina and I decided to live in the school staffroom and Jess, the new teacher, was to take over the silver bullet that we had lived in the year before. I figured that these new arrangements would not be for too long as housing was clearly a priority. I was wrong.

After six months in the staffroom we had had enough. The house construction was underway, yet only one or two builders were ever on site and the process was dragging on. I contacted the regional superintendent whom I had up to this moment had a strong working relationship and mentioned that we wished to close the school until the housing situation was rectified. He indicated that this was not a good idea. The next day we had eleven tradesmen on site and the house was completed within a week. My relationship with my direct line manager, while always civil and courteous, never fully recovered.

This situation highlights one of the realities of leading schools in remote communities. Not only is the education-related work challenging, but so too are the myriad of situations that are dealt with that have little to do with student learning. Where weekends may usually be filled with social functions, community life for non-locals can at times be lonely. In the wet season,

roads in some parts of the Northern Territory are impassable, meaning that opportunities to step out of the community are limited, causing some staff to suffer forms of cabin fever. If you need an air conditioner or plumbing fixed, these matters may not always receive immediate attention as accessing remote communities even in good conditions takes time and planning.

Living, teaching and leading in remote Indigenous schools is extremely rewarding but also relentlessly challenging. My own experiences are summed up neatly in the words of Halsey (2019) who questioned how real change is likely to occur in remote education when there is a long-established tradition of sending the least experienced leaders to 'some of the most isolated, complex, demanding and challenging schools and contexts' (p. 10).

These are environments where you are constantly required to adapt as stability and instability co-exist in everything you do. You have no option but to be flexible and creative in every facet of your role. When I discovered that in a community of over 250 people the only people with a watch were the non-local school teachers and the nurse, having students attend school on time required new approaches. When school was due to start at 8am we would regularly have around forty of our seventy-two students at the school. At 8.05am we would do our morning fitness jog around the community and kids from surrounding houses would join as the group went past. By the time we returned to school at 8.20am, we would have three full classes. You can usually find a way, but you need to be prepared to think and act outside your own prior experiences.

Many years on from my first forays into remote Indigenous education and the landscape worries me greatly. For decades this space has been plagued by discourse that has centred on educational dysfunction, program failure and wicked problems. If more hopeful educational possibilities are to be realised in the future, current approaches in remote education must give way to new alternatives; and could these new alternatives include leadership reform that could make a difference for students who study in remote schools? But in asking this question I also ponder how this research might provide anything different to what has come before. It's a pertinent consideration as I am a white, middle-class, middle-aged male who could rightfully be characterised as having gone through life with a tailwind. I have not suffered hardship. I have benefited from being a member of the dominant society and my own epistemological, ontological and axiological foundations often align with what is presented all around me in the media, at social functions and in general daily life, so how can

I presume to be able to make a tangible difference in an area of education that has proved intractable despite considerable efforts?

Having worked as a school principal in three remote Indigenous community schools provides useful insights but I contend that this alone does not provide the necessary foundations to authentically attempt to reform remote Indigenous education. Having worked in education for more than twenty years has provided experiential understandings of how schools work, but again I argue that this is insufficient to claim the breadth and depth of understanding required to bring about educational transformation in highly complex, contested schools such as those in remote communities. Instead, this study emanates from the educational aspirations of minoritised cultural groups nationally and globally and leans heavily on the scholarship of academics whose work has already resulted in positive learning trajectories for First Nations students. This positioning is critical as only when we begin to consider education from the perspectives of those to whom it relates can new possibilities emerge.

Chapter 1 – Introducing the research

> .. in their local contexts, principals relate in embodied and emotional ways to the lives and prospects of students, parents and the broader community. Through these relationships, principals' identities can shift from the compliant, accountable entrepreneurs (valued by the system) to advocates for their communities. They can engage in 'counter-conduct' and 'counter-discourses', and speak out for the interests of their school community (Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019, p. x).

1.1 Introduction

Dilemmas and possibilities are always present in the roles that educational leaders are required to perform. Complexity is found in the dichotomy of what leadership is presumed to enable and what education systems expect. Eacott (2018) claims that this creates a paradox between what leaders would like to do and what their professional remit demands. For leadership practitioners interested in equity and social justice, the current educational landscape is contradictory because emancipatory educational possibilities and the need to adhere to the orthodoxy of systemic imperatives co-exist disharmoniously.

Many contradictions similar to this are apparent in remote Indigenous schools where school leaders are required as part of their professional remit to develop and implement the school's educational vision. While the education departments that leaders work for and the communities in which they are based share a common desire for educational success (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016), these stakeholder groups ascribe different meaning to both the purpose of education and how success is defined (Guenther & Osborne 2018b), therefore providing a challenge in determining the priorities that should underpin the school's vision. The dilemma for the leader in remote Indigenous communities involves the need to constantly navigate competing educational demands in schools that are considered to be 'in crisis' according to current student achievement data (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020; KPMG 2017; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Ockenden 2014; Unsworth 2013; Welch et al. 2015).

Across top-end Australia, this educational crisis plays out daily but most significantly in the Northern Territory (Collins 1999; Hall & Guenther 2019; Ladwig & Sarra 2009; Masters 2011; Spillman 2017; Wilson 2014). To address the situation, the Northern Territory Department of Education (DoE) invests in the efficacy of their school leaders to influence reform at the local level. As part of the Education NT Strategy 2018-2022 (Northern

Territory Department of Education 2017), school leaders are deemed to provide a bridging mechanism between departmental policy and educational practice that is designed to lift performance.

In this thesis I set out to address how contradictions that impact the practice of leaders in remote Indigenous schools may be addressed through consideration of the question, 'what are the leadership possibilities for culturally responsive practice in remote Indigenous schools?' This question guides all facets of the research through an ethnographically informed methodology that sought to understand what supports and inhibits an educational leader's practice in connecting schooling with their students' lives.

Through this introductory chapter, contextual factors including framings of remote schools and the expected roles of remote school principals are foregrounded. These important foundational understandings are built upon by outlining historical events that have impacted Indigenous education and current expectations of school leaders in remote Indigenous schools. From this platform, varying conceptualisations of 'the problem' in remote Indigenous education are detailed, highlighting the contested and unresolved space in which leaders currently work. As this educational landscape has not seen any significant student achievement progress in over a decade according to Australian government initiatives such as *Closing the Gap* (Commonwealth of Australia 2020a), alternative leadership practice that offers potential for new educational trajectories are in need of exploration. To provide a framework for considering new possibilities, Dewey's concept of *oeuvre* is outlined as it provides capacity to unveil socially just approaches that are currently unattained (d'Agnese 2019). The final moves of this chapter involve positioning myself as a researcher in relation to the politics of knowledge production that is recognised as never being neutral or value free, and then outlining what has been included and excluded in the scope of the study.

1.2 Aims of the research

This research is guided by the question: what are the leadership possibilities for culturally responsive practice in remote Indigenous schools?

The study considers national and international approaches in relation to educational leadership, culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), and how this may inform school leadership practice in remote Indigenous contexts. Specifically, this research aims to:

- Capture and examine principals' work in remote Indigenous schools
- Critically analyse the personal and professional dimensions of principals in remote Indigenous schools
- Analyse educational practices that could be considered culturally responsive using frameworks provided by Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), Khalifa (2018) and Morrison et al. (2019)
- Deploy a dilemmas and possibilities frame to the work of principals through my fieldwork to reveal culturally responsive practice possibilities

1.3 Remote school definition

Defining what constitutes a remote area and by extension a remote school in Australia is highly contested. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a), geographies throughout Australia are categorised according to five classifications including major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. These classifications highlight distances from major 'centres' with remote and very remote regions being located the furthest from major service provision. Each classification is indicated in Figure 1.

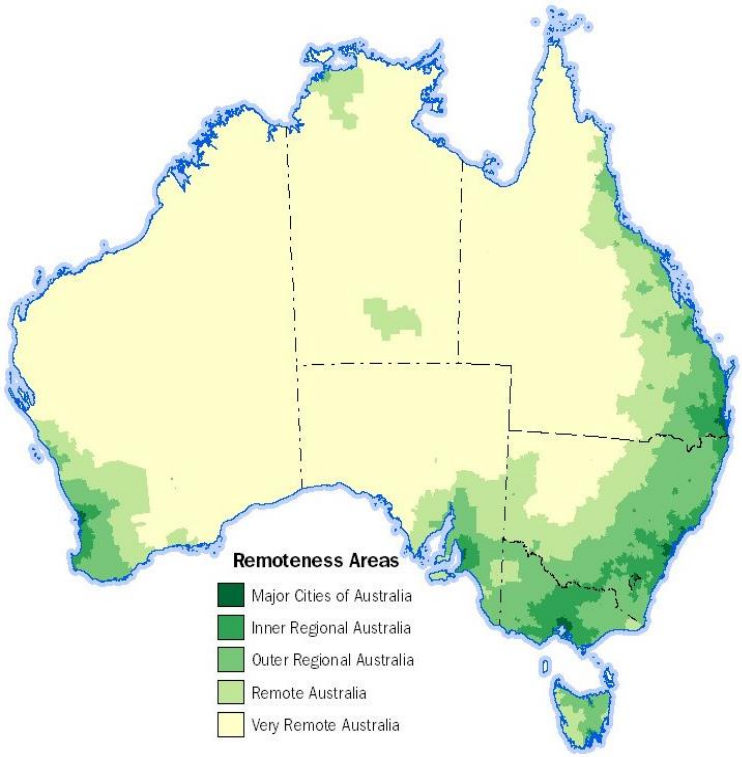

Figure 1. The Australian statistical geography standard remoteness structure

DoE documentation (Northern Territory Department of Education 2020) and *My School* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) also utilise the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a) to define what constitutes a remote area. Guenther, Halsey and Osborne (2015) however challenge this understanding of remote on the basis that it is established by statistical geographers who make value judgements according to binaries of advantage and disadvantage dependent on proximity to major infrastructure and services. The authors assert:

> …it is not necessarily the physical or spatial location that matters as much as the perceptions that people have about the culture, economy and social opportunities that exist in the space (Guenther, Halsey & Osborne 2015, p. 64).

When this rationale is applied to further research conducted by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016), it is evident that definitions of what constitutes a remote area are not homogenous nor universally agreed upon. The authors found that, according to Indigenous persons who reside in communities officially classified as remote or very remote, they did not view themselves as disadvantaged on the basis of where they choose to live.

In an attempt to provide some clarity about the general characteristics of a remote Indigenous school, the following description offered by Morrison et al. (2019, p. 4), is useful:

> …remote and very remote schools are usually located on Aboriginal-controlled lands and serve specific Aboriginal communities. Schools are often small and have high enrolments of Aboriginal students (Guenther & Bat 2013) and 'nearly all of the students will speak local languages before English' (Guenther et al. 2016, p. 48).

Morrison et al. (2019) also claim that remote Indigenous schools are 'unlike their urban counterparts across various parameters' (p. 4) as geographic, cultural and linguistic dimensions are often unique when compared to schools in metropolitan and regional settings.

A range of literature has been drawn upon to define what constitutes a 'remote school'. This thesis considers remote schools to be located in Indigenous communities that are characterised by distinct cultures, local customs, laws and languages (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2020) and include what the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a) refers to as both remote and very remote localities.

1.4 Remote school principals

Leaders in the position of principal in remote Indigenous schools find themselves part of a wider Australian educational leadership collective. Throughout Australia, principal characteristics include a predominantly white, middle class educator population that extends across public, Catholic and Independent sectors (Australian Council for Educational Research 2013). These sectors respectively represent 65.6%, 19.9% and 14.5% of all students enrolled in Australian Schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019). In primary schools, females represent 57.5% of all principals while males represent 42.5%. In secondary schools, females represent 41.7% of all principal positions while males represent 58.3% (Australian Council for Educational Research 2013). The average age of 'school leaders' (denoted as Principal, Deputy Principal or 'other' school leadership roles) across Australia is 50.7 years in primary schools and 51.5 years in secondary schools (Australian Council for Educational Research 2013).

In the Northern Territory, the 2019 and 2020 DoE Annual Reports (Northern Territory Department of Education 2019a, 2020) provide the following details: the majority of school leaders in the role of 'principal' in DoE schools are non-Indigenous; principals oversee DoE schools that are located across six regions – Darwin, Palmerston and Rural, Arnhem, Katherine, Barkley and Alice Springs; 71% of DoE schools are located in remote or very remote communities; 14 534 of all DoE students are Indigenous with 49% of the total student population having a language background other than English and; $1.108 billion was allocated in the 2019–20 financial year to provide an education across 153 public sector schools for 33 876 students.

The context in which school principals in this study work can also be understood through the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage **(**ICSEA) that refers to the level of educational advantage for students at a particular school. The average ICSEA value across Australia is 1000 yet most remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory are generally located at the lower end of the scale, signifying greater disadvantage. In order to calculate the ICSEA, combined factors such as parents' education, parents' occupation, the school's geographic location and the proportion of Indigenous students who attend the school are considered (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020).

Sammen (2017) also indicates that social determinants including economic status, mortality rates, health status and wellbeing, all have an impact on student educational outcomes. While

these factors are all considered important, they are not the primary focus of this research and are therefore excluded in order to concentrate on how education leaders use their practice to connect schooling with students' lives.

1.5 Indigenous education and leadership in Australia

Research that specifically considers Indigenous schools across Australia is extremely thin (Buckskin 2016; Unsworth et al. 2018). Despite an absence of longitudinal data that specifically considers Indigenous education or leadership, Pascoe (2013) claims that Australia is home to the longest surviving First Nations civilization in the world. A lineage of this magnitude requires, amongst other things, a form of education that ensures human existence from one generation to the next. Despite its enduring nature, Indigenous education in Australia has been severely disrupted by European invasion that has sought to colonise both physical spaces and intellectual spaces (Fogarty et al. 2018; Price 2015; Rigney 2018).

Welch et al. (2015) indicate that prior to European arrival, Indigenous education had always provided a 'practical initiation into culture: learning by doing' (p.1). According to Rigney (2018), this form of education was deeply integrated with the local environment, was taught through the use of children's home languages and involved knowledge being passed on from one generation to another. Knowledge was generally shared by family members according to children's unique stages of development and readiness (Price 2012, 2015), providing educational experiences that were considered to be highly relevant. This was an education that 'explained one's role and place in society, one's relationship to the land, to kin, and to spiritual ancestors' (Welch et al. 2015, p. 2). Despite the utility of this form of education for Indigenous societies, Bin-Sallik (2003) highlights that the colonial gaze saw limited value in something that was regarded as 'primitive', even questioning whether or not Indigenous persons could be educated at all.

Cowlishaw (1999) describes this as the beginning of a palimpsest where Indigenous structures and systems were beginning to be erased and replaced by Western models that were considered to be superior. For Indigenous children, this resulted in a shift in who oversaw their education. While elders had for millennia been the 'examiners' and 'masters' in Indigenous education to teach what Price (2015, p. 3) refers to as the 'essentials of life', significant change that ignored the vitality of Indigenous traditions was emerging (Welch 1988). Burridge and Chodkiewicz (2012) define this period as constructed by power laden

hierarchies where settlers regarded themselves as ‘civilised’ and the First Peoples of the nation as ‘savages’.

In the early days of colonisation, schooling for Indigenous students was set up and operated by churches or charities and, as Bin-Sallik (2003, p. 22) notes, was largely geared towards the goal of ‘civilising’ and expressly ‘for the purpose of educating, Christianising and giving vocational training’. According to Grace and Platow (2017) approaches of the era that viewed Indigenous persons as inferior have kept them ‘locked out’ of education equality in this country ever since. In this moment a great opportunity to be responsive to the needs of Indigenous students was lost in order to maintain colonial control. As part of this project to maintain colonial authority, Indigenous clans were removed from their lands, often resulting in children attending schools on either missions or reserves (Grace & Platow 2017). Welch (1988, p. 209) describes the nature of education at this time as informal and predominantly oriented towards religion, whereby ‘hymn-singing, prayer recital, and the learning of catechism were common features of the curriculum’.

Price (2012) indicates that criticisms of these early forms of Western oriented education centre on a departure from highly personalised traditional Indigenous pedagogies that catered for the individual needs of the child towards policies that aligned with colonising agendas. Indigenous students were part of a new educational order, where those with educational authority were no longer a student’s family and community, but rather the state and church. According to extensive literature (see examples in Campbell & Proctor 2014; Grace & Platow 2017; Reynolds 2009), these ‘new learnings’ that were expected from authorities now in charge were often regarded by Indigenous students and their families as irrelevant, since they did not align with their knowledge, culture, heritage, values or customs.

While the impact of European arrival and expansion across the country had significant consequences, its effect in the Northern Territory was not to be experienced until much later. Despite the impact of expanding pastoral and mining industries, Duguid (1973) indicates that remoteness provided a ‘buffer zone’ for some Indigenous groups to stay on traditional lands, providing a means to negotiate interactions with colonial parties through more gradual processes. Formal education was not established until as late as the 1940s by missionaries, with government schools having their inception from 1950 onwards (Devlin, Disbray & Devlin 2017).

Following the 1967 Referendum, when Indigenous Australians were recognised for the first time as citizens (Grant 2017), education underwent another period of change. Kowal (2008) speaks of self-determination being heralded as 'the antidote to the racist assimilation era' (p. 338) and emerging to offer 'new hope' through a series of broad economic, social and cultural developments. The guiding tenets of self-determination recognised the importance of Indigenous Australians being able to shape their own future with greater autonomy than any time since European occupation, providing potential for new educational possibilities to emerge.

Following a period of 'self-determination', the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, established in 1989, still highlighted that 'Aborigines remain the most severely educationally disadvantaged group of people in Australia' (Australian Department of Education Employment and Training 1989, p. 9). Through the policy's recommendations, the extent to which self-determination had allowed Indigenous persons to be involved in educational decision-making was called into question. Advocating for greater Indigenous representation, the policy aimed to promote student learning that would develop cultural identities and understandings, including the utilisation of bilingual approaches through teaching and learning in a student's 'mother tongue' (Simpson, Caffery & Mcconvell 2009).

In the Northern Territory, the experiences of Yolngu educator, Nalwarri Ngurruwuttun (Fry 2014) highlight the coalescing of a range of goals in Indigenous education that sought to enable new educational trajectories for Indigenous students. In the mid-1970s, Ngurruwuttun was part of the drive towards increasing the number of Indigenous teachers. By the mid-1980s, 'Aboriginalisation' meant an increase in local Indigenous teachers at her school, Yirkalla Community Education Centre. In 1989 the school transitioned towards implementing a 'both ways' (Yunupingu 1999) curriculum that sought to facilitate bilingual instruction and consider more widely both Western and Indigenous perspectives. Bilingual education included 'home languages' that according to Devlin (2011) allow easy access to learning as students are familiar with the language of instruction. The author suggests that the benefits to students and the wider community were significant as:

> …school ceased to be an alien place and a lot of parents got involved for the first time in their children's schooling (Devlin 2011, p. 52).

The re-construction of school principal is once again apparent in the experiences of local educators like Ngurruwuttun when the reconciliation era of the 1990s sought to strengthen

relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and provided opportunities for Indigenous educators to be part of new mentoring programs. One such program saw Ngurruwuttun supported through her period of training and induction as a school leader, before becoming a principal in her own right at Yambirrpa School (Fry 2014).

Shifts in the Indigenous education landscape were beginning to emerge, however bilingual education programs found themselves under increasing pressure. Support and resources were gradually rolled back prior to 1998 when the 'Northern Territory Government passed legislation to axe these programs' (Nicholls 2005, p. 160) on the basis that English-only schools were purported to achieve better English literacy results than their bilingual counterparts. Nicholls (2005) claims that the Northern Territory government never offered any statistical data to support this argument, describing their actions as 'epistemic violence' (p. 165), 'a denial of human rights' (p. 166) and 'tantamount to linguistic genocide' (p. 167). Disbray (2014) describes the initial inclusion of local languages in 1973 as a move that allowed scope for identity formation and aligned with self-determination efforts through the development of biliterate and bicultural capacities. Removing this aspect of education, Devlin, Disbray and Devlin (2017) regard as directly excluding access to Indigenous culture and language that the authors claim is suggestive of steps back to an assimilationist era.

Indigenous education has undergone numerous changes over time, with the most significant impact being influenced by who controls the content that is taught and how it is delivered; these shifts continue to influence how current Indigenous education 'problems' are framed.

1.6 Representation problems in Indigenous education

Indigenous Australians account for approximately 3.3% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016b) which affords the status of a cultural minority. Invoking the scholarship of Ogbu (1992) it is recognised that other cultural groups in Australia also share cultural minority status, however many of these groups are voluntary minorities, quite distinct from Indigenous Australians who are regarded as an 'involuntary minority' because they do not have other homelands to return to if their experiences 'become unbearable' (Ogbu 1992, p. 291). Understanding this subtle but important distinction is important when outlining existing 'problems' in Indigenous education in Australia as research suggests that involuntary minorities may be sceptical of mainstream beliefs and strategies that have not always served them well. Rigney (2001) argues that Indigenous people in Australia are embedded in a system that has been responsible for their oppression

since no alternative options exist. Consequently, scholarship indicates that Indigenous students require curricula and pedagogical approaches that align with their cultural and linguistic repertoires (Guenther 2015a; Morrison et al. 2019; Rigney 2018).

Despite Indigenous education in Australia being forever impacted by colonisation, its 'discovery' as an 'educational problem', according to Gray and Beresford (2008), did not occur until the 1960s; a period when government reports began specifically considering educational disadvantage (Matthews 2012a). Since this time, discourse regarding Indigenous education in Australia has been overwhelmingly consumed by narratives of deficit and disadvantage (Bishop 2020; Guenther 2015c; Guenther & Bat 2013; Vass 2013). This trend is highlighted in the work of Gray and Beresford (2008, p. 204) who state 'Australia has the worst Indigenous educational outcomes of any comparable Western settler society'. Adding further weight to Indigenous educational identities, data from the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), based on standardised literacy and numeracy tests for Australian students, also indicates that Indigenous student achievement has consistently fallen below Commonwealth targets (Caccetta 2018; Unsworth 2013), a detail that has been reported on by successive *Closing the Gap* reports (Commonwealth of Australia 2018, 2019, 2020a).

According to Julie Matthews (2012b), reports of this nature on Indigenous education exacerbate disadvantage. She states:

> …the on-going and profound educational disadvantage of Indigenous Australians has remained the focus of numerous government reports and policy. The trouble with government interventions into Indigenous education is that universal mono-dimensional education solutions are often sought for complex multi-dimensional social issues that involve intergenerational disadvantage and trauma, ongoing socio-economic disadvantage, lack of sustainability of school reform and embedded racism, as well as top down policy governance models (p. 164).

Remote Indigenous communities are named consistently in reports and academic research as a site of significant educational disadvantage (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020; KPMG 2017; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Ockenden 2014; Unsworth 2013; Welch et al. 2015). Hall and Guenther (2019) take a further step in naming the Northern Territory 'the country's largest education problem' (p. 6) when considering academic results across Australia's highest frequency of remote Indigenous communities.

Drawing upon the work of Bacchi (2009) is useful when attempting to understand existing problems of remote education, as interrogation of its many dimensions highlights that 'the problem' is complex, contested and unresolved. For decades stakeholders and commentators have held different perspectives on how the problem is framed and the solutions that may address the situation. According to Indigenous educator accounts captured by Anderson et al. (2018), the underlying cause of this contestation should be understood through the different purposes that stakeholders attribute to education and the subsequent remedies that have been proposed.

For the DoE, the purpose of education aligns neatly with global logics that draw correlations between student academic achievement and becoming a productive member of society (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017). Educational goals, underpinned by what Yunkaporta (2019) refers to as the need to produce economically productive citizens, align with the tenets of what Becker (1994) described as Human Capital Theory. This orientation is evident in how the DoE has responded to a range of system-wide reviews and reports (see examples in Collins 1999; Ladwig & Sarra 2009; Masters 2011; Wilson 2014) which have been highly critical of how education in the Northern Territory has served the needs of Indigenous students. Since the first of these reviews in 1999, the solutions posed have followed a similar pattern. Consistently, all reviews have suggested that remote Indigenous education is 'in crisis', with the final review, overseen by Bruce Wilson (2014), providing a clear articulation of the terms of reference that currently determine both the purpose of education and how success is measured:

> This review has made a decision to focus on the English language skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system. Some people will find this a challenging position. The recommendation is based on the view that Indigenous children learn English in the way that other children learn English: through rigorous and relentless attention to the foundations of the language and the skills that support participation in a modern democracy and economy. The review does not support continued efforts to use biliteracy approaches, or to teach the content of the curriculum through first languages other than English (p.7).

According to the logic of the review, everyone learns English the same way regardless of whether they learn this as a first language or an additional language. Furthermore, the purpose of education is centred on the development of 'English language skills and knowledge that underpin success in the western education system' (Wilson 2014, p. 7). Questions may subsequently be raised about how such an approach appropriately considers the linguistic dimensions of remote Indigenous students who speak multiple languages and/or

dialects but may be less proficient in English? Are students regarded as a problem that must be corrected despite an otherwise apparent linguistic proficiency? Similarly, the review explicitly notes that it does not support bilingual approaches, indicating that its authors understand the problem according to Western orientated educational priorities, with solutions to match. However, according to educational aspirations offered by members of remote Indigenous communities, this form of education can be considered as both 'impoverished' (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods 2004) and 'incomplete' (Daniels-Mayes & Sinclair 2014) because important cultural and contextual dimensions of learning are absent (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016).

The review of the Northern Territory Department of Education conducted by Wilson (2014) is crucial to current departmental priorities because it was from recommendations made in the review that the current NT Strategy was developed. Existing reform efforts are contiguous with global and national standardisation movements, currently guiding the work of all DoE employees (Spillman 2017). Under the NT strategy, English literacy and numeracy is regarded as the antidote to the educational problem in remote Indigenous schools.

Recommendations made by Wilson (2014) that inform current DoE directions have been criticised by numerous commentators who frame 'the problem' differently (Guenther 2015b; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Spillman 2017). Counter views, while sharing a desire for improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students in remote settings, suggest that solutions offered by Wilson (2014) are flawed. Critics such as Spillman (2017) claim that current solutions are culturally biased, overly simplistic and are colonialist in their assumptions and implementation. For Spillman (2017), Wilson's recommendations reify Indigenous students according to deficit educational narratives that fail to respond to 'the local, relational, cultural and linguistic complexity' (Spillman 2017, p. 137). The scholarship of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) finds synergy with Spillman through their research that indicated that Western-only models of educational delivery fail to cohere with what remote communities see as the purpose of education.

Recent educational 'solutions' based primarily on Western framings of the problem and externally imagined solutions have been unsuccessful in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Criticism through reports has indicated a range of failings: educational deterioration from a low base (Collins 1999); low educational expectations at a system level (Ladwig & Sarra 2009); high student failure rates (Hughes & Hughes 2012);

rising educational disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Wilson 2014); and long standing remote Indigenous education policy failure (Fogarty, Lovell & Dodson 2015).

Evidence indicates strongly that while efforts to bring about educational reform have been significant, they have not worked. This suggests that the status quo must be disrupted in order to usher in a new paradigm and new possibilities in Indigenous education.

1.7 The gap in remote educational leadership support

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2014) advocates for contextualised, learning-centred, responsive educational leadership. Despite this call, no theoretically informed and empirically substantiated model of practice currently exists to support educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools, indicating a significant missed opportunity in remote educational transformation. Since the early 2000's, two leadership programs that sought to fill this void have either been abolished or regarded as insufficient for advancing student achievement. These programs are known as Dare to Lead and the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) Project.

The now defunct *Dare to Lead* program was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education and administered by the Principals Australia Institute (Winkler 2004). Day (2000) indicates that the program commenced in the year 2000 and was designed to work with school leaders to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. According to Winkler (2004), the program was based on a fee for service arrangement where 'the emphasis [was] always on enhancing school leadership in order to achieve practical change and outcome improvement' (p. 20). *Dare to Lead* was considered at the time to have relevance for remote schools as it stepped away from 'broad-brush approaches' and instead aimed to facilitate 'individualised, regionalised and tailored approaches' (Winkler 2006, p. 30); however Davis (2005) argues that it was also marred by factors that limited its impact. Criticisms of the program included the fact that involvement was voluntary in nature and was largely controlled and organised by non-Indigenous persons and co-ordinators, residualising the range of the program and the depth of Indigenous community perspectives that shaped what was offered (Davis, 2005). Deeper investigation of the programs themselves also indicates that the predominant focus was geared at a practitioner level, rather than providing the deep theoretical underpinnings that Ainscow (2005) suggests may transform leadership across multiple sites more sustainably. The *Dare to Lead* program is no longer funded under

the charter of the Principals Australia Institute (Principals Australia Institute 2018) and therefore ceases to exist as a support platform for contemporary remote school leaders.

In contrast to the general paucity of specific programs to support educational leaders in remote contexts, the Stronger Smarter Institute (SSI) was established by Chris Sarra in 2005 with the intention to support educators at all levels working in Indigenous Education (Stronger Smarter Institute 2018a). The institute's Stronger Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) project was developed following Chris Sarra's work as principal at Cherbourg State School. According to Sarra's accounts he 'made significant changes to the way that Aboriginal students experienced education' (Stronger Smarter Institute 2018a, viewed January 2019). Teaming with the Queensland University of Technology and Education Queensland, the Stronger Smarter Institute aimed to replicate Sarra's model for Indigenous students throughout the nation, yet broader adoption of his leadership approaches have experienced only limited success. Luke (2013) argues, through an extensive independent review of the SSLC project, that 'schools continue to work from deficit assumptions that preclude student enfranchisement, academic improvement and genuine community involvement and governance' (p. 406).

The abolition of *Dare to Lead* alongside concerns identified with the SSLC project mean that support provided to school leaders in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is limited to internal DoE processes. At present, there is no theoretical model of practice to support remote school leaders in light of the cultural and contextual dimensions of their students' lives. The absence of appropriate investment and support for remote school leaders highlights a void that this research seeks to address.

1.8 Possibility as theoretical frame

The lack of appropriate support for remote school leaders comes with significant educational risk. According to post-colonial theorising offered by Khalifa et al. (2014a), where hegemony in education is maintained through an adherence solely to the status quo as determined by dominant society, the risk for culturally minoritized students is that not only are their physical spaces controlled by others but so too are their psychological spaces. Here, the risk is that students' academic thinking is required to predominantly align with that of their colonial oppressors, diminishing the richness, fullness and value of education as their own identities and cultural capital are considered to lack legitimacy. If new possibilities are to emerge that

provide scope for educational transformation, Patrick and Moodie (2016) suggest that ineffective educational policies and practices must be reconsidered and reframed.

Early conceptualisations of educational possibility are captured in the work of John Dewey and are drawn upon in this thesis when examining remote educational leadership and its relationship to discourse, dilemma and contradiction. According to Deweyen thought (see examples in Dewey 1913, 1916, 1929) education can involve 'wonderful possibilities' (d'Agnese 2019, p. 693) that should not be narrowed down, but rather opened up in order to allow students to experience the full potential. Scope for educational possibility is captured by d'Agnese (2019), who draws on Dewey's concept of *oeuvre* to highlight how an education that is committed to 'openness and radical possibility' (p. 695) provides unique opportunities for inclusive approaches.

Possibilities that seek to be inclusive would discredit socially unjust practice that educates Indigenous children out of an Indigenous identity. Aligning with the work of Spivak (1988) and Said (1995), new imaginings that ensure that cultural identities are strengthened is dependent on the development of new possibilities that disrupt the normative, colonised status quo. In educational contexts, this is reliant on developing approaches that may reveal the full spectrum of a student's educational capacities. To this end, educational approaches as detailed in the collective works of scholars including Moll et al. (1992), Freire (1993), Khalifa et al. (2014b), Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) and Morrison et al. (2019) have significant utility in the consideration of new possibilities throughout this study. The authors claim that learning is most acute when students' unique funds of knowledge are accessed and scope is provided for their own research and investigation; that participation in learning is best achieved through dialogic, problem-centred and collaborative approaches; that educational processes are more important than final products or a reliance only on test results and that education must have capacity to dismantle old customs that reinscribe inequity so that new, culturally inclusive attitudes and approaches may be formed.

Throughout this thesis educational possibility is framed according to the aforementioned conceptualisations as they align with Dewey's concept of *oeuvre.* In each case, new possibilities are committed to what is currently 'unattained' (d'Agnese 2019). In the process of trying to unveil latent potential that may lead to new educational possibilities through the leadership practice of school principals in remote Indigenous schools, this research also draws on the scholarship of Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004) that strongly

advocates that new educational trajectories must not fall into the trap of simply replacing one form of essentialism with another. This research heeds the astute advice of Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004) and is committed to educational possibilities that align with Deweyen thought as underpinned by socially just imperatives.

1.9 Researcher positioning

Berger (2015) argues that researcher positioning is of paramount importance as personal and professional factors can impact the process and outcomes of qualitative research. In order to undertake research according to the ethical standards that Berger (2015) indicates are imperative, a range of researcher experiences that have shaped the lenses through which this study has been conducted need to be indicated. Experiences include 24 years in professional education roles, working across private and public sectors, city and remote contexts and with co-educational and single sex cohorts. Responsibilities have included teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary level, middle manager and remote school principal roles.

Drawing on what Tripp (1994) terms ‘critical incidents’ I now outline selected incidents that occurred when working as a school principal in one or other of three remote schools in the Northern Territory. The first incident involved the relative ease with which my first full-time role as an educator was gained despite my obvious inexperience. At the age of twenty-two, after a fifteen-minute phone interview, I was offered a remote school principal role at Minyerri School, Northern Territory. The role involved responsibility for seventy-two students, two full-time teachers, two assistant teachers, a cleaner and a grounds person. The professional remit also included overseeing the development of learning programs, maintenance of school buildings, school vehicles, government housing, school finances and the employment of new staff. Having spent my entire life in the city, arriving in a community designated as ‘very remote’ (according to Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020, classifications) certainly took me beyond the world as I had known it.

Honoured by the responsibility bestowed upon me, I also questioned how an inexperienced teacher could be charged with such significant responsibilities at the beginning of their career. I couldn’t help but think that this would never occur in mainstream city schools in other parts of Australia. Over time it became evident that the Northern Territory Department of Education’s initial decision to appoint a teaching couple (myself as school principal and my wife Katrina as a teacher) was primarily dictated by available housing as there was only one ‘silver bullet’ caravan for accommodation available in the community. Pragmatism was

evidently a key factor in my initial appointment as a principal; however questions can rightly be asked about the extent to which the needs of the students were considered in this process.

After years of service in both small remote schools and larger community education centres, a pattern of employment in Indigenous communities became evident. Invariably, new teachers were white, middle-class, monolingual in their approach to education, often inexperienced and travelling from city environments to a remote locality for the first time in their lives. Enthusiasm from new staff was generally in abundance but could often be described as what Charles (2017) calls an 'entrepreneurial adventure' as a new role and income was tied to the opportunity to be involved in something 'exotic'. Despite their eagerness, the vast majority of new, non-local teachers were inadequately equipped to deal with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students they were to teach. On many occasions they were also unsure of how to 'make space' (Davids & Waghid 2016, p. 93) for learning approaches that aligned with students' needs. Disconnects of this nature led to an array of challenges including significant staff turnover, students having to adapt regularly to new teachers and their 'ways of doing things', plus difficulties for new staff settling into a cultural context that was foreign to their previous experiences. Educators who were new to teaching 'out bush' grappled with the concept of working with students who spoke English as an additional language, dealing with classroom behaviour in a culturally respectful and appropriate manner and, when not teaching, often found it challenging to cope with living in relative isolation.

The notion that 'Indigenous Australia is not culturally uniform' (p. 6) as found in the research of Stewart and Warn (2017) was experienced first-hand across the three schools and communities in which I worked as a school principal in the Northern Territory (Minyerri, Ramingining and Bulla Camp). While each community shared certain commonalities, cultural and linguistic diversity was also apparent according to unique histories, geographic locations and the total population of the community itself. Consideration of context was critical in each community because successful educational outcomes were best achieved by tailoring school experiences, rather than expecting all students to follow a prescriptive, homogenous path. Attempts were made to ensure students' cultural identities were mirrored in their school environment, yet attending authentically to student needs often resulted in feeling I was not fully adhering to my professional obligations as a school leader.

As a school principal I felt constantly torn between the tensions of departmental and community expectations. In simple terms, both groups wanted the best educational outcomes for the students, but their goals were incongruent and neither group talked to the other at sufficient length for new understandings to emerge. Drawing on the scholarship of Eacott (2018) I was witnessing the existence of parallel monologues where everyone was talking but not with each other. The result was incessant educational leadership confusion at the ground level as demands were often at odds with one other.

I understand that my prior experiences, worldview and institutional representations shape perspectives and interpretations offered throughout this study. In embarking upon this research journey, I considered often the critical advice found in the work of Cazden and Luke (2019):

> No matter how "culture fair", sensitive and "appropriate" you think your research design is, it remains an artefact of Eurocentric social science, a particular epistemic and sociocultural filter, with all the historical baggage and risk of cultural appropriation, exploitation, and objectification of Indigenous peoples, communities and knowledges (p. 249).

Researcher responsibilities captured in these words, and others that hold a similar sentiment, have been visited and re-visited on many occasions as I recognise the ethical obligation to act with care and caution in a research project of this nature. I do not presume to speak for Indigenous persons, yet I actively align with Indigenous advocacy for self-determination and view culturally responsive approaches to education as having significant potential in the achievement of this goal.

1.10 Research limitations

The scope of the research includes schools that aligned with the definition of 'remote Indigenous schools' within the Northern Territory and excludes schools that did not. Similarly, only perspectives of school leaders in the role of principal in remote Indigenous schools within the Northern Territory are examined, while persons whose professional responsibilities are conducted beyond this framing have been excluded. Furthermore, student outcomes, school funding, school policy, educational infrastructure and resourcing have all been excluded from this research in order to concentrate the focus on educational leadership practice.

The rationale underpinning these decisions was based on establishing research parameters that would best facilitate answering the research question and accessing the voices and lived realities of school principals who have leadership responsibilities in the contexts in which further knowledge and understanding was sought. Privileging data collected from leaders in remote Indigenous schools was considered imperative to the development of the research findings.

The findings from this research while centring on leadership practice in remote Indigenous schools are not exhaustive and instead are limited to the schools and principals involved. As schools involved in the research did not include every region of the Northern Territory, the research represents only a sample of the diversity and scope of remote Indigenous contexts within the DoE jurisdiction. In light of these limitations, claims made are specific to the respondents and schools involved in the study with no claim of generalisability being sought.

1.11 Thesis structure

The following synopsis of each chapter provides an overview of how this thesis is organised. It seeks to translate the process of research into a coherent articulation of the problem, outlining the processes used to answer the guiding question of the study and ultimately elucidating how new knowledge and leadership tools have emerged through the research findings. The chapter overviews provide details about the literature, theoretical framework, methodology and methods utilised throughout all stages of the research.

Chapter two forms a review of literature that examines scholarship at the frontier of evolving educational fields and comprises three main sections: Culturally responsive practice and school leadership; school leadership theory and global discourse; and understanding remote educational environments. The first of these sections utilises national and global literature on culturally responsive practice to highlight a hopeful strategy upon which new leadership approaches can be conceptualised for specific use in remote Indigenous educational contexts. For the school principal, leadership practice that respects the tenets of cultural responsivity facilitates movement beyond orientations that have historically beset Indigenous communities through asymmetrical balances of power. Rather, leadership practice attuned to cultural and contextual factors allows for shared approaches that recognise efficacy in a plurality of worldviews and seeks to honour these worldviews in localised schooling. Next, research in the area of educational leadership is examined, highlighting a link that is consistently made between leadership practice and student learning. Connections between leader practice and

learning is imperative to educational transformation in remote Indigenous schools, indicating that deeper understandings of the remote school leader's practice is critical. The final section describes remote Indigenous educational settings from various stakeholder perspectives, foregrounding existing DoE initiatives for remote Indigenous schools and outlining the specific professional responsibilities of remote school principals as identified in role descriptions and the NT Strategy. Understanding how stakeholders view the remote educational landscape according to varying aspirations and agendas highlights the complexity that underpins a school leader's role and is imperative when conceptualising new practice possibilities.

The methodology and methods employed in this research are detailed throughout chapter three. Initially, the selection of an ethnographically informed methodology is articulated, drawing upon its utility in capturing the status quo of leadership practice in remote Indigenous schools and then applying this knowledge for the generation of new support tools. In order to accomplish this, the chapter outlines how the research design, data collection and data analysis were purposefully planned and executed to arrive at research findings that were appropriately informed by a combination of empirical fieldwork and theoretical rigour. Procedural and contextual details that underpin the research are then provided, foregrounding who was involved in the study, how participants were recruited and how consent for their involvement was obtained. Finally, this chapter details a range of reflexive research practices that were utilised throughout the study to navigate a variety of practical and philosophical challenges to ultimately generate new leadership practice possibilities that may empower remote school principals in the enactment of their roles.

Contextual elements of the study are provided throughout chapter four, the first of four chapters dedicated to data analysis. Strategic priorities of the DoE are outlined through principal role descriptions and annual school improvement plans (SIPs) as these documents shape expectations of school leaders in Northern Territory schools. Principals and the schools involved in the study are then introduced through the use of portraits, ensuring the contextual dimensions of each leader's practice can be understood in relation to specific school factors including student enrolment, staffing, historical student achievement data, geographical factors and additional details that are unique to individual sites. Beyond the provision of contextual details, information pertaining to the relative experience and the philosophical underpinnings that guide each principal's leadership practice is also provided. This chapter also analyses how the work of remote school principals in the study is enacted amidst an

educational environment where aspects of the NT Strategy are misaligned with contemporary scholarship in the area of Indigenous education.

Chapter five provides an analysis of how leaders in remote Indigenous schools enact their roles in relation to curriculum and pedagogy. Initially this involves locating the specific curriculum and pedagogical priorities of both the DoE and remote Indigenous communities. Data that highlights existing DoE priorities was located through analyses of SIPs, annual performance reports, interviews with school principals and on-site observations. To determine the educational priorities of remote Indigenous communities, extensive research conducted in these specific contexts by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) was reviewed in relation to this study. From this platform, the practice of educational leaders was analysed to determine what priorities leaders are most responsive to. This chapter subsequently presents two models of leadership practice that provide strong possibilities for connecting curriculum and pedagogy to students' lifeworlds with detail that provides a unique contribution to new knowledge.

School leaders have a responsibility to be a leader of learning as outlined through their professional remit. Chapter six analyses this leadership responsibility through the practice orientations of principals in relation to staff professional learning. Annual SIPs, annual school reports and the accounts of remote school principals involved in the study were examined to determine professional learning priorities. This revealed the extent to which school principals are responsive to both the DoE and their specific educational contexts. Evident in the data were degrees of variation in principal behaviour in the area of professional learning, with two practices displaying significant culturally responsive potential. Following the provision of specific examples, a synthesis of the research participants' leadership practice relating to professional learning is provided, with connections made to culturally responsive frameworks and wider literature in the areas of leadership and remote Indigenous education. To conclude the chapter, the emergent possibilities for leaders to utilise professional learning to develop culturally responsive capacities in their staff is outlined through theory building that extends beyond the boundaries of existing scholarship.

Analyses of data in the area of community engagement is presented throughout chapter seven. Consideration is initially given to remote school leaders' relational priorities as determined through annual SIPs, annual performance reports and subsequent interviews. Priorities as determined through analysis are then explored to understand how the practice of

remote school leaders is translated ‘on the ground’ and what educational imperatives they are most responsive to. Practices most sympathetic to utilising community engagement in accordance with local aspirations and the lifeworlds of students are outlined. A subsequent summary of all analysed data is provided to illuminate how school-community relations are impacted by various stakeholders in remote education. Finally, this chapter suggests that while much scholarship in the areas of cultural responsivity and remote Indigenous education have advocated for strong school and community connections, they have often failed to indicate how this might be achieved − an area of significant contribution that is addressed in this study through the practice of remote school leaders.

Chapter eight provides a meta-analysis of all data that led to the establishment of the four key findings. These findings, when combined with a range of examples of educational leadership practice that use nuanced forms of cultural responsivity, provide answers to the guiding research question. Upon these new understandings two new tools are developed to support leaders of remote Indigenous schools. These tools comprise a continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility and a re-framed conceptualisation of what the role of a remote Indigenous school leader entails.

The concluding chapter considers and summarises all aspects of the study and highlights the relationship between methodology and theory that have led to the main thesis. The implications of the study are outlined with specific reference to remote school leaders, the DoE, remote Indigenous students and the communities in which they live. Areas that require further research in remote school leadership are also considered as a means of further advancing the field.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

> School leadership is paramount in fostering student engagement and improving educational outcomes as it impacts upon curriculum and pedagogic practices within the school, teachers' professional learning, cultural safely (sic), and respect for cultural identity and knowledges through language and cultural programmes and engagement with community (Trimmer, Dixon & Guenther 2019, p. 2).

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to examine scholarship at the nexus of cultural responsivity, educational leadership and remote Indigenous schooling. To achieve this, the theoretical edge of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is explicated. Contemporary theorising of CRSL in United States educational contexts shows significant potential to connect whole school sites to the cultural and contextual dimensions of students' lives. In Australia, CRP research has sought to advance pedagogical theorisation to support educators by building on the rich and diverse funds of knowledge and cultural capital that Indigenous students possess. CRSL and CRP, while both offering significant scope for this research are under-theorised and under-researched, particularly in remote Indigenous contexts across Australia. This represents a research gap that is outlined throughout the first section of the review.

The thesis recognises that it is persons in leadership positions who provide significant scope for transforming student educational outcomes (Hallinger 2011b; Khalifa 2018; Leithwood et al. 2004; Pont 2008). Using leadership categorisations developed by Gunter (2001), educational leadership literature is examined to better understand how practice expectations are framed by educational systems, by Indigenous communities and cultural minorities and finally by individuals whose responsibility it is to provide leadership at school sites. Utilising extensive national and global studies, educational leadership approaches that are considered to limit connections between learning and students' lives and those that are deemed to offer authentic hope and possibility are outlined.

The third section of the literature review honours the call made by Gillies (2013) that 'any meaningful study of leadership would require to address the topic in its relational, political, cultural and social specificities' (p. 35). Consequently, literature that specifically focuses on remote Indigenous education contexts is prioritised in order to make sense of arguments that impact the work of school leaders. Remote Indigenous contexts are prosecuted according to

contextual descriptions offered by multiple educational stakeholders before outlining specific details that pertain to the educational aspirations of remote Indigenous community members, departmental initiatives that are in the early stages of adoption and the professional responsibilities expected of principals in remote Indigenous schools.

2.2 The theoretical edge of cultural responsivity

In its present incarnations, culturally responsivity is often attributed to moves first established by Ladson-Billings (1995) from the United States, who drew from critical race theory to develop pedagogies to disrupt the systemic disadvantage experienced by numerous culturally and linguistically diverse students (Pirbhai-Illich, Pete & Martin 2017). The scholarship of Ladson-Billings (1995) highlighted that when a student's education aligns with their cultural identity, it positively impacts their chances of academic success. Indigenous and non-Indigenous educationalists have drawn from these ideas to suggest that cultural responsivity shows strong potential for First Nations students in settler colonial countries. Possibilities have specifically been found in the scope of cultural responsivity to improve student achievement (Rahman 2010), alleviate degrees of educational disadvantage (Craven, Yeung & Han 2014), develop student potential through strengths-based approaches (Lewthwaite et al. 2015), increase congruence between home and school environments (Villegas & Lucas 2002) and enhance student's self-concept, motivation and engagement (Munns, Martin & Craven 2006).

Since the inception of cultural responsivity, the majority of research has focused on educator pedagogy. In Australia, research that extends to the area of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) does not currently exist and therefore represents a significant theoretical gap. Internationally, the research of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018), hereafter referred to collectively as the 'authors of CRSL', represents the theoretical edge of scholarship in the area of CRSL, with its central guiding tenets now detailed.

2.2.1 Culturally responsive school leadership

Theorisation of cultural responsivity in school leadership practice is currently in its infancy (Khalifa 2018). Early forays into alternative or nuanced modes of leadership that considered Indigenous culture can be seen in the work of Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002). The work of these scholars highlighted that Western leadership is often focused on individuals who work to influence others, whereby Indigenous leadership (often referred to in writings as 'native') is more commonly regarded as a collective process that takes place 'within a particular cultural and community context' (p. 134).

The scholarship of Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002, p. 160) considered multiple worldviews with their research indicating that:

> …culturally grounded community practice of educational leadership is founded on the following guiding principles: 1) collective action takes precedence over the individual; however, both are valued; 2) revitalizing and developing indigenous ways of knowing (to include spiritual, language and cultural traditions) is an obligation and responsibility of the community; and 3) reciprocity binds networks of individuals, communities, and institutions.

These findings share commonalities with the work of Johnson (2007, p. 54) who suggested that culturally responsive leadership has as a central goal to:

> …support academic achievement, work to affirm students' home cultures, empower parents in culturally and economically diverse neighbourhoods, and to act as social activists who advocate for societal change to make their communities 'a better place to live'.

The research of these aforementioned scholars is important as they have impacted subsequent theorising in the field, with the most recent being by the authors of CRSL. Contemporary works from these academics stem from social justice, anti-racist, community-based and culturally-relevant leadership (Khalifa 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Khalifa et al. 2014b). Studies conducted by authors of CRSL have predominantly centred on educational leadership within an urban alternative high school in Michigan, USA, where the principal sought to provide educational leadership that was equitable for the schools' culturally diverse and often minoritized student population. In each case, CRSL was infused through a range of other leadership orientations.

Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) propose that if the work of teachers in classrooms is most successful when aligned with students' cultural and social needs then the same expectation should be required of school leaders as they impact the 'entire school culture and climate' (p.

1273). Furthermore, the sphere of influence of leaders is expansive, as it includes critical elements of schooling including 'curriculum, policy, pedagogy, and student achievement' (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016, p. 1276).

2.2.2 Culturally responsive school leadership behaviours

The authors of CRSL identify four major leadership practice behaviours that emerged through their research (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016, pp. 1283-1284), namely practice that:

- Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviours
- Develops culturally responsive teachers
- Promotes culturally responsive / inclusive school environment
- Engages students, parents and Indigenous contexts

According to the first leadership practice behaviour, educational leaders are encouraged to employ critical self-reflective practice as a means of examining 'biases, assumptions, and values that stem from their cultural backgrounds' (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016, p. 1285). The authors of CRSL suggest that such processes must take place before any leadership activity occurs. This practice orientation can be seen as emerging from the understanding that 'you cannot change the outer world unless you begin by changing yourself' (Dalal 2002, p. 29). Upon this basis, self-reflexivity is proposed as an assurance that leaders are critically conscious, understanding that they are 'cultural beings' (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016, p. 1285) and as such are influenced in their work by their own identities and those of others. Understanding both one's own cultural subjectivities and the cultural identity of the learning community provides a platform from which transformational and socially just leadership can develop.

Aligning with the research of Villegas and Lucas (2007), the culturally responsive school leader is encouraged to prioritise instructional contexts that adapt and respond to student needs. The development of teachers who can apply culturally responsive pedagogy and curriculum forms the second behavioural theme of CRSL. According to Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), leaders' work must include the ongoing mentoring of staff to ensure that instruction and curricula privilege students' cultural norms. This call from the authors of CRSL shares synergy with the work of Lindsey, Roberts and Jones (2004, p. 44) who stated:

> …culturally proficient educational leaders take responsibility for helping each student understand himself or herself as a unique, competent, and valued member of a diverse cultural community rather than a deprived minority in a dominant culture.

As principals are considered to have a major impact on whole school sites (Leithwood et al. 2004), adhering to the third underpinning tenet of CRSL involves the promotion of a welcoming and inclusive educational environment. Similar notions are captured in the collective scholarship of MacGill (2014) and Johnson (2007) who advocate for educational inclusivity through an 'ethics of care', whereby the learning community sees their own lifeworlds actively represented at the school. According to Price (2015), inclusive school practices allow students, parents and other community members to feel valued and safe.

The final behavioural theme of CRSL involves the engagement of students, parents and Indigenous contexts through the creation of 'authentic overlapping school–community spaces' (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016, p. 1290). Leaders are required according to this orientation to move beyond traditional school-centric educational prioritisation in favour of being community-centric so that the practices and functions of the school are coterminous with local aspirations (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa et al. 2014a; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). This expands the responsibility of school leaders to also be community leaders, where they seek to be inclusionary beyond the school gate in order to advocate for and with the community on both educational and non-educational matters (Khalifa 2012).

Leadership established upon the CRSL behavioural tenets requires exemplary role modelling in all school processes and interactions. This includes prioritising the combination of relational and educative aspects of a leader's role as this enables a shared 'educative vision' (Smyth 1989) to be realised. Such an approach values the students' cultural capital and ensures that student voice is heard through aligning the school's directionality with students' identities, culture and aspirations (Bogotch 2002).

Khalifa (2018) claims that to be a culturally responsive leader requires movement beyond traditional forms of educational leadership that are linked to 'settler colonial forms of administration' (p. 56). Drawing on the work of Castagno (2014) and Phuntsog (1999), the form of leadership that is sought is one that extends past a 'culture of nice' and, instead, authentically values the practices and culture of students, ensuring that their own worldviews are represented and celebrated.

The culturally responsive school leader exhibits specific, nuanced behaviours that cannot simply be 'added on'. Rather, all facets of their daily leadership work must be genuinely embedded in approaches that positively impact student learning, empower all school staff to

operate according to the students' cultural needs and are guided by localised educational aspirations (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

The authors of CRSL indicate that understanding local educational aspirations requires a commitment to work relationally across pedagogical, curricula and professional learning platforms. As these school functions are expansive, the use of equity audits is advocated as a mechanism that allows all stakeholders to assess how inclusive local school practices are and where further development is required. Though a commitment to processes of this nature, the school and the community develop shared understandings of potentially oppressive structures and can establish courses of action to move towards more social just forms of education (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

2.2.3 Culturally responsive pedagogy

In Australia the theoretical edge in culturally responsive pedagogies is found in the research of Morrison et al. (2019). Their scholarship has built on national and international studies including the works of Ladson-Billings (1995), Gay (2000), Bishop (2007), Castagno and Brayboy (2008), Sleeter (2011b), Krakouer (2015), Perso and Hayward (2015) and others, to consider how pedagogical practice can be mobilised to meaningfully connect learning to students' lives.

Underpinning the review is the understanding that after more than a decade of *Closing the Gap* initiatives, educational disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australia have not abated (Morrison et al. 2019, p. 9). Culturally responsive pedagogies are therefore considered across metropolitan and regional contexts in Australia for their educational potential to provide 'a way forward for educators, schools and education systems' (p. 57). The nature of this potential is captured in the words of Daniels-Mayes (2016, p. 54) who claims:

> CRP does for marginalised and minoritised students what traditional pedagogies do for middle-class European Australians. That is, CRP filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through student cultural frames of reference, making them more personally meaningful and easier to master.

CRPs potential is positioned amidst educational discourse and action that is often guided by 'best practice'. Constructs of this nature are well intentioned but may be better understood as 'best practice for the majority' and may not always consider the best interests of those who do not readily identify as part of the cultural mainstream. Lingard (2018b) proffers that

education has often been established upon the ‘knowledge of the most powerful’ (p. 56), thereby disconnecting ‘best practice’ from the lives and experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Krakouer 2015; Perso & Hayward 2015). In Australian educational contexts, Rigney (2016) asserts that pedagogy and curriculum did not begin with European arrival. Rather, student-centred approaches that considered deeply the lifeworlds of young Indigenous children had been in existence for millennia in a range of differing forms (Rigney 2018). Yunkaporta (2009c) refers to this as ‘ancestrally perfected ways of learning’ (p. 8), suggesting that while schooling in its current form was not always apparent, education has always been an important function of Indigenous lives in Australia.

To enable the benefits that CRP seeks to provide, earlier scholarship in Australian contexts by Krakouer (2015) and Perso and Hayward (2015) indicate that educators must recognise the diversity that exists between and within cultural groups, as this ensures that those who have experience working with one group do not automatically make assumptions about another. Perso and Hayward (2015) found that the culturally responsive educator is always ‘prepared to learn’ (p. xxi) as this is considered the only way to truly honour the cultural and contextual needs of each student. These findings align with international scholarship by Sleeter (2012) who suggests that it is imperative to move beyond single idealisations of ‘best practice’ so that more plural frames of reference can encompass multiple cultures and worldviews, making student learning contextually and culturally meaningful.

Through research and a subsequent review of literature, Morrison et al. (2019) identified five critical elements that are imperative for an educator’s pedagogical approach to be considered culturally responsive:

- High intellectual challenge
- Strongly connected to student lifeworlds
- Recognition of cultural difference as a positive asset
- Critical thinking, activist orientated
- Performing learning and/or multi-model literacies

In making their claims about what constitutes CRP, the authors draw attention to a distinct link made between cultural competence and cultural responsivity; terms that are often interchangeably misused. Distinctions include the fact that cultural competence does not address structural, institutional or interpersonal inequalities of a socio-political nature; training to be ‘competent’ can result in checklists that ‘essentialise’ and ‘other’, often failing

to recognise the cultural diversity that exists by considering a cultural group to be homogenous. Other distinctions are: that cultural competence can be limiting when presuming to 'know a culture' through the development of technical expertise, rather than through the lived experience of being embedded within the culture itself, and cultural competence has tendencies towards privileging the knowledge of the provider, as opposed to recognising and acting upon multiple worldviews (Morrison et al. 2019).

To illustrate the point made by Morrison et al. (2019), Daniels-Mayes and Sinclair (2014, p. 10) provide details about the link between these two concepts:

> …the link between cultural competence and responsiveness is that the latter is the delivered outcome of cultural competence. That is, an individual or organisation needs to possess cultural competence to be able to enact or respond.

The *Aboriginal cultural standards framework* (Western Australian Department of Education 2015, p. 7) is also useful in understanding both the relationship and distinction between cultural competence and cultural responsivity. As outlined in figure 2, the framework indicates that cultural competence has an educator positioned as 'capable' whereas cultural responsiveness has an educator positioned as proficient.



Figure 2**. Cultural standards continuum**

When looking at specific indicators utilised within the framework, the pedagogical capacities of a culturally responsive educator cannot simply 'be acquired'. Proficiency to teach according to students' cultural and linguistic repertoires requires time, effort, energy and ongoing support.

As indicated throughout the contemporary scholarship of Morrison et al. (2019), CRP offers theoretical and practical scope for the advancement of new educational possibilities, however it is not devoid of challenges.

2.2.4 The limitations of cultural responsivity

For all the benefits that cultural responsivity is deemed to afford students from cultural minorities, theorising is still in a state of emergence, limiting the conclusiveness to which claims can be made about its effect.

Drawing on the work of Sleeter (2011a), it is suggested that much contemporary research into cultural responsivity and its educational effect has been developed through 'case studies, program descriptions and anecdotes' (p. 13). The author indicates that while these studies have utility in highlighting hopeful possibilities, a higher volume of quantitative research data is required to provide more substantiated credibility to cultural responsivity as an educational change mechanism.

Morrison et al. (2019) make similar claims, indicating that while international research provides qualitative support for culturally responsive approaches, in an Australian context 'there are few published qualitative studies that report on the impact of CRP on the schooling experiences of Aboriginal students' (Morrison et al. 2019, p. 46). The authors posit that reasons for limited data may derive from how educational success is determined. At present, educational success in Australia is framed primarily through just one criterion – academic outcomes. In this regard, Morrison et al. (2019, p. 45) outline that other educational criteria such as engagement with learning, identity formation, cultural safety and relationship development are equally valid, yet can be challenging to statistically quantify.

2.2.5 Theoretical framework

The scholarship of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), Khalifa (2018) and Morrison et al. (2019) foregrounded in this literature review represents the theoretical edge in CRSL and CRP and is therefore utilised as the theoretical framework of the study. Notably the use of 'inclusive practices' by the authors of CRSL and 'lifeworld' by Morrison et al. (2019) both refer to educational experiences that are considerate of a student's lived realities according to prior experiences and their unique funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992). Consequently, these terms are used interchangeably throughout the thesis. Furthermore, community-centred approaches to leadership, underpinned by the best interests of the community (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), have been privileged because extensive literature indicates this as an area of latent potential for new educational possibilities (Anderson et al. 2018; Guenther 2013, 2015a; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Huijser et al. 2015; Sarra

et al. 2018). An outline of the theoretical framework utilised by this research is provided in figure 3.

CRSL (Khalifa et al. 2016, Khalifa 2018)	CRP in Schools (Morrison et al. 2019)
1. Critically self-reflects on leadership 2. Develops culturally responsive teachers 3. Engages student, parents and Indigenous contexts 4. Promotes inclusive school environment	1. High intellectual challenge 2. Strongly connected to lifeworld 3. Recognition of culture as an asset 4. Critical thinking, activist orientated 5. Performs learning and / or multi-model literacies

Figure 3. Theoretical frameworks of cultural responsivity

Throughout the data analysis chapters, threads from critical theory, post-colonialism and post-structuralism were also utilised to understand and explain whose interests are being served in existing remote Indigenous school contexts through a leader's practice. These theoretical conceptualisations are beneficial as they provide a means of recognising how ideological forces and existing structures work to include some knowledge and exclude others; factors that are of significant consequence when seeking to understand leadership possibilities that may contribute to the transformation of remote Indigenous schooling.

2.3 School leadership theory: global discourse

Literature in the general field of leadership indicates its efficacy to influence the achievement of desired outcomes (Bennis 2007; Kean et al. 2011; Maxwell 2007; Rath & Conchie 2008). Despite evident utility, Willink and Babin (2018) claim that leadership also involves dichotomies of practice where balancing opposing forces, such as risk and reward, rights and responsibility, clarity and complexity, significantly impacts how practice is enacted. Similar dichotomies are also found between notions of leaders as 'cutting-edge, ground-breaking, ahead of their time, and visionary' (Eacott 2018, p. 101), and needing to adhere to institutional or organisational logics and agendas (Eacott 2018).

In response to these understandings, leadership theory has relied heavily on two predominant approaches that have sought to mobilise practice that can lead to the achievement of desired outcomes. These approaches include leadership that is centred on being either hierarchical or heterarchical. In recent decades, theorisation of the latter approach has developed momentum as scholars such as Drath et al. (2008) have been critical of leadership approaches that they suggest are limited by having single points of origin and reception. In making this claim, Drath et al. (2008) offer an alternative leadership conceptualisation known as the DAC framework that provides opportunities for goals and visions to be developed more collectively. The framework foregrounds the need for leaders to be guided in their practice by the constructs of direction (D), alignment (A) and commitment (C) as determined by the specific stakeholder group, thereby providing scope for plural intelligences to be harnessed.

McChrystal, Eggers and Mangone (2018) concur with the need to move beyond structures that afford authority predominantly to the leader at the top of a hierarchy and relegate followers to subordinate positions. The authors indicate that where systems of operation involve complex demands, the need for all stakeholders to interact and influence one another is critical so that visions can be co-produced and co-enacted. Approaches such as those advocated by Drath et al. (2008) and McChrystal, Eggers and Mangone (2018) represent unique leadership practice possibilities for contexts that have not responded well to traditional, top-down methods.

Academic and grey literature that seeks to activate and respond to multiple stakeholder understandings and capacities through heterarchical approaches, includes strong consensus regarding the central underpinnings of this form of leadership. Examined scholarship (see examples in Clarke & Wildy 2011; Cranston 2013; Drath et al. 2008; Eacott 2018; Giles 2018; Gillies 2013; McChrystal, Eggers & Mangone 2018; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Osborn, Hunt & Jauch 2002; Rath & Conchie 2008; Stacey & Mowles 2015; Zaccaro & Klimoski 2001) indicated that leaders who seek to be inclusive must prioritise relationship building that steps beyond us/them binaries and towards and/both orientations so that trust, compassion, stability and hope are established across the wider stakeholder group; all stakeholders must be committed to a learning journey so that construction and re-construction of understandings is afforded through ongoing feedback loops; and local conditions and contextual factors must be prioritised at all times.

Benefits of leadership espoused in general leadership literature is also found in relation to education. Barber, Whelan and Clark (2010) describe the importance of school leadership succinctly when claiming 'you can't improve schools without leaders' (p. 5). Pont (2008, p. 9) also shares this sentiment when stating:

> School leadership…plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate…effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.

School leadership can involve a range of roles and responsibilities according to specific factors such as school size, location, demographic and grade ranges (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2020b). At the principal level, Leithwood et al. (2004) claim that a significant and broad influence is apparent. Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) agree, stating that principals exert influence across whole school environments, affording capacity to instigate possible solutions to localised educational problems (Khalifa 2018).

Although educational leadership can be a point of leverage for reform, Niesche (2013) claims that a leader's practice is also impacted by plural discourses that seek to guide their performativity according to agendas that may originate beyond the local environment. Ball and Maroy (2009) suggest that this professional reality forms one of the most critical functions of the educational leader who needs to mediate external regulations that are likely to influence local education priorities. According to Gillies (2013), external demands require that leaders mobilise their agency and subjectivity to determine what educational priorities are included, silenced, privileged or rejected at their specific sites. Decision making in these moments is imbued with significant responsibility as scholars including Hayes et al. (2004), Fullan (1992) and Ball (2016) consistently view educational leadership as the site where students' academic and social outcomes can be improved, where school improvement can be brought 'into sharp focus' and where new possibilities can emerge through educational re-culturing.

New possibilities and educational reform have long been approached through what Leithwood et al. (2004) refer to as adjectival forms of leadership. The authors provide a number of examples including participative, instructional, moral, transformational, strategic and democratic leadership that have all been promoted as enabling educational reform according to particular goals. Of all these leadership forms, instructional leadership is regarded as having the greatest effect, a claim supported across the literature by Leithwood et al. (2004), Hattie (2009), Barber, Whelan and Clark (2010) and Hallinger (2011a). Meta-

analyses conducted by Hattie (2009) outline a range of specific practice dimensions of instructional leadership that are regarded to have the greatest impact on student outcomes. These practices include working with teachers to evaluate their teaching and the curriculum, promoting teacher participation in learning and development, ensuring that school resourcing matches teaching priorities, establishing clear goals and expectations and shielding teachers from external pressures that may impact their core responsibilities (pp. 83-84). Hallinger (2011a) also applied a meta-analysis to research that he termed 'leadership for learning' and found that instructional leadership had a mean effect size that was more effective than 'other leadership' approaches (p. 131).

Instructional leadership, for all it is deemed to afford cannot, according to Leithwood et al. (2004, p. 10) be the only leadership orientation of the educational leader. The authors state:

> We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to chose [sic] from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one "ideal" set of practices.

Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2004) concur with this notion when claiming that the work of leaders involves plural dimensions and is imbricated across multiple fields, demanding a range of leadership approaches that can be modulated according to specific student learning needs. Khalifa et al. (2014a) make a similar argument when applying a culturally responsive leadership lens, suggesting that while instructional leadership is critical, improvement in academic success must also include the application of transformational, social justice, anti-racist and community-based practices.

Utilising a range of leadership modalities allows educational leaders to respond to complex contextual factors. Educational environments that are considered complex are described by Guenther and Osborne (2018b) as non-linear in nature and may involve circumstances where educational purposes and visions are contested. Dolan (2018) claims that educational spheres that are considered paradoxical and/or contested, demand dynamic forms of leadership to mediate multiple educational accountabilities that may be misaligned. Leadership understandings provided by a range of scholars foreshadow the importance of recognising that leadership cannot simply be defined as a decontextualized set of ingredients. Rather, leadership practice involves approaches that must respond to dynamic forces that are linked to contextual factors. As Cranston and Ehrich (2008, p. 18) suggest:

> Leadership is a not a concept to be considered simplistically nor in isolation – it is not to be defined by a formula nor can we propose a recipe for its development. Leadership takes many forms, is understood in different ways and enacted in different contexts.

Synthesising the key arguments presented in educational leadership literature indicates that efficacy is apparent in the role that leaders play to effect change; heterarchical approaches that seek input from multiple stakeholders show significant promise; it is leaders at the principal level who have capacity to influence whole school sites; and instructional dimensions of what leaders do has utility, yet an expansive range of leadership orientations is required in order to appropriately respond to local contexts and potential complexity. Distilling leadership theorising indicates that it is the *practice* of educational leadership at the principal level that must be better understood according to its specific context of enactment if educational transformation is sought.

Educational practice architectures developed by Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) provide scope for leadership approaches to align with the specific needs of their students while also adhering to systemic imperatives. The authors claim that educator practice must utilise ongoing reflexive processes to shape practical approaches that fit both their local contextual demands and wider institutional expectations. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014, p. 52) advocate that sustainable approaches are reliant not only on conceiving new practice, but also on supporting it discursively, materially, economically and politically. In applying a form of 'wrap-around' model to practice architecture, new forms of practice that work educationally for both students and systems are possible.

General and educational leadership literature indicates that the practice of leaders is enacted amidst fluid, dynamic, complex and evolving fields. For this thesis, framing the field of educational leadership is of high importance, with the work of Gunter (2001) allowing a degree of containment that also enhances understanding. She suggests there are four main categories in which an educational leader's work may be understood: critical (understanding the interplay between a leader's agency and structures that support or limit that agency), humanistic (a narrative that privileges personal stories and the contextual location of leadership), instrumental (concerned primarily with site-based performance management) and scientific (the use of statistical evidence to measure a leader's impact). These categories provide a framework for locating and understanding varying forms of leadership considered throughout this study, including how educational leadership is defined according to

government and departmental structures, the community in which a leader operates and by individuals who have responsibility to enact leadership in situ.

2.3.1 Leadership and 'the system'

Drawing on research in areas including educational theory, strategic management, complexity theory and organisational dynamics (Biesta 2016 ; Davis & Sumara 2010; Rizvi & Lingard 2010; Stacey & Mowles 2015,), this thesis defines 'the system' as an organisational and social object that impacts the work of all people who work within it. Individuals form and influence the system and are impacted by the decisions of others who also operate within the system. In the case of school principal leaders, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2014) indicates that they form an integral structural and operational role in how the system operates, but are also directed in their duties by jurisdictional, national and global logics.

Lingard (2018b, p. 59) indicates that contemporary impulses towards globalisation have led to significant 'economisation of education policy' under what is consistently referred to as neo-liberal logic. To frame understandings of what neo-liberalism entails, the scholarship of Harvey (2007, p. 2) is useful as he states:

> Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

Under this definition that centres on 'human well-being' and 'liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms', the guiding tenets of neo-liberal practice can be regarded as having honourable intentions. Decades on from neo-liberalism's inception across the globe, Ball (2016) asserts that the paradigms of neo-liberalism have shifted the meaning of education from 'a service to a commodity' (p. 1049) and that the neo-liberal subject's degree of success in their respective roles is now determined by inspections, reviews and appraisals of what the wider market deems to be relevant and important.

Under the influence of neo-liberalism, the respective research of Rizvi and Lingard (2010) and Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) indicate that emergent idealisations of appropriate educational behaviour are currently based on a mistrust of the education sector at large. Mistrust, according to Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) is predicated on the notion that schools are 'inefficient', 'outmoded' and 'in need of fixing' (p. 27). The solution to this perceived

problem according to neo-liberal logic is greater control and accountability that aims to ensure educators are kept on track. Lingard (2018b) suggests that in such an environment, negotiation of a school's purpose is less a matter for teachers and students than for politicians and bureaucrats who assume a mandate to steer education systems according to models of metagovernance. Ball (2010) suggests that there is inherent risk in these approaches because monologic functioning of schools is possible when educational leaders have limited autonomy and are professionally required to acquiesce to externally determined educational imperatives.

Lynch (2014) claims that the impact of new logics has significantly altered the educational landscape, directing the impetus of educational leaders' work towards forms of managerialism. The research of Eacott (2017) picks up on this idea, suggesting that contemporary educational leadership is enacted as a form of 'Taylorism', where the predominant focus involves workplace efficiency and the attainment of goals that are often determined beyond school contexts. Commentators such as Rose (1989) and Lingard et al. (2013) argue that this emerging style of strategic management repositions leadership practice within a regulatory structure whereby individuals regulate their own practice according to political agendas.

The infiltration of neo-liberalism in education regards system initiatives as essential, demanding that educational leaders use their professional authority to influence organisational imperatives at their school sites. Scholars including Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) and Ball (2019) claim that while this does not completely discount the ability of educational leaders to mobilise localised initiatives, they may be considered peripheral if not aligned to the dominant objectives of the system.

Internationally, neo-liberalism is evident through initiatives such as the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) where educational achievement results are used to form global rankings. Anagnostopoulos, Lingard and Sellar (2016) describe this as a process of educational filtering that favours technical efficiency over broader educational capacities. Similarly, it is argued by Ainscow (2005) that we 'measure what we value' (p. 120) and 'what gets measured gets done' (p. 119), highlighting a direct correlation between global educational policy contours and expectations of 'on the ground' educator practice. According to Dinham (2012) the imperative for instructional leadership in contemporary education is directly linked to its capacity to be aligned with standardised testing regimes revealed

through PISA at an international level and, in Australia, NAPLAN at a national level. McCarty (2009) avers that this desire for standardisation drives a form of micro-management. This is where a fervour for school improvement and school effectiveness materialises as routine exercises in scripting and compliance (Unsworth 2013) according to knowledge acquisition that is presumed to be required by all but may not be attuned to localised settings (Ball 2010). Decentralised, data-driven decision making is utilised through school improvement mechanisms that are standardised across entire systems, and while being promoted as an equitable approach, Khalifa et al. (2014b) and Pirbhai-Illich, Pete and Martin (2017) disagree, suggesting that such moves are a modern form of colonialism for cultural minorities.

Rose (1989) warns against such impacts of neo-liberalism that he regards as diminishing the opportunity for educators to lead according to contextualised needs, instead causing students to be regarded as mere objects of the educational process, rather than as democratic human subjects. To illustrate this point, Khalifa (2015, p. 262) highlights that for marginalised cultural groups, approaches that dehumanise students have inimical consequences:

> …neoliberal models of education serve to marginalize Black and other minoritized youth because their ways of knowing and being are not validated in school.

Cranston (2013) indicates that the status quo brought about by neo-liberalism is one where 'democratic (public) purposes have been swamped by individual and economic purposes' (p. 134), decreasing the role of schools to assist in the development of 'active and competent citizens' (p. 133) and instead focussing on creating educational winners and losers. In Australia, these 'winners and losers' are on public display through the *My School* website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) that outlines how schools are performing in Standard Australian English, reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy, as demonstrated through NAPLAN results (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020a, viewed Dec 14 2020).

According to Biesta (2016) standardised testing regimes such as NAPLAN limit the breadth and depth of what education affords students because an overemphasis is placed in only one area of educational possibility. Such an approach honours the development of specific knowledge and skills (qualification) according to global measures above the need to develop a student's traditional, cultural and religious expressions and practices (socialisation) or by treating students as individuals who have agency to shape their own lives (subjectification).

Homogenous modes of practice are encouraged through processes that view all students as the same, a feature of education that Biesta (2016) considers to be highly problematic as he sees this as reducing educational openness, minimising opportunities for contextual interpretation and limiting thinking in order to produce a highly predictable system. Biesta also questions how the complexity and unpredictability of a system that involves such variables as produced by human participants can operate successfully within technological boundaries that regard the educational landscape as a mechanistic domain. Universal solutions can be seen as the target of 'technical only' solutions that are currently applied despite the dynamic nature of the educational landscape. Wilkinson, Niesche and Eacott (2019) question the sense of leadership practice that seeks to make education predictable, yet they also acknowledge that this is a professional reality for contemporary school principals (Eacott 2018; Niesche 2013; Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019).

According to Eacott (2018), neo-liberal inspired educational demands have resulted in an attempt to separate context from leadership practice. Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) describe this as a codification of leaders' roles according to scripted rituals and routines that treat students as human capital. Under these conditions, school leadership has been required to adopt many characteristics of corporate managerialism in order to focus efforts on metrics that Rizvi and Lingard (2010) say are about maximising a school's level of output. Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) suggest that under this form of educational logic, the fulfilment of a school leader's role is achieved when the performance scripts have been internalised to a point where they no longer question the external agenda that impacts their work.

Educational descriptions of this nature infer that school leaders are not required to think and operate critically in the enactment of their roles, thus limiting their agency to engage in nuanced, localised leadership approaches. Smyth (2008) proposes that the impact of new levels of compliance and accountability demands are likely to overwhelm school leaders through degrees of work intensification that leave little time to question their own complicity as part of hegemonic policy paradigms. Systemic educational leadership demands under neo-liberalism are described by Hayes et al. (2004) and Eacott (2011) as involving both conscious and unconscious assumptions. According to the scholarship of Smyth (2008), educational leaders who seek to be fully informed in their roles, despite demands brought on through busy schedules, must recognise how systemic influences seek to simultaneously narrow their focus to system-centric objectives, while encouraging the exclusion of actions that are extraneous to performativity measures.

Reductionist tendencies illuminated by Smyth (2008) have similarly focused predominantly on the leading 'of' schools, rather than leading 'in' schools. According to Eacott (2011) these approaches objectify and decontextualise the practice of leaders and, while providing a neatly organised framework, do not privilege leadership design that is matched to the needs of the local community that education is purported to serve. Ultimately, educational leadership practice can be reduced according to what Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) call 'ring binder scripts', requiring fixed practice orientations despite the dynamic nature of what school environments entail or the educational aspirations of local communities.

According to categorisations provided by Gunter (2001), leadership as defined by the system may be viewed as a combination of instrumental and scientific orientations. 'Good leaders' under this interpretation have a managerialist focus and align their practice with new macro-imperatives through a process of consuming, translating and enacting system-inspired policy as matters of high importance. Educational agendas that are instrumental and scientific are concerned with a narrative of numbers that are used to validate the effectiveness of a leader's actions according to pre-determined knowledge-frames and targets that may not always align with contextualised student, school or community needs.

Numerous education scholars have been critical of practices that they suggest are narrow in both their motivations and assumptions (Biesta 2016; Disbray 2014; Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti 2013; Matthews 2012b), despite intentions of neo-liberalism that claim to centre on people's well-being and a desire to be liberatory. Similarly, extensive research has questioned whether a global compulsion for measurement (Biesta 2016; Halsey 2018; Kamler & Comber 2005) adequately considers marginalised groups or specific locales in which education is provided (Bishop & Glynn 2003; Khalifa 2015; Ladson-Billings 1995; Lingard 2018a; Pirbhai-Illich, Pete & Martin 2017). Lynch (2014) and Gillies (2013) claim that critical ethical and social dimensions of education are sidelined through neo-liberalism's desire to privilege student achievement in areas that are regarded as politically important and can be statistically quantified. Upon these neo-liberal priorities, the scholarship of Davids and Waghid (2016) is sceptical that leadership is able to cater for student populations that include significant diversity.

2.3.2 Leadership, Indigenous communities and cultural minorities

In considering how leadership is defined by Indigenous communities, this study draws on the research of Luke (2013) and Stewart and Warn (2017) who indicate that there is no single,

homogenous understanding of an Indigenous community. Context brings diversity and as such, each community is unique. Despite their heterogeneous nature, the authors indicate that some commonalties do exist, and it is these commonalities that are drawn upon when articulating how leadership is defined in remote Indigenous environments.

Research that has considered Indigenous and cultural minority perspectives throughout the world has produced a consistent alignment of the enabling educational conditions that connect student learning to their own cultural and contextual understandings of the world (see examples from Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 1999; Bishop 2007; Castagno & Brayboy 2008; Delpit 1993; Grande 2004; Ladson-Billings 1995; Villegas & Lucas 2007). At the core of these efforts, Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) suggest that equitable, power-sharing relationships must be established to enable students and their families to be empowered through the possibilities that education affords beyond hegemonic, top-down approaches. As principals influence whole school sites (Khalifa 2018), community generated logics can be viewed as a guide to how local schools should be led.

Delpit (1993) considers the education of African American minorities in the United States, questioning how the educational problems across culturally diverse student groups are represented. She posits that when a white student has a learning need in education, that need is suggestive of their own individual issue. When a black student has a learning requirement in education it is viewed as representative of a problem for the entire African American community. As foregrounded in chapter one (1.6), the manner in which a problem is framed has a significant impact on solutions that may be considered. In this example, Delpit (1993) suggests that former approaches have been too quick to make generalisations about an entire cultural group, based on deficit orientations.

The scholarship of Bishop and Glynn (2003) examines the construct of educational problems and solutions through their extensive work with Maori students in New Zealand. The authors found that if educational solutions are sought outside the ‘experiences, understanding and aspirations’ (p. 7) of the community they will most likely fail. Bishop and Glynn (2003) advocate for educational approaches that privilege both context and culture. Specifically, this involves a Maori-centred approach that ‘locates Maori aspirations, preferences and practices at the centre of the exercise, and involves Maori in the design, delivery, management and monitoring of educational initiatives and developments’ (p. 71).

According to the Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1999) their Indigenous communities share strong parallels with the work of Bishop and Glynn (2003), since they seek an education for their children that encompasses multiple worldviews, where parents and the wider community work in partnership with the school. As detailed in the *Guidelines for Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers for Alaska's Schools*, it is expected that educators who teach in small rural schools will use the Alaska Teacher Standards to inform their practice beyond performance indicators stipulated by the state jurisdiction (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 1999).

In Australia, Sarra (2003) has suggested that his educational leadership work at Cherbourg highlighted a need to engage in meaningful dialogue with the community, rendering school governance a collective responsibility. Sarra's call to valorise local voices, aspirations and interests as part of an adaptive leadership design is supported through research conducted by Stewart and Warn (2017) who emphasise the need for leadership in Indigenous contexts to move from individualism and competition towards collective action. However, educational reviews (including Collins 1999; House of Representatives 2017; Ladwig & Sarra 2009; Masters 2011; Wilson 2014; Yunupingu 1994a) and current student achievement data available through NAPLAN, indicate strongly that a mismatch between what schools do and what communities want is apparent in many remote Indigenous schools in Australia. This is despite articulation of what communities desire from remote Indigenous education, as most recently detailed by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) and Anderson et al. (2018) (see explicit details of community educational aspirations in section 2.4.2).

In the current *Closing the Gap* policy era there is strong commonwealth pressure to improve literacy, numeracy and attendance (Commonwealth of Australia 2017, 2018), yet, according to Phillips and Luke (2017), 'Indigenous communities have different criteria for what counts as 'success' beyond and in addition to test scores and other conventional measures' (p. 991). The notion of 'in addition' aligns with the previously mentioned Assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1999) educational framework and is specifically noted in the research of Guenther and Osborne (2016) in their work in remote Indigenous communities across Australia. The authors advocate explicitly the desire of communities involved in their research for 'both ways' learning so that students can be strong in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds.

Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2004), Kamara (2017) and Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) highlight that a 'cultural distance' between system imperatives and community aspirations

places school principals in the position of broker where they are required to constantly negotiate between the wider bureaucracy and the locale in which they are working. Vass (2013) declares that policy has often framed Indigenous education in Australia 'as a 'problem' that needs fixing' (p. 85), an observation that is also considered in the work of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) which highlighted that community members do not share this perspective. For school leaders, not only are the intentions of the system and community at odds with one another, but so are perspectives on how they view the status quo.

Luke (2012) describes a socio-cultural disconnect between system and community as one where school leaders must also offer some protection from macro imperatives that can re-orient school directions. The author claims that 'school leadership has wound up acting as human shields, deflecting bureaucratic noise and a mountain of accountability-driven red tape away from the core business of classroom teaching and learning' (Luke 2012, p. 4). Leaders are required under conditions described by Luke (2012) to act not only as brokers and negotiators but also as protectors of localised visions for education that is under constant pressure from external agendas. According to productive leadership models espoused by Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2004) and culturally and contextually orientated approaches recommended by Guenther and Osborne (2018b), leaders in remote Indigenous schools are required to be resourceful and savvy, given that their practice must allow them to navigate complex cross-cultural and inter-cultural fields.

Aligning with broader research in educational leadership, studies conducted in remote Australian Indigenous communities such as that by Sarra (2003), Wildy and Clarke (2012), Kamara (2017) and Guenther and Osborne (2018b), indicates that de-contextualised approaches fail. Considered alongside the concept the work of Eacott (2018) who advocates for educational leaders to privilege spatio-temporal conditions at their sites, leaders in remote Indigenous communities are required to recognise and adapt to contemporary manifestations of social, cultural and historical influences that are place-based. Eacott (2018) highlights here the imperative to take a holistic approach to leadership. This is a notion articulated by Kamara (2017) who indicates that while de-contextualised and compartmentalised forms of leadership that have failed in Indigenous communities have tended to operate only from the head, holistic, culturally and contextually appropriate approaches emanate from the heart.

According to Minutjukur et al. (2013), for local Indigenous educators, operating from the heart involves maintaining local strength and power through the maintenance of local

languages, stories and family connections. Honouring local agendas requires a form of leadership that supports the intellectual, organisational, cultural and social capital that exists among staff, students, families and the community (Hayes et al. 2017). Leadership of this nature focuses on pedagogical practice that supports a 'culture of care', prioritising the establishment of 'bonding ties' (within the school) and 'bridging ties' (between schools, families and communities) that Guenther and Disbray (2015) assert are imperative to strengthening school-community relationships.

The call by Minutjukur et al. (2013) for dialogic interactions requires a form of relational leadership that must be exercised rather than just possessed (Gillies 2013). Arbon (2008) and Lowe (2017) concur that relational approaches are critical as they authentically valorise local voices, building trust, respect and cultural understandings, and provide scope for reciprocity to be enabled. Similarly, Bishop and Glynn (2003) advocate strongly through their research that the only way to bring about sustainable, relevant and meaningful progress involves listening to, and acting upon, local wisdom and education necessities as determined by the community themselves. In remote Indigenous education, scholars have been critical of approaches that have previously been shaped according to cursory consultation as opposed to being established upon deep, ethical listening qualities such as *kulini* (Osborne 2018) and *dadirri* (Ungunmerr-Baumenn 2017) where processes are unrushed with learning and listening taking place on both sides of the conversation with 'common ground' (Huijser et al. 2015) being sought.

Similar concerns have been expressed by Vass (2014) who warns against only the voices of the elite amongst the wider Indigenous community being privileged, therefore failing to act upon the interests and concerns of students or local community members. Morrison et al. (2019) concur with this sentiment, suggesting that for too long, approaches in remote Indigenous communities have been top down as opposed to bottom up, subjugating local aspirations through 'outside-in' approaches. What is consistently called for here through research is co-constructed, power-sharing approaches that collaboratively engage both the system and local communities.

Current models however, according to Lowe (2017) fail to be established upon collaborative, plurivocal co-construction that is sought by communities and instead are based on 'differential power'. Through the work of Delpit (1993) and Fraser (2003), differential power can be understood as often locating those with the most power as unwilling to fully embrace

their responsibility to listen, diminishing the opportunity for parity of participation. According to Howard (2016) this relegates marginalised positions to being 'perspectives' while dominant societal norms maintain their status as 'truths'. Similarly, while community aspirations may be strong, their agency to effect change may be limited, prompting the need for a type of listening that Delpit (1993) says requires 'not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds' (p. 139).

Recognising unequal power relationships in Indigenous education is critical because it highlights that what is often established as 'the problem' (ie systems having too much power), can also be conceptualised as a critical element in determining new solutions. Invoking the scholarship of Eacott (2018) and Giles (2018), new solutions that may lead to more inclusive and socially just forms of education are heavily reliant on relational leadership. This form of leadership complements Indigenous worldviews and offers an opportunity for what Osborne (2018, p. 34) calls 'power sensitive dialogue', allowing community aspirations to not only be heard, but also acted upon. For remote Indigenous educators who contributed to the work of Anderson et al. (2018), the building of authentic relationships is considered imperative because it provides a bridge between potential cultural misunderstandings and allows directions to be determined collaboratively. Yunkaporta (2019) expands on this notion, claiming that high-context cultures such as those prevalent in remote communities require dialogue as this relational process allows negotiated feedback loops to be maintained, allowing reciprocity to occur.

The collective works of Anderson et al. (2018) and Yunkaporta (2019) find synergy with research such as *Red Dirt Education: A compilation of learnings from the Remote Education Systems project* (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016), where communities favoured educational approaches that were established upon authentic, place-based relational connections. This perspective also aligns with a consistent array of literature from Indigenous scholars and educators (see examples from Anderson et al. 2018; Bond 2010; Buckskin 2018; Kamara 2017; Nakata 2007; Rigney 2017, 2018; Sarra 2003, 2010; Yunkaporta 2009c, 2019) and logics presented internationally (see examples from Bishop 2007, 2012; Bishop & Glynn 2003; Castagno & Brayboy 2008; Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Villegas & Lucas 2007).

According to leadership categories provided by Gunter (2001), the leadership that Indigenous communities and cultural minorities seek is humanistic; this is where power is shared, where

educational directions are co-constructed and where cultural diversity and context are valorised in socially just ways. For remote educational leaders this requires dialogic processes that strengthen voice and agency for local school communities and frame school directions according to collective visions and wisdom.

2.3.3 Leadership and the individual

The individual educational leader's role is articulated in the work of Eacott (2018) as being imbued by paradox. He explains that what leaders do is often determined by their role statements, yet in general leadership 'is frequently conceived as something beyond roles' (Eacott 2018, p. 8). This suggests that leaders are required to adhere to the orthodoxy of the system within which they work but are also expected to be innovative and transformative beyond the scope of official role descriptions. Attending to these dual demands deems the role of the educational leader as highly complex.

Part of the complexity originates from leaders being both part of the system and also impacted by the system. Molla and Gale (2018) illustrate this educational leadership reality when outlining that school principals are considered to have degrees of agency and autonomy to determine how their school functions in alignment with the local context, provided that their practice retains an adherence to systemic compliance. According to this logic, leaders need to rationalise their own educational subjectivities, mediate system imperatives and balance both positions according to student and community aspirations. Additional complexity can also be found when invoking the scholarship of Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) who found that testing regimes such as NAPLAN place pressure on educators to act in accordance with measures upon which others may judge performance. As school leaders have responsibility for entire school sites, the pressure on principals to deliver what the system expects is significant.

Across Australia, standardised testing through NAPLAN is an educational requirement that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2020b) expects leaders to adhere to as part of their professional remit. Should leaders not wish to comply with this expectation, Niesche (2013) claims that such practice is likely to be viewed as counter-conduct as it is oppositional to national education objectives and rationalities. Molla and Gale (2018) highlight that, despite the challenge of pushing back against system imperatives, policy prescriptions are handled in a range of ways by school leaders. Their research found

that educational leaders generally enact their practice according to one of three key orientations: compliance, compromise or contest (Molla & Gale 2018).

Commentary on how leaders respond to external policy prescriptions is also found in the scholarship of Eacott (2011) who suggests that understandings of broader cultural, social, historical and political relationships often determine how leaders apply their leadership agency. Findings of both Molla and Gale (2018) and Eacott (2011) indicate that, while institutional expectations do influence the practices and functions of schools, leaders have degrees of autonomy at their disposal that allow policy to be interpreted at school sites according to leader subjectivity. Discourse in educational leadership offered by Gunter (2001) regards practice that is discerning and reflective about what is externally expected and what is internally enacted as stemming from critical leadership orientations. The author indicates that critical positions allow leaders to be empowered to make decisions in the best interests of their school context. Further scholarship by Brown (2015), Eacott and Evers (2015) and Niesche (2013) respectively indicates that critical leadership practice provides scope for the advancement of socially just educational outcomes, ushers in opportunities to disrupt hegemonic processes and affords nuanced practice possibilities that can respond to the context in which they are enacted.

According to Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), leadership responsivity allows school leaders who bring criticality to their practice to offer school communities a form of leadership that extends beyond systemic scripting and conformity (Fitzgerald & Savage 2013) in favour of greater agency for localised needs. Support for educational approaches that seek to be inclusive are widely available in scholarship (see examples in Moll et al. 1992; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Rigney 2018; Unsworth 2013; Yunkaporta 2009c) and indicate a need for critical leadership that can support teachers' pedagogical practice in alignment with contextual factors.

Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2004) argue that it is at the pedagogical level that leadership does its most substantive work. The authors outline that this requires context-appropriate activity that aligns curriculum, pedagogy and assessment through collaboration, negotiation and co-construction. In this process, the educational leader is positioned at the centre of schooling: a position that aligns with calls for heterarchical approaches (Cranston 2013; Huff Sisson et al. 2020). Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) concur that leadership approaches that seek to honour and valorise contextual learning needs and aspirations is of high importance. The authors

highlight that the uniqueness of a school setting must be recognised and leaders encouraged to utilise improvised approaches to bring 'ingenuity, energy, imagination and skills' (Fitzgerald & Savage 2013, p. 138) to their daily work. According to Hayes et al. (2017), contextualised approaches respect the intellectual, organisational and cultural capital of educational sites and build capacity across the school community through an enhancement of students' social and academic capacities.

Privileging community aspirations in shaping the local educational environment involves a commitment towards ongoing dialogue that is championed by scholars such as Freire (1993) and Bishop (2012). Fitzgerald and Savage (2013) claim that fostering input locally provides scope for movement beyond transmission models of education that often reproduce the status quo according to purposes ascribed by dominant societal groups. Importantly however, Smyth (1989) places a caveat on critical leadership approaches that seek to provide an 'alternative, more inclusive and less privileged view of leadership' (p. 121), reminding educators that their core business remains the need to be educative. Synthesizing the range of commentary indicates that exponents of critical leadership must ensure that they combine collective contributions and input with a continued focus on student learning.

So how do educational leaders balance the dual needs of the system they work for while also privileging the educational aspirations of the local community? This question is important as Molla and Gale (2018) found that, while principals have some agency in how they respond to external demands, principals in disadvantaged schools most often chose compliance orientations as they are reluctant to enact practice that is oppositional to employer expectations. Similarly, the scholarship of Smyth (2008) indicates that while agency exists for leadership autonomy and many educational leaders are suspicious of external authorities, they are also highly compliant. In remote Indigenous education environments, Guenther and Osborne (2018b) found that when school leaders are faced with choosing between either a system or a community position, a leader's decisions are generally oriented towards favouring system priorities over localised priorities. In attempting to answer the question posed at the start of this paragraph, the work of scholars including Stacey and Mowles (2015), Huijser et al. (2015), Rossingh (2015) and Yunkaporta (2019) is useful. The authors all indicate that it is possible to move beyond practice that is binary in nature and requires the choosing of sides. Instead, they offer that intelligence and wisdom is found collectively when ideas and understandings are shared and when multiple priorities and aspirations are heard and acted upon. What these scholars offer is a path forwards for individual leaders who are

struggling to navigate their role according to ongoing tensions that pull and push them in directions that feel misaligned.

According to leadership categorisations provided by Gunter (2001), the individual leader who seeks to practice their role in alignment with the contextual needs of the local community is likely to apply a form of critical leadership. This leadership orientation recognises that leaders are impacted by the influence and authority of the systems they work for, however some agency still exists to push back against external demands if doing so is regarded as being in the best interests of their students and the wider community.

2.4 Remote educational contexts

In chapter 1 (1.3), geographical settings that in Australia are regarded as 'remote' were outlined according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a). Globally, however, regions that share similar characteristics are known through an alternative range of terms including 'sparsely populated' (Taylor et al. 2018), 'low density' (Government of Canada 2019), 'remote rural' (The World Bank 2011) and often simply as 'rural' (United States Census Bureau 2018). This understanding of geographical nomenclature is critical when wishing to make international comparisons with educational jurisdictions that may share similar contexts to remote schools in Australia.

From an educational perspective, literature pertaining to these locales uncovers an assemblage of commonalties that exist 'beyond periphery' (Rasmus Ole et al. 2016, p. 11). These include the complexity of education delivery (Miller 2015; VanTuyle & Reeves 2014); the need for relevance in curriculum and pedagogical approaches (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Stelmach 2011); a consistent call for bilingual education in cross-cultural settings (Tulloch et al. 2016); challenges with staffing of schools (Stelmach 2011); the need for more local educators (Tulloch et al. 2016); feelings of professional isolation (Miller 2015); concerns with school attendance (Stelmach 2011); paradoxical relationships between macro educational policy and local needs (Normore, Anthony 2010); the perpetuation of colonial practices (Tulloch et al. 2016); and the need for contextual leadership preparation and capacity building (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

How 'remote' education contexts are described internationally provides a useful backdrop against which remote Indigenous contexts can be considered in Australia. Specifically, this involves consideration of how stakeholders in remote Indigenous education in Australia

characterise remote contexts, how remote Indigenous community members articulate their educational aspirations, how existing DoE initiatives are impacting education in remote Northern Territory schools and what the professional responsibilities are of school leaders in remote principal positions.

2.4.1 Stakeholder descriptions of remote Indigenous education contexts in Australia

According to the report *The power of education: From surviving to thriving. Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students* produced by the House of Representatives (2017), remote Indigenous education in Australia is mired by disadvantage. The main concerns involve low student learning outcomes and low student attendance when compared with the wider Australian student population (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020; Commonwealth of Australia 2020a). With specific regard to student achievement, data in the areas of literacy and numeracy available through *My School* (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) indicates that the vast majority of remote Indigenous schools across Australia are achieving at a standard that is either 'below' or 'well below' all Australian students, with the lowest overall achievement standards experienced in remote communities of the Northern Territory. A similar picture is painted in the area of student attendance in remote Indigenous communities when viewing the 2020 *Closing the Gap Report*. In this report remote Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory indicate an average attendance of 40-60% which is the lowest recorded range across all Australian regions (Commonwealth of Australia 2020a, p. 42).

Perspectives offered through these publications (see examples in Commonwealth of Australia 2012, 2020a; House of Representatives 2017) share alignment with field research conducted in remote Indigenous schools in Australia where these environments are described as places where significant challenges abound. Accounts by Schulz (2007) and Wildy and Clarke (2012) describe remote Indigenous education settings as imbued with disorientation, Parkinson (2015) indicates that these are locations where educators feel caught between departmental and community philosophies and Winkler (2016) suggests that the only people likely to succeed are those who possess a unique skill set. Importantly, all of these perspectives are provided by non-locals who according to Guenther (2015c), make sense of these educational contexts according to the idealisations and interests of the privileged majority; a position that Schulz (2007, p. 278) describes as a 'white mainstream centre'.

Accounts of remote Indigenous education contexts as being imbued by failure and dysfunction feature prominently, however these are not the only perspectives available. The work of Matthews et al. (2010) describes remote Indigenous communities as places where education is not always confined to schools and classrooms as learning involves the inter-relationality of a person's entire surroundings. As a consequence Matthews et al. (2010) consider remote localities as being full of possibilities if links between learning and place are made. Many years earlier, Yunupingu (1994) made similar claims when describing remote communities as providing everything that a person needs, with education playing an important role in learning about the responsibilities people have to look after the place in which they live. Yunupingu (1994) presents remote communities as places where 'deep intellectual strength' (p. 120) is present provided that balance, harmony and connection with place are maintained.

The range of remote educational descriptions listed here highlight the importance that perspective plays. Descriptions offered by non-local, non-Indigenous persons often label remote settings according to deficit narratives; Indigenous people who live in such communities however do not view themselves through such lenses. Rather, as outlined by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016), the disadvantage that is said to permeate remote educational contexts may well be misplaced: the authors suggest it is non-locals who attempt to navigate remote landscapes who are disadvantaged in settings that may be foreign to them when considered against their own prior experiences.

2.4.2 Remote Indigenous community educational aspirations

Between 2011 and 2016, the Remote Education Systems project (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016) was carried out with the aim to better understand remote Indigenous education environments through the voices of people who live there. As part of the project, the research team sought to elicit from community members what they regarded as the purpose of education in remote communities and what educational success looks like.

Findings from the authors' research indicated that the largest number of responses to questions relating to the purpose of remote education centred on land, language and culture. Priorities in these areas were regarded as 'maintaining strong links to local language, kinship and stories' (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016, p. 54) and also ensured that student identities could be preserved. Further responses that centred on the purpose of remote

education related to ‘being strong in both worlds’ (p. 54) and the need for education to provide future possibilities for employment.

When seeking responses to what remote educational success involves, Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016, p. 59) captured one their most important findings, notably what communities constitute as educational success:

> It turns out that success is not what we might think it is. It isn’t about year 12 completion, quality teachers, going on to university, and it certainly isn’t about NAPLAN scores. Rather, success in the eyes of remote education stakeholders—and more particularly, remote Aboriginal community members—is about parent and community involvement in schools.

The Remote Education Systems project (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016) drew upon more than 1000 individuals and actively sought the voices of remote Indigenous community members, representing some of the most credible and contemporary understandings of what remote Indigenous communities view as educational priorities. As such, this thesis privileges the scholarship of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) when describing the educational aspirations of remote Indigenous communities.

2.4.3 Northern Territory education initiatives and remote schools

Research projects such as that conducted by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) in remote Indigenous communities align with national and global scholarship that advocates for educational reform that responds specifically to the learning needs of Indigenous students (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 1999; Bishop 2007; Ladson-Billings 1995; Morrison et al. 2019; Sleeter 2011b; Spillman 2017; Villegas & Lucas 2002). In alignment with these calls the DoE has commenced moves in a direction that is now considerate of the need to ‘keep local language and cultures strong’ (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016). New directions of this nature gesture beyond what Buckskin (2015, p. 167) refers to as a ‘white is right’ paradigm in favour of including educational approaches that are cognisant of the importance that Indigenous languages and cultures play in remote Indigenous community life.

As detailed earlier, language development in the area of bilingual education has been inconsistently implemented in the Northern Territory. Nicholls (2005) suggests that denying students access to their first language through education is a denial of basic citizenry rights since significantly more than just linguistic communication is lost. Lee et al. (2016, p. 59) concur, positing that:

> When languages are lost, a great deal of traditional knowledge gets forgotten too. This is because Aboriginal knowledge is embodied in ways of talking and thinking that are different from European ways.

The development of home language and literacy is, according to Disbray (2014, p. 128), 'an end in itself' but also provides additional utility through translanguaging that allows students the use of 'one language to reinforce the other' (Garcia et al., 2014, p. 64). Wigglesworth, Simpson and Vaughan (2018) claim that language is also deeply aligned with the development of identity and self-determination, indicating that the new directions of the DoE, including *Keeping Indigenous Languages and Culture Strong: A Plan for the Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in Northern Territory Schools* (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016), is a positive initiative for remotely educated Indigenous students. The question is how these new initiatives are implemented. If implementation is well supported and delivered, the potential to impact student learning that valorises student identity is extremely promising, as Wigglesworth, Simpson & Vaughan (2018, pp. 8-9) indicate:

> There is now relatively widespread agreement within the literature on bilingual education that children coming to school with another language are advantaged by receiving the first few years of their schooling in their first language and learning literacy skills initially in this language..

An agenda for change in Northern Territory schools has been set in motion. Central to this new agenda is a focus on doing things 'with' Indigenous people as opposed to former models that were inclined to do things 'to' Indigenous people (Sarra 2010). Similar shifts are also evident in *Changing the Conversation – A Blueprint for Language Education in Northern Territory Schools* (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2015). Directions outlined by this policy document are underpinned by five key principles: (1) Strong ownership; (2) Strong programs; (3) Strong teaching, strong learning; (4) Strong pathways; and (5) Strong plans, strong futures (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2016, p. 8). The implementation of this new direction, according to *'Changing the Conversation'* (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2015), is highly dependent on school principals facilitating this new initiative at the local level.

Included in this initiative is the simultaneous privileging of the DoE's construct of 'community-led schools' (Northern Territory Department of Education 2021) that is designed to empower the decision making of the local community. The strategy spans a ten-year period with the first two phases to be followed by a review of progress. The tiered approach is

outlined by the Northern Territory Department of Education (2019b, viewed June 6, 2020) as follows:

> Stage two will focus on key areas that deliver positive educational outcomes for students, are supported by the community and are sustainable. Stage two implementation will align with new policy direction and government priorities, in particular the government's commitment to community engagement and local decision-making including community-led schools.

A school in the Northern Territory that takes an approach of this nature is Gunbalanya Independent Public School. Gunbalanya is a remote Indigenous community in Arnhem Land where the local school utilises a range of community-led initiatives including a co-principalship model (local and non-local principals working together), a Families as First Teachers Program for 0-3 year olds (Northern Territory Department of Education 2019c), working to a flexible school calendar to align with ceremonies and the traditional hunting season, a school board that includes elected members from the wider community (parents and industry), pathways for senior students that enable options between mainstream certification and work ready programs and agreements with businesses and organisations that allow students to get practical 'on Country' experience in a range of roles that may be suitable for them to pursue after secondary schooling (Department of Education Skills and Employment 2017). Under this community-led model, autonomy is provided to the school through its independent status to centralise community aspirations as part of local education provision.

Co-principalship that is currently in operation at Gunbalanya affords what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) terms 'envisioning'. Smith indicates that such envisioning binds people together as future directions are not determined from afar, instead they are localised and contextualised in order to respond authentically to the goals and aspirations of the local community. This place-based process recognises that while commonalities often exist from one setting to another, so too does difference and it is upon specific factors that are unique to a particular community that envisioning originates. This process seeks to move beyond the limitations of simply following 'someone else's plan' and instead allows scope for communities to take control of their own destinies (Smith 2012).

Directions being taken at Gunbalanya align with what Indigenous scholars and remote Indigenous communities have been seeking: a repositioning of a community's role in local education (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016) that ensures culture and context are taken seriously. Former Yirrkala School principal, Nalwarri Ngurruwuttun, indicates (Fry 2014)

that it is through community decision making that local strength emanates and, as such, the privileging of community needs, values, interests and aspirations ensures that education can be delivered in a manner that is consistent with Indigenous 'cultural laws and ways of doing and being' (Fry 2014, p. 13).

Implementation of Northern Territory's *A Share in the Future – Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024* (Northern Territory Department of Education 2019b), while representing new and positive intentions through new initiatives, also features a notable concern: an explicit focus on Direct Instruction to achieve literacy and numeracy development. Direct Instruction is actively promoted and supported by Noel Pearson, the founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, and has come under scrutiny through an inquiry of the House of Representatives (2017), because there was considered to be limited independent evidence to support the benefits of the program. Concerns for the program lie in what Fogarty and Schwab (2012b) would refer to as a 'back to basics' approach that may fail to connect curriculum and pedagogy to other aspects of students' lives. The Northern Territory Department of Education can be seen through new initiatives to be attempting to move closer towards approaches that align with community aspirations, as found in the research of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016). The inclusion of a 'one size fits all' model such as Direct Instruction may be questioned however, as such approaches are by definition unable to respond to the cultural and contextual diversity that exists across remote Northern Territory schools.

2.4.4 Professional responsibilities of remote school principals in the Northern Territory

School principals in remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory are regarded as integral to the Australian educational landscape (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2020b; Northern Territory Department of Education 2017). As noted earlier, these educational leaders oversee schools that are characterised as having the lowest educational outcomes in the nation (Commonwealth of Australia 2020a) and it is the role of the appointed school principal to remedy the situation (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017).

The importance of the school principal's role in lifting student performance is noted in both national publications that focus on remote Indigenous schools and also in departmental reviews that are specific to the Northern Territory. One such publication is *Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools* (Commonwealth of Australia

2012), which stated ‘it is clearly evident that school leadership, especially that of the principal, performs a critical role in improving outcomes’ (p. 2). This coheres neatly with educational reviews in the Northern Territory conducted three years apart. Masters (2011, p. 10) indicated that:

> A key strategy for school systems wishing to improve student performance is to build capacity of all principals and others in school leadership roles to drive improved classroom teaching and learning.

Similarly, Wilson (2014, p. 200) concluded that:

> Respondents to the current review took the view that the quality of principals was the single most important factor in the quality of schools.

The sentiment expressed in these words is now found at the very heart of the NT Strategy (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017), as principals in DoE schools are charged with the responsibility of leading their respective schools towards objectives that seek to ‘achieve better outcomes for children and students’ (p. 1). These outcomes are sought through attention to four identified focus areas: quality teaching; data and accountability; community engagement and differentiated support. Notably, the DoE is an arm of the Northern Territory Government, highlighting that the work of school principals is strongly aligned to political agendas. This alignment between the school principal and government rationalities is made clear in DoE school principal position statements that indicate: ‘The Principal plays a vital role in delivering the strategic plan of the Department of Education’ (see appendix J).

When considering role descriptions for remote school principals with their mainstream counterparts from other Australian educational jurisdictions, their key duties and responsibilities are very similar. They have a clear focus on: academic progress through curriculum and pedagogical development; ensuring that staff receive appropriate professional learning; oversight of the administrative, operational and resource management of the school; a need to link positively with the local community and the willingness to work with support staff and/or agencies for staff and student benefit (see DoE role descriptions in appendices J, K and L).

While commonalties exist in the overarching professional responsibilities of school principals across the nation, those who lead remote Indigenous schools must adhere to these responsibilities taking account of two factors that make their roles unique. One is working within a system that is regarded to have failed its students for decades and it is the on-site

principal's role to improve educational trajectories (Collins 1999; Ladwig & Sarra 2009; Masters 2011; Wilson 2014). The other factor is that the students who attend remote Indigenous schools have highly specific cultural and contextual learning needs as indicated through new DoE initiatives that seek to strengthen local languages and cultures (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Morrison et al. 2019; Northern Territory Board of Studies 2015; Northern Territory Department of Education 2016).

Despite research indicating that cultural responsivity affords theoretical and practical utility to connect learning to the cultural, linguistic and contextualised needs of students from diverse cultural groups, cultural responsivity is currently absent in the lexicon of the DoE. As indicated by Morrison et al. (2019, p. 35):

> Alarmingly, cultural responsiveness is not mentioned in the policy documents of the Northern Territory and Queensland State governments, despite those jurisdictions having the highest populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Demands placed on leaders in remote Indigenous schools throughout the Northern Territory are suggestive that those leaders would benefit from support in the areas of CRSL (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and CRP (Morrison et al. 2019).

2.5 Conclusion

In Australia, disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student achievement is evident across remote Indigenous community schools with this gap being most apparent in the Northern Territory. At the centre of efforts to address educational disadvantage in the Northern Territory are educational leaders in the role of school principal who are the conduit between the department they are employed by and the community in which they work. According to the NT Strategy, principals in the Northern Territory are charged with the responsibility of leading their respective schools towards objectives that seek to improve educational outcomes for all students. Globally, educational leaders are regarded as having a significant impact on student achievement, with Leithwood et al. (2004, p. 3) claiming that this is sharply pronounced in locales where 'the learning needs of students are most acute'.

Utilising educational leadership categorisations provided by Gunter (2001), it is apparent from this literature review that the DoE, Indigenous communities and individual leaders are not making sense of the purpose of remote education in the same way. Their philosophical frames of reference are not aligned and as a consequence they are failing to collectively pull in the same direction. This is suggestive of a status quo that is bound to leave all stakeholders

frustrated and confused. In particular, school leaders operate at the centre of a highly contested and contradictory space. It is true that the DoE can be seen to be supporting remote school leaders to connect learning to students' lives through new initiatives that are designed to place greater value on local languages and culture. Nevertheless, despite the possibilities that these initiatives afford, they have also been questioned for their reliance on instructional models that do little to recognise the linguistic and cultural repertoires of remote Indigenous students.

Despite a level of professional responsibility that is significant, DoE school principals in remote Indigenous schools are currently afforded no practical or theoretical models of leadership practice to support the work that they are required to perform. Globally however, culturally responsive approaches provide hopeful possibilities when working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Culturally responsive approaches are underpinned by the philosophical belief that 'neither Western nor Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures have all the answers' (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016, p. 89). Highlighted in this logic is a desire to bridge existing gaps through a shared, 'both/and' approach, actively stepping beyond the confines of binary, 'either / or' orientations that have historically excluded Indigenous knowledge, practice and resources according to asymmetrical powers, authority and influence. What is called for are approaches that recognise the legitimacy of multiple worldviews and intelligences and a desire for students to benefit from all of it. These are approaches that have lain dormant in many remote Indigenous schools and offer latent potential that values Indigenous people for who they are, recognises students as strong, capable and competent and empowers school leaders to innovate and to hold student connectedness to learning at the heart of all decision making.

Conceptualisations of CRSL found in the research of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018) and the tenets of CRP provided by Morrison et al. (2019) offer authentic hope for the transformation of remote school sites, given that this scholarship collectively seeks to mobilise educational approaches that value and reveal students' cultural repertoires and intelligences. Despite significant potential, CRSL does not currently exist in Australian contexts and CRP has not been theorised for remote Indigenous contexts, representing a void that this research seeks to address.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and methods

> Indigenist research principles can be drawn upon by non-Indigenous researchers who uphold its principles for Indigenous self-determination (Rigney 2006, p. 41).

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the intention is to outline the links between the research question and the methodology and methods utilised throughout the study. As the central focus of this research is to explore and better understand the conditions that enable culturally responsive possibilities in the practice of leaders in remote Indigenous schools, the initial aim was to understand existing leadership orientations and determine how these approaches are attuned to the needs of students. After establishing an understanding of existing practice this study was also interested in the rationale that underpins these approaches so that this knowledge could be utilised to develop theoretical leadership approaches that are inclusive and socially just.

To capture the narratives that shape remote school principals' leadership practice, a qualitative research methodology was selected for this study, aligning with Punch (2009) and Hartas (2010) who claim that such approaches offer significant benefits in the multidisciplinary field of education. Literature in the field of social science research identifies a range of qualitative research designs including narrative inquiry, case studies, grounded theory, phenomenology and participatory action research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013; Creswell et al. 2007; Punch 2009). This study however, centres on a qualitative, multi-sited, ethnographically informed approach that is interested in analysing the educational leadership practice of school leaders through a culturally responsive lens (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019).

This interpretive design sought to utilise the lived experiences of five remote school principals to contribute to knowledge production that may in turn contribute to the transformation of remote Indigenous education through new educational leadership possibilities. Development of the research design involved a reflexive process that continually moved between data provided from empirical fieldwork and knowledge unveiled through theoretical deduction, considering all understandings through a focus that was specifically interested in connections between educational leadership practice and student lifeworlds (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019).

In this chapter, three key moves are explicated. First, an outline of the ethnographically informed methodology is provided with specific reference made to the research design features, data collection processes and how data was analysed. Next, details are provided about the ethics approval process, how research participants and sites were selected and how consent from school principals and Indigenous communities was obtained. Finally, a number of reflexive research practices are reported, highlighting many of the philosophical and pragmatic challenges that were navigated when seeking to simultaneously honour the discipline of social science and the experiences shared by research participants to answer the guiding research question.

3.2 Ethnographically informed methodology

This research, while recognising the utility that traditional ethnography affords in revealing behavioural and cultural nuances and complexities (Della Porta & Keating 2008), sought to step beyond merely understanding 'what is' in order to contribute new knowledge to 'what could be' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). In this way, the study is most interested in applying understandings of the status quo in order to bring about change; a process for which the selected methodology is well suited.

The tenets of ethnography outlined by Creswell (2009) align neatly with the goals of this research as it privileges the voice of research respondents, enabling a holistic understanding of the subject of the study according to their everyday experiences. Further support for this methodological approach is found in the scholarship of Brewer (2000) who indicates that ethnography has utility in terms of knowledge generation, theory building and application to policy making. Additionally, ethnography presents an opportunity to expose how the interests and knowledge of some groups is sanctioned, while for others it is excluded (McLaren & Kincheloe 2002). Adoption of an ethnographic research methodology may therefore be viewed as deliberate and purposeful given that the underpinning priority was to develop an approach to leadership practice that simultaneously adheres to system and community expectations while also connecting authentically to students' lives.

In order to suitably understand the field of inquiry, I followed the recommendation of Doody and Noonan (2013) to have close association with persons whose practice is under investigation. Doing so ensured that the voice and perspectives of those who could provide emic perspectives of remote school leadership were privileged. Ensuring that it is the research participants' contributions that are captured also aligns with words of caution provided by

Hartas (2010) who claims that 'in education…researchers are very often, first and foremost, members of the community being researched' (p. 296). Consequently, the advantage of having a foundational level of knowledge and understanding of the settings under investigation must not influence or skew the research by failing to authentically hear what the data is indicating. Silverman (2017) recognises that bias is challenging to remove from the research process completely, yet its potential to impact data in both the collection and analysis stages has been carefully considered with efforts made to ensure that it is the respondents' realities that are captured, without contamination via my own prior remote school leadership experiences.

In all phases of research, the generation of knowledge was directly linked to the heart of remote Indigenous Schools. In phase one, perspectives were garnered from reviewing school development priorities as articulated in school improvement plans (SIPs), performance reports, *My School* website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) and individual school websites where available. In phase two, these perspectives were analysed alongside the lived experiences of school principals through in-depth interviews, site observations and follow-up conversations. In phase three, provocation interviews that were informed via emergent themes from phases one and two, were utilised to extract richer understandings of the leadership practice tensions, challenges and opportunities that exist for school leaders in remote Northern Territory communities.

While knowledge has been generated rigorously and systematically at all stages to produce propositional answers to the key research question, the study can most accurately be described as 'ethnographically informed' as some limitations on time and financial resources impacted the extent to which observations could be conducted across remote sites. To extend connections with each site and each school principal, a range of strategies were employed, including significant work that was completed with each school principal prior to site visits. This involved preliminary phone conversations, provision of participant information that outlined the nature and purpose of the study, signing of consent forms to be involved in the research and advance notice provided of all interview questions; post site-visit follow-up phone conversations to clarify participant responses; delivery of all interview transcripts for checking and/or modification by all research participants; and the use of provocation interviews following an extended analysis of phases one and two data.

Employing these strategies positively impacted the relationship between researcher and participant and sought to build on what Khalifa (2013) indicates is possible in ethnographic research, namely a 'broader picture of the culture of a context' (p. 72) made more likely by utilising an elongated timeframe and regular contact with research participants.

This process honoured the tenets of ethnographical research and simultaneously ensured that the research process was collegial in nature. The benefit of these research features was most evident in the follow-up phone conversations where all participants provided detailed responses to clarifying questions and again in phase three provocation interviews where questions were generatively developed via themes that emerged organically from the group of principal participants. In this regard, it can be noted that while the initial on-site interviews provided the greatest data yield, the greatest quality was achieved in subsequent conversations. In each of these conversations, principals stepped beyond what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) refer to as institutional framings, allowing specific lines of inquiry to be penetrated more deeply.

3.21. Research design

When designing the research, a number of critical considerations were made. Mack (2010, p. 6) suggests that this is a feature of the research process that cannot be understated:

> …how one views the constructs of social reality and knowledge affects how they will go about uncovering knowledge of relationships among phenomena and social behaviour and how they evaluate their own and others' research.

This research is considerate of a premise advocated by Ernest (1994) that there are no universal truths, only opportunities to get closer to the truth. The utilisation of an interpretivist design sought to uncover and construct meaning through research that investigates the direct experiences of people who are positioned at the core of the phenomena.

Scholarship from Creswell (2009), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) and Silverman (2017) indicates that, while ethnographic research has established merit, like other forms of qualitative inquiry it also has limitations. Critics of ethnography generally question its value according to either a natural science or postmodern critique. Briefly stated, Brewer (2000) suggests that positivist positions would argue that ethnography does not 'measure up' to the standards of science and scholars of postmodernism may contest the notion that all truth is contingent and relative, therefore rendering any statement made by respondents as versions of

rhetoric and discourse. Furthermore, critics may question how a non-Indigenous person such as myself can claim to conduct research within Indigenous communities in a manner that is regarded as appropriate. To counter common critiques, a total of eight research design measures have been employed in the research design.

First, the positionality of the researcher has been fully disclosed in the prologue and chapter one (1.9). As a non-Indigenous scholar, I understand that my experiences, worldview and institutional representations shape perspectives and interpretations presented throughout the study. As part of my ethical commitment towards de-colonial research practices, I have sought to privilege the work of Indigenous scholars and the arguments made for the necessity of Indigenous research methodologies by Rigney (2001), Rigney (2006) and Moreton-Robinson (2006) regarding concerns about colonial approaches. Throughout this study I invoke Indigenous standpoints, values and experiences to consider carefully how my own ethical/methodological approach must be responsive to the concerns Indigenous scholars raise in framing all facets of the research.

Second, the research design has been shaped through consideration of Indigenous voices both globally and locally. Internationally this includes but is not limited to voices such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Bryan Brayboy, Russell Bishop, Mere Berryman and Linda Smith. Nationally this includes Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Martin Nakata, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Tyson Yunkaporta, Peter Buckskin, Chris Sarra, Stan Grant and other esteemed Indigenous scholars and leaders. Furthermore, this study seeks to utilise Indigenous voices and perspectives as the baseline upon which the research is framed, returning repeatedly to ensure that community voices, as advocated by Luke (2013) are privileged, not sidelined. To this end, the findings from *Red Dirt Education: A compilation of learnings from the Remote Education Systems project* (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016) is widely utilised throughout the study as it captures community voices in relation to an array of remote educational matters. Additionally, Indigenous voices at the forefront of remote Indigenous education have also been utilised throughout this study as either direct quotes or as epigrams in order to consistently re-focus the study on the needs, values, interests and aspirations of Indigenous persons themselves.

Third, in alignment with sentiments posed by Martin (2008), it is recognised that, historically, research has not served Indigenous interests well in Australia. Consequently, this study is mindful of not perpetuating colonising processes. Rather, the research sought to better

understand school leadership through a culturally responsive lens, adhering to global and national Indigenous advocacy for models of education that consider the perspectives of the people they ultimately aim to serve.

Fourth, the ethnographically informed methodology utilised within this research aimed simultaneously to adhere to the recommendation made by Sherwood (2010) to 'do no harm' while also recognising what Berryman, Soohoo and Nevin (2013) describe as the potential to contribute to the corpus of knowledge. Attempting to adhere to both research underpinnings is recognised as offering potential to counter the impacts of colonisation by offering alternative narratives and approaches to what currently exists in practice.

Fifth, it is understood that this research is situated at the nexus at which Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews intersect within an educational context. Understanding the foundational worldviews of cultures that co-interact is imperative in this study to ensure that research is framed according to the aspirations of Indigenous communities and not merely what Rigney (2006, p. 34) describes as the 'researcher's priorities'. A central guiding tenet of this research is to facilitate improved understandings of cultural spaces where the work of remote school leaders can contribute to the transformation of remote schooling. This research goal aligns with the scholarship of Yunkaporta (2009c, p. 9) who suggests that 'at low levels of knowledge there is only difference across cultures, but at high levels there is common ground'. I seek to unearth this common ground through a process of sensitive and deliberate exploration.

Sixth, this study acknowledges international studies in CRSL by Khalifa (2012) that indicate 'in research on school leadership, scholars often situate school leadership behaviours exclusively within a school context' (p. 461). As contemporary scholarship promotes the utility of leaders engaging in overlapping school-community spaces (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), this research is interested in learning how leaders in remote Indigenous schools enact their practice both within and beyond the school boundaries for the educational benefit of students.

Seventh, this research is guided by the suggestion made by Eacott (2018, p. 18) that 'if the social world is messy then scholarship should embrace such messiness rather than seek to bring artificial order to it'. Achieving this also required drawing on research recommendations by Hall and Guenther (2019) who advocate that the voices of those who are situated within the systems, in this case school leaders, must be privileged in order to

determine new practice possibilities. While leaders' perspectives have been privileged, all principals and their school's geographical locations have been deliberately de-identified in accordance with design recommendations provided by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013). Confidentiality between the researcher and participants was also maintained through the non-disclosure of any specific Indigenous language groups that may have been mentioned in interviews or school documentation as these details could suggest the regions in which the study was conducted (Johnson & Christensen 2012). These deliberate features of the research design were underpinned by a desire to elicit responses from informants that were authentic in nature with no concern for potential repercussions to an individual's future career prospects.

Finally, this study sought to go where Silverman (2020) suggests quantitative research cannot. Specifically, this involved accessing narratives that underpin remote school leaders' practice and the use of specific markers to organise how agendas are mobilised in remote educational contexts. The study draws upon the scholarship of Molla and Gale (2018) to consider how system policy is enacted in schools according to positions of compliance (doing exactly as directed), compromise (adhering to policy prescriptions whilst trying to privilege local needs simultaneously) and contest (favouring local needs over systemic policy directives). In a similar fashion the scholarship of Ball and Maroy (2009) is utilised through their conception of 'logics of action' (p. 101) that guide school principals' work according to categorisations of 'instrumental' (mechanical, closed and homogenous in nature), 'hybrid' (attempting to balance educational dynamics) and 'expressive' (organic, open and heterogenous in nature). The combination of multiple phases of research ensured that layers of meaning could be uncovered and subsequently understood through the selected organisational markers.

3.2.2 Data collection

Data collection was reliant on a range of methods that are synonymous with ethnographic research including publicly available and school-specific document procurement, in-situ and phone interviews and the use of field journaling from observations made during site visits.

In phase one school profiling, naturalistic data generation sought to initially capture contextual school details (see a full list of details sought in appendix F) from publicly available sources including the *My School* website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) and school specific websites where available. These details were

shared with each school principal prior to interviews being conducted so that all information could be checked for accuracy. Some details available publicly were questioned by school principals and where discrepancies were evident, school profiles were updated accordingly.

Participants also provided copies of their current school improvement plans and annual school reports. These documents were utilised to understand the educational philosophies that drive existing school visions and agendas, how key priorities were articulated and what programs and/or initiatives were driving the facilitation of these goals.

Phase two involved a semi-structured interview format that sought to access an 'insider's view' of a remote school principal's work. The intention was to understand the 'thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning [and] motivations' (Johnson & Christensen 2012, p. 202) of each principal and how their vision for the school was both formed and framed. This phase specifically intended to consider how a leader's experiences and subjectivities guide their leadership practice, a concept addressed by Cranston and Ehrich (2008, p. 18) who claim:

> How leaders talk about leadership, how they understand its nuances and its practices is deeply embedded in their own life forces and experiences, their personal values, beliefs and driving principles and the fields of endeavour in which they work.

The rationale behind conducting each initial interview in-situ was motivated by a desire to combine interviews with school site and leadership practice observations. The combination of these research methods sought to develop a deep and authentic understanding of each school principal's practice that may be evident beyond a reliance only on their words. The limitation of relying on words alone is recognised in the work of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) when explaining that speech is made up of double structures where both words and the performance upon which a conversation is enacted provide meaning. Conducting the first interview in person and combining this with on-site observations, the aim was to better understand the informant's responses through a comprehensive appreciation of the full context in which the leader's insights were delivered.

The beginning of each interview was informal by design as a means of establishing collegial rapport that aimed to elicit genuine responses that would benefit the project. This approach is considerate of the need to deliberately avoid any potential power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee and instead recognises that an 'inter-view' is something that takes place between people and where validity of data can only be assured if both parties feel they are on an equal footing (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). Throughout each interview,

a ‘patiently probing’ style advocated by Johnson and Christensen (2012) was adopted as a means of trying to uncover meaning that extended beyond the superficial, in a manner that felt more like a conversation than a formalised meeting. All interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes and were recorded so that data could later be analysed. An open-ended style was adopted, without reference to literature or theory, thus encouraging respondents’ own answers and avoiding potential bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013; Silverman 2017).

Each interview question (see appendix G for a full list) was trialled with the PhD supervising team prior to any field work being conducted as part of what Silverman (2017) regards as forming an internal validity process. Specific attention was paid to checking that questions were likely to capture the express thoughts and opinions of the interviewees and that the range of questions used throughout the study could be triangulated with data collected during other research phases (Johnson & Christensen 2012). Consideration was given to the substance, semantics and the order of each question as a means of maximising both the yield and quality of the data. Ultimately, this process aimed to sharpen each question and provide the best opportunity to produce narrative constructions that would directly assist in answering the guiding research question.

Despite the evident utility that interviews provide in educational research (see examples in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013; Punch 2009), potential limitations do exist. Examples of possible limitations include questions that relate to the reliability of responses that Hartas (2010) claims could be regarded as ‘co-constructed’ or involve elements of ‘truth editing’ (Punch 2009) on the part of the participants themselves. To mitigate these concerns, the strategies of respondent validation and convergent validity were employed.

Respondent validation, also referred to as member checking (Johnson & Christensen 2012), was sought through follow up phone conversations after each site visit. This ensured that co-construction through external interpretation was avoided as it was the participant’s interpretation that was sought and captured. Ultimately use of this process sought to avoid concerns that Silverman (2017) labels ‘spurious correlations’ through a tempting potential to arrive at easy but unsubstantiated conclusions that may not be the expressed thoughts and beliefs of the research participants themselves.

Convergent validity as detailed in the scholarship of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) was used to make meaning of data beyond one collection method and from multiple school

principals, diluting the impact that any potential ‘truth editing’ from one respondent could have on emergent themes captured across entire data sets. In applying this process, the researcher sought to be methodologically aware, allowing findings to be determined upon rigorously applied design (Silverman 2017).

All interviews were voice recorded and subsequently transcribed. Research participants were provided with copies of the transcript and given the opportunity to add, modify or delete any component, enhancing the validity and reliability of subsequent findings (Silverman 2020). There was a period of twelve weeks between the phase two on-site interviews and field observations and the subsequent phase three provocation interviews, enabling initial data coding to be completed so that patterns and emergent questions could surface organically (Wiersma & Jurs 2009). Processes of this nature were crucial in developing the provocation interviews upon generative themes and ensured that the final phase of research was grounded upon what Silverman (2017) regards as comprehensive data treatment. Phase three took place via telephone conversations between the researcher and the respondents, one remote school principal at a time. Each conversation was planned to last approximately thirty minutes however all principals were keen to provide detailed responses, resulting in most provocation interviews lasting between forty to fifty minutes in duration.

As in the previous phase, prior to conducting the provocation interviews, each question was trialled with the PhD supervisory team as the research sought to elicit responses that would assist in answering the guiding question of the study. The interview format for the provocation phase was semi-structured, allowing all respondents to answer the same six questions (see appendix H), yet also allowing flexibility for lines of inquiry to emerge. As with phase two interviews, the phase three provocation interviews were voice recorded, transcribed and provided to all participants so that they could make any necessary additions or modifications prior to any data being analysed.

3.2.3 Data analysis

In order to make sense of the data, discourse analysis was employed, since scholars including Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) and Punch (2014) advocate that it is a useful form of analysis for investigating a range of communication modes. Utility is found in the capacity of discourse analysis to examine the relationship between words and their meanings, given that no spoken word or written text, according to Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010), can be regarded as neutral. Discourse analysis proved to be

highly beneficial to this research due to its flexibility (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013) to analyse first the linguistic content of websites and school documentation as required in phase one school profiling and, second, conversational mediums as required in phases two and three.

School profiling data was analysed according to the lenses of the NT Strategy (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017) and the tenets of CRP in schools (Morrison et al. 2019). Initially data was organised into categories that understood the school's vision as it aligned to departmental imperatives, culturally responsive pedagogical approaches or a combination of both. Further analysis considered how the school's areas of focus as part of their guiding vision either enabled or inhibited a connection between learning and students' lifeworlds.

The management and organisation of data initially relied on the use of Nvivo software, however this process was ultimately abandoned as it was felt that it did not allow the researcher to be as close to the data as desired. After discussions with supervisors it was decided to experiment with more traditional methods of highlighting hard copies from the phase one data collection. This process proved significantly more useful and was used for coding of themes from DoE documents and school documents.

Through phase one school profiling, a total of thirty emergent themes was established. These themes comprised eight behaviours and/or practices that support the connection between school processes and students' lifeworlds, nineteen inhibitors or practices that limit connection between the school and its students, and three themes that were categorised as 'interesting' since they did not easily accord with either of the aforementioned groupings.

Research phases two and three again utilised the tenets of CRP in schools (Morrison et al. 2019) combined with the scholarship of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018) that considers the tenets of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Traditional methods of highlighting hard copies of data were used again to code themes from the school principal interviews and provocations. Initially the transcripts were simply coded on their own, however it was found over time that textual meaning was more evident when interview recordings were played while coding the transcripts. Ultimately, the benefit of this approach was found in maintaining what scholars such as Silverman (2017) refer to as the original form of the data materials. Following this process ensured that data was considerate

of the context in which it was provided rather than potentially having its meaning diluted through the separation of anecdotes from the original sites where they were provided.

An analysis of the phase two principal interviews provided a total of sixty-five emergent themes. These themes comprised twenty-six practices that support the connection between school processes and students' lives, thirty-three inhibitors of practices that limit connection between the school and its Indigenous students and a total of six themes that were categorised as 'interesting'. For phase three of the study, forty-six emergent themes were established as part of the provocations. These themes included seventeen practices that support the connection between school processes and students' lives, twenty-four inhibitors or practices that limit connection between the school and its Indigenous students and a total of five themes that were categorised as 'interesting'.

After data from all research phases was coded, emergent themes were then organised into four categories: strategic management, curriculum and pedagogy, professional development and community engagement. These categories were selected because consensus through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2014) and wider educational literature suggests that how schools are led and managed (Eacott 2018; Khalifa 2018; Leithwood et al. 2004), what is taught (Biesta 2016; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Prosser & Hattam 2008; Sleeter & Stillman 2005), how it is taught (Freire 1993; Morrison et al. 2019), how teacher knowledge and practice is developed (Burgess 2019a; Craven, Yeung & Han 2014) and how interactions occur between the school and wider stakeholders (Guenther & Disbray 2015; Sarra et al. 2018; Trimmer, Dixon & Guenther 2019), all directly impact the learning experiences of students. By utilising this approach, major narrative arcs in educationally critical categories were established, ensuring that remote school principals' practices were made visible. Major research themes and narrative arcs are explicated throughout chapters four to seven and were used to establish findings in chapter eight. Findings outlined in chapter eight were subsequently used to develop a continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility and also to re-frame the role of educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools.

3.3 Approvals, participant and site selections, recruitment and consent

3.3.1 Approvals

Ethics approval for this research was provided in two stages. The University of South Australia approved the study on November 2, 2018 (see appendix B) and the Northern Territory Department of Education granted approval on December 13, 2018 (see appendix A).

3.3.2 Participant and site selection

A total of five school principals, employed by the DoE were involved in the study. Each principal worked in a Northern Territory school at the time that data was collected. Each school site was officially classified as very remote according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility and Remoteness Index (2016a) and is referred to as a 'remote Indigenous school' as part of this research. When selecting participants for the study, DoE personnel at the Regional Director level were consulted to locate school principals who were deemed to actively engage with their local community and displayed reflexivity in their leadership practice. Involving DoE personnel who worked directly with remote school principals was considered both appropriate protocol and also allowed advice to be sought regarding possible research informants who fulfilled the requirements of the study.

Respondents in this study are all principals and have responsibility for whole school sites, however, the exact nature of their duties differs depending on the classification of their appointment. One research respondent was a teaching principal where the only other members of staff at the school included a local assistant teacher and a part-time bus driver. At the time of data collection this school had a student population less than twenty with the principal combining leadership responsibilities with a full-time teaching load. Three other research respondents also shared the designation of teaching principal, yet their roles involved overseeing a small team of local and non-local staff. In these schools, the student enrolment ranged from fifteen to fifty-five students with two or three classrooms at each school site. The final research respondent was an executive contract principal who oversaw a local and non-local staff of approximately forty persons, catering for a school with an enrolment in excess of two hundred students. This school principal was the only school leader who had other staff members within the school in recognised educational leadership positions.

Site selection was restricted to schools that consisted of 90% or higher Indigenous student population (according to My School data, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020). The study deliberately selected schools that ranged in size and student composition (including both primary and primary-secondary combined cohorts) to ensure that a cross-section of educational environments were considered as part of the research and to understand leadership practice across various remote Indigenous school landscapes.

3.3.3 Recruitment and consent

Research informants were recruited via a four-step process. This included:

Step 1 – formal approval was sought from the DoE;

Step 2 – contact was made with DoE personnel at the Regional Director of Education level to discuss the project and seek support and advice regarding school principals within their region who suitably met the research criteria;

Step 3 – contact was made with remote school principals in each location to seek their involvement. Initial contact involved the provision of a participant information sheet (see appendix C) that detailed the nature and scope of involvement. Upon their agreement to be involved, each participant signed a consent form (see appendix E) as acknowledgement of their willingness to be part of the research;

Step 4 – in alignment with what Martin (2008) refers to as a 'knock before you enter' approach, school principals were asked to seek the support and consent of the local school council or key community members for the researcher to interview the principal on site (see attached School Council consent form in appendix D). This process ensured that communities gave express permission for the study to be conducted and that all details pertaining to what the study involved was shared in a spirit of full disclosure and transparency.

3.4 Reflexive research practices

Hindsight reveals that when initially taking on the role of social scientist as part of the PhD process, I was unaware of many significant research challenges that lay ahead. What first appeared to be a logical and linear process that merely involved seeking the input of research participants and determining findings, was in reality a navigation of research protocols and procedures that were reliant on constant learning, adapting and crafting according to my specific project. Attia and Edge (2017, p. 33) refer to this as a 'process of on-going mutual

shaping between researcher and research' that was used through this study to ensure that contributions to knowledge were based on rigorous applications of scientific research processes.

The reflexive practices engaged in throughout the research can be categorised most accurately as either prospective or retrospective. Accessing Edge (2011), prospective reflexivity refers to the effect that the researcher had on the research, whereas retrospective reflexivity is concerned with how the study has impacted the researcher.

Prospective reflexivity was most evident throughout this study when dealing with my own status as either an insider or outsider. Having previously been both a teaching principal and executive contract principal in remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory, prior experience positioned me as an insider; a role imbued with both advantages and disadvantages. An apparent advantage was an appreciation I already had of the daily work requirements of a remote school principal, yet this was coupled with an apparent disadvantage in terms of the risk of personal experiences being drawn upon when determining findings. In this case, the potential contamination of data (Attia & Edge 2017) and spurious research conclusions (Silverman 2017) were avoided by relying only on procured research data when making claims and determining findings.

Equally confronting was my role as social scientist that located me as an outsider. This outsider / researcher role was a new identity for me personally but provided a beneficial vantage point beyond the daily responsibilities that directly impact what principals in remote Indigenous schools do, allowing an opportunity to contemplate leadership practice in a way I had never previously experienced and providing a range of new educational leadership insights.

Retrospective reflexivity throughout the research neatly captures the fact that personally and professionally this process has forever changed me. Invoking Dewey (1916) it can be surmised that while I sought to have an impact on the field that was researched, the process has also had a profound impact on me in return. When I began the research my understanding of the remote educational leadership landscape was very much anchored by practitioner understandings. What has shifted significantly throughout the research is the depth of my understanding through an engagement with empirical field work and the necessity to use theory to interpret what the data is saying.

Attia and Edge (2017) suggest that being a reflexive researcher requires an ongoing commitment to 'stepping forward' and 'stepping back'. My own personal journey involved almost constant movement between these two interrelated orientations. Stepping forward demanded my active commitment to conducting research through a design that aimed to utilise a methodology and methods that would enable the research question to be successfully answered. This also included the constant rehearsal of ideas through regular discussions with my supervisory team, and committing to a process of writing, editing and updating, and presenting at university forums about research progress. Stepping back involved taking the time to theorise what my data was indicating with the most surprising element being the many layers of theorising that are possible. While data was read and re-read, my understanding of what it meant changed over time as I became more familiar with scholarship in the field of inquiry, allowing an opportunity to interrogate my data through ever increasing understandings.

3.5 Conclusion

The methodology and methods employed in this study to answer the research question have been detailed throughout this chapter. An ethnographically informed methodology was selected as it provided scope to capture both the status quo of leadership practice in remote Indigenous schools and the intention to ultimately use this knowledge to generate new theoretical leadership possibilities.

In an effort to achieve the central aim of the research a number of important design elements were considered. The research sought to consider the perspectives of the people it ultimately aims to serve above all other priorities. In doing this it was recognised that research in Australia has a long history that has not served Indigenous interests well, requiring research that is motivated by new possibilities to privilege Indigenous voices at the local and global level to form the baseline upon which its design was shaped and framed.

From this critical platform of research design, important elements of data collection and data analysis were revealed. It was indicated that three phases of research from school profiling, principal interviews and site observations and, finally, principal provocations would provide rich data that could be analysed according to the lenses of the NT Strategy (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017), the tenets of CRP (Morrison et al. 2019) and culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

Finally, this chapter detailed a range of reflexive research practices that were engaged in throughout the study. Practical and philosophical dilemmas that involved ongoing navigation were detailed in order to simultaneously be disciplined in the role of social scientist, honour and respect the accounts provided by research participants, and ultimately be able to generate new leadership theories that may empower and support remote school principals to connect their leadership practice to their students' lives.

Chapter 4 – Leadership possibilities for strategic management in remote Indigenous schools

> Educational leaders and teachers will either reproduce oppression, or they will contest it (Khalifa 2018, p. 19).

4.1 Introduction

The DoE's commitment to providing a public education system that is focused on accelerating school improvement is driven through strategic management (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017). This form of management involves the ongoing planning, monitoring and assessment of an organisation in order for specific goals to be achieved. Bush and Coleman (2000) view strategic management in education as an all-encompassing aspect of an organisation's functions for the attainment of specific goals over an extended period of time. Strategic management in the Northern Territory is evident in the 2018-2022 NT Strategy that coercively aligns the values of the DoE to the work carried out by its employees. This ensures that DoE staff have a clear understanding about their role in contributing to the overarching educational visions of their employer.

Educational leadership performance is widely regarded as integral to the improvement of whole school sites (Cranston 2013; Leithwood et al. 2004; Masters 2011; Wilson 2014) and is therefore a critical component of the current DoE strategic management direction. Despite the apparent efficacy of leadership to improve educational outcomes, debate remains about how to systematise and address educational reform in remote Indigenous communities (Good to Great Schools 2018; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Hughes & Hughes 2012; Northern Territory Department of Education 2017; Sarra 2003). Many of these debates were foregrounded in chapters one and two, where variations across stakeholder groups were demonstrated in regard to the purpose of education, how educational problems are represented and the solutions that are deemed necessary to transform remote Indigenous education contexts.

In order to navigate a range of educational imperatives, school leaders filter external educational demands and constraints in relation to local aspirations at the site of the 'autonomy gap'. As articulated by Heffernan (2018, p. 32) this refers to:

> …the gap between what principals have identified that they need to do in order to produce the types of data being sought by school systems, and their power to actually implement these changes.

Heffernan's autonomy gap conceptualisation places the remote school principal in a unique decision-making situation where they must constantly use their available leadership agency to navigate a range of competing educational priorities. These competing demands force leaders to determine what is regarded as the core business of the school and what is considered peripheral.

This chapter will contrast strategic management literature, leadership autonomy and the culturally responsive literature outlined in the literature review. The chapter comprises three sections. First an examination of DoE policy priorities as strategic management; second, principal portraits are examined for systemic accountabilities and needs of remote students, and finally an analysis of key leadership challenges is outlined.

4.2 Education NT Strategy 2018-2022 (NT Strategy)

The NT Strategy (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017) is the DoE's current strategic management initiative aimed at driving student learning improvement. The strategy (Education NT Strategy 2018-2022, Northern Territory Department of Education 2017, p. 1) asserts that:

> We are committed to a strong public education system that ensures equity and gives every child the opportunity to engage, grow and achieve. We will accelerate school improvement by ensuring schools' priorities are focused and that the system supports what schools need to achieve better outcomes for children and students.

In order to achieve 'better outcomes' and 'accelerate school improvement', the DoE outlines school priorities that must be focused in highly prescriptive ways.

Before analysing the current agenda of the DoE, it is useful to first consider how such agendas are shaped. While former Northern Territory policy directions have been guided by a range of reviews and reports, contemporary education policies, shaped by global and national interests influence school leadership and its measures of productivity (Ball 2016; Rizvi & Lingard 2010). Implicit in these policies are 'Western-orientated' intellectual, social and political values of schooling that the NT government has invoked for its constituency; approaches that this thesis indicates as stemming from Taylorist and neo-liberal logics that were foregrounded in chapter two (2.3.1).

Despite the Northern Territory having the largest number of Indigenous communities in the country where local Indigenous languages are used (Hall & Guenther 2019), Western standards of literacy and numeracy feature normatively in the purpose ascribed to remote schooling and the required practices of educators. Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson (2015, p. 9) describe what counts in a remote Northern Territory education, through an analysis of the 2014 Wilson review that informed the current NT Strategy:

> Statistical and demographic forms of knowledge are privileged over knowledge derived from the culture, traditions, values and history of Aboriginal people, and the involvement of school communities is positioned as unnecessary, unless those communities are willing to work within the confines of a preconceived model of educational success.

Here, Western knowledge and language is positioned as most important – a feature that is intended to guide the practice orientations of school principals. In this leadership role, principals are required to lead the transformation of educator practice for school improvement by mobilising whole-school approaches that align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to departmental imperatives as part of the overarching strategic management plan. These imperatives are evidenced in remote school principal job descriptions (teaching principal and executive contract principal) examined as part of this research. They highlight the requirement for a principal's leadership practice to be accountable to the NT Strategy goals:

> The Principal plays a vital role in delivering the strategic plan of the Department of Education and is the leading educational professional in the school who inspires students, staff and community members to optimise the learning of all students (appendix J).

The contemporary remote school principal's professionalism defined by the NT Strategy, embeds 'school improvement' as consensus accountability and the solution involves accelerating reform with help from 'system supports with what schools need to achieve better outcomes' (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017, p. 1). According to system measures of success, these 'outcomes' are aligned directly with NAPLAN outputs through a specific focus on literacy and numeracy achievement.

While school leader empowerment and autonomy is assumed in the NT Strategy, leaders are constrained and restricted with little room for translation in their enactment of policy at the local site. Hayes et al. (2005) argue that policy rhetoric on school autonomy frames ideas of empowerment that do not necessarily translate to authentic empowerment in practice.

Throughout this study I seek to deliberately work at the level of policy discourse since that allows a critical analysis of the demands and constraints placed on principals, especially the codified instructions presented as a regime of truth for the processes that shape discourses of excellence and success. Neeleman (2019) argues that these regimes of truth are widespread and in 'many countries, education systems are moving towards a combination of increased school autonomy and intensified accountability' (p. 31) – a direction that is most evident in the DoE according to data captured and outlined later in this chapter. Neeleman (2019) further explains that in the wake of such shifts, school decision-making and the role of the school leader has gained in importance. Despite these trends, surprisingly little is known about how schools and school leaders use their autonomy in practice (Neeleman 2019, p. 31). Some countries allow autonomy in resource allocation but not in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment, while others such as Australia and New Zealand are the opposite (Neeleman 2019, p. 32). As for principals in Australian remote Indigenous schools, they are policy actors faced with the problem of interpreting policy to mediate at the level of school-based practices. This is a complex practice that challenges their autonomy.

Consequently, the DoE claims to devolve school autonomy, but in practice this does not always translate to a full version of educational leadership autonomy. The focus therefore is to analyse how principals enact their autonomy according to culturally responsive educational tenets in remote schools in ways that are relevant to local contexts. This involves consideration of how leadership strengthens teacher capacity, grows community trust and collectively raises educational expectations, while simultaneously acting to deliver system outputs (such as student tests, enrolment and attendance figures, retention reports and other school accountability measures).

The autonomy of the remote DoE school leader can be seen as heavily influenced by corporate managerialist approaches (Smyth et al. 1993). This is an orientation where autonomy is granted, provided that the educational leader is also 'a team player', who 'co-operate[s]' with macro objectives. This allows the DoE to position itself as empowering local school principals through a form of 'participative' control (Smyth et al. 1993), while also ensuring that they can 'divest themselves of the responsibilities for implementation' (Smyth et al. 1993, p. 2). School leaders therefore finds themselves caught between positions of policy actor and policy subject, symbolic of imposed neo-liberalism that is guided by an audit culture. What this study is interested in is determining how leaders enact their practice when located both within and outside policy discourse that shapes their roles.

While a full copy of the NT Strategy is available in appendix I, segments of the strategy are introduced in the next section in order to clarify the educational priorities of the DoE and how a remote school principal's practice is implicated as part of this plan.

4.2.1 Focus areas and design principles of the NT Strategy

There are four focus areas of the NT Strategy: quality teaching, data and accountability, differentiated support for schools, and community engagement. Each of these focus areas is outlined in figure 4. When examining the language that underpins each focus area, the DoE can be seen to be using a series of maxims to emphasise their intended direction. This is a skilful and clever technique that forms the strategy's design as it is difficult to dispute or disagree with amorphous, ambiguous truths of this nature (Silverman 2020).

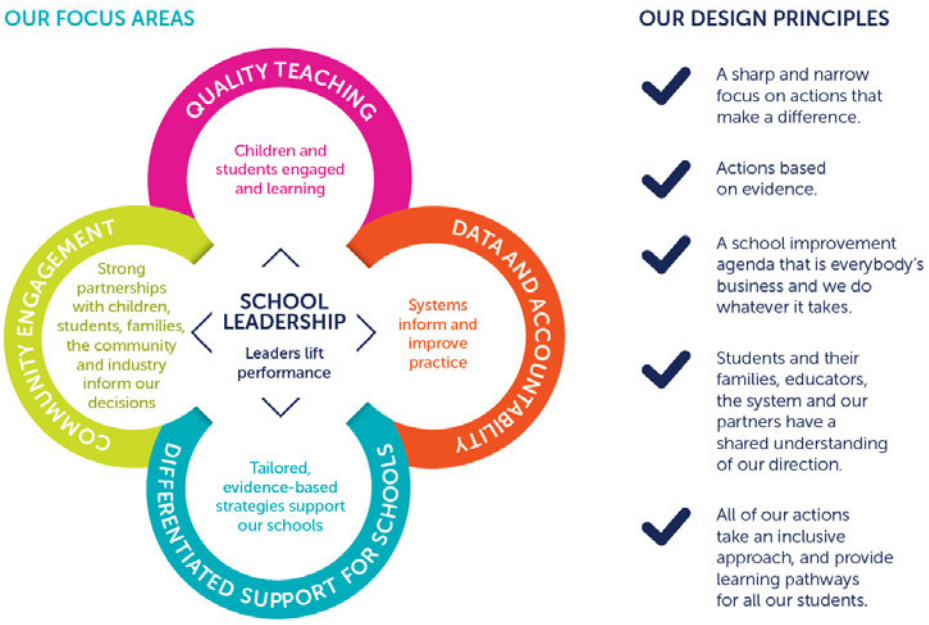

Figure 4. Focus areas of the NT Strategy

The ideas highlighted in figure 4 are an example of what Schubert and Sooryamoorthy (2010) call a centre-periphery model. This is where influence is exerted from the DoE's head office in Darwin, impacting the direction of Northern Territory schools and the work of remote school principals who practice their leadership at a significant geographical distance from 'the centre'. The NT Strategy locates school leadership amidst the four focus areas, highlighting the significance that the DoE places on school leaders who have on-site responsibility to 'lift performance'.

The design principles outlined in figure 4 underpin the NT Strategy and highlight important factors that influence what is expected for all schools within the DoE jurisdiction. These principles are characteristic of efficiency and effectiveness measures that Smyth (1989) unequivocally states have no place in schools. Drawing on logic offered by Smyth (1989), the NT Strategy design principles seek to exercise hegemony and control, but in the process they simultaneously limit the scope and possibilities that education may afford. For example, a leader's work is connected to DoE determined education performance targets, allowing responsibility to be conferred directly onto the department for framing the educational agenda. As part of this approach 'a sharp and narrow focus' is outlined – an approach that scholars warn residualises students' educational experiences (Au 2011; Biesta 2016; Disbray 2014; Luke 2009; Smyth 2008). Similarly, while the design principles state that actions are based on evidence, this may raise questions about whose evidence has been utilised to determine the required actions (Biesta 2010). Presumably this 'evidence' is not representative of collective research or collective educational aspirations as the strategy articulates that 'school improvement is regarded as everyone's business' before contradicting itself when indicating that partners must share an understanding of 'our' (the DoE's) direction when referring to school improvement. This indicates a monological approach that is not considerate of multiple stakeholder perspectives. Finally, the design principle that 'inclusivity is prioritised for all students' appears weak in addressing the fact that 73.3% of Northern Territory Government Schools are located in remote or very remote communities (Northern Territory Department of Education 2019a) whose students' cultural, linguistic and contextual needs do not appear to have been taken into consideration. In each case, the design principles of the NT Strategy can be seen as problematic as they reduce educational possibilities and, in doing so, pose a significant dilemma for leaders who are required to align their practice accordingly.

To determine the extent of a school's improvement and a leader's progress, the NT Strategy lists a number of categorisations that are utilised to measure success. These measures outline specifically how the DoE utilises the collection of data to support their conceptualisation of quality education. These measures used to determine success in DoE schools under the NT Strategy are outlined in Figure 5.



Figure 5. NT Strategy measures of success

The logic and central requirements of the DoE are evident in these 'success measures' with each one impacting principal performance and autonomy for leadership practice. Not only is their performance judged against these criteria, educational leaders are also required as part of their professional responsibilities to collect on a regular basis data that aligns with departmental success determinants. These requirements ensure that leaders focus and continually re-focus their energies and attention on imperatives determined beyond their specific educational contexts. Success can be seen as predominantly measurable through quantitative data that Gunter (2001) highlights is indicative of scientific and instrumentalist education orientations. These orientations are yet another form of intended efficiency and effectiveness (Smyth 1989) where 'progress' at any given school or group of schools can be quickly ascertained. What these measures fail to do however is understand the important contextual narratives that sit behind numerical data, therefore providing an incomplete picture of what is actually going on.

4.2.2 Links between the NT Strategy and annual school improvement plans

At each DoE school an annual school improvement plan (SIP) determines a range of educational priority areas. This planning document provides scope for schools to select two of the DoE's school priorities (based on the NT Strategy) and up to two additional priorities that are relevant to a school's individual context. The combination of these priorities then forms the basis of the school's twelve-month focus. Once the annual SIP has been drafted by school staff, it must be endorsed by the chair of the school council and approved by the DoE's senior director of school improvement and leadership.

According to samples provided by all principals involved in the study, each SIP includes details pertaining to the nominated priority area, how these priorities will be delivered, evidence of achievement, baseline data from the previous school year, targets for the current school year, actions that will be taken to achieve the selected priorities, person/s responsible

for overseeing development of each priority, resources allocated to each priority and the timeframe determined for achievement.

Each priority area listed as part of the SIP is monitored throughout the school year with principals required to provide periodic and end of year reports for the DoE as part of their professional remit.

4.3 Remote school contexts and principal portraits

4.3.1 Rocky Cliff School and Principal

Situated more than 250km from the nearest regional centre, Rocky Cliff is officially categorised as a very remote school. The school caters for sixteen Indigenous students from preparatory to year six via two, full-time teaching staff. These two staff members were both new to the school in the year in which data was collected, both are non-Indigenous, originate from outside the community itself and respectively hold the positions of teacher and teaching principal. No local staff are currently employed in the school.

The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value of 672, which compares to a national average of 1000 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020). Student attendance is >70% across all year levels and >90% of students' first language is a language other than English. There are five main local languages or dialects that are spoken within the community. At the time of initial data collection, the most recent data available through the *My School* website for Rocky Cliff was from 2012, presumably because a minimum of five students in a year level must complete NAPLAN in any given year for data to be displayed. This data indicated that students at the school were 'substantially below' when compared with all Australian students.

John, the school principal at Rocky Cliff, performs the role of a teaching principal. John is an experienced remote school principal having taught and been in numerous other school principal roles in Indigenous communities in both the Northern Territory and Western Australia. When John agreed to be part of the study, he had just started at Rocky Cliff School.

Interview data indicates that John views local involvement in the school as critical. In his first interview he suggested, 'strength lies in the local people in positions of authority and making decisions for their community'. In previous schools, John considered the employment of local staff a priority. He stated, 'at my last school, I had five local staff, and that's where I…

invested my resources into people' and 'it works way better when you can deliver education in partnership with local people'. One of the greatest challenges for John at Rocky Cliff School was that upon his arrival at the community, no local persons were employed in any capacity at the school.

John viewed the lack of local staff at the school as a structural impediment to teaching and learning at Rocky Cliff due to frustrations in making local community links without the input of local employees. Drawing upon prior experiences, John referred to the utility of local assistant teachers who were familiar in operating between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. At Rocky Cliff, the absence of local input was compounded by having 100% new non-local staff at the school and one of them being completely new to remote Indigenous contexts.

John's approach is to try and learn, respond and adapt to local circumstances and approaches, yet he is heavily guided in the enactment of his work by the NT Strategy. This is evidenced when he says:

> The Department of Education has a strategic plan. Their four key areas are quality teaching, data and accountability, differentiated support for schools and community engagement. From that, remote schools were asked to choose…outcomes to work on in the annual SIPs. There were pretty much only two that aligned with small remote schools. One is to target attendance in the hope of increasing every student to be attending 80% or above. The second is around literacy in the NAPLAN writing results.

In this example we can see that while the DoE provides a degree of choice for schools, John regards this as a directed choice since the options available to remote schools are significantly limited. The limitation of John's autonomy as a school principal is also captured when he says:

> At the end of the day, I am here, I am employed to provide what the department is telling me I need to be doing. I still have to bring it right on back to that.

This comment is telling as it indicates the significant institutional pressure that is exerted on leaders to acquiesce to departmental imperatives. While John's previous comments suggest a desire to access community knowledge, his final insight demonstrates the limits of how willing he is to utilise his subjectivity for student benefit. By acknowledging that he has a role to play in a larger educational agenda, John provides himself with an 'out' through the adoption of a leadership posture that is ultimately dictated by the hegemonic power structures of the DoE.

4.3.2 Willington School and Principal

The Willington School is classified as very remote. It is a one teacher school where the teaching principal takes responsibility for both the teaching program and all administrative requirements of the school. Bob, the school principal, is supported by one local part-time assistant teacher and one part-time local bus driver who transports students from nearby communities to the central school site.

The school has an enrolment of seventeen students, 100% of whom are Indigenous. According to the school principal, English is either the third or fourth language of the students who attend the school. Willington School has an average attendance of 71% and according to *My School* data (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020), all students are 'substantially below' other Australian students in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy. The school has an ICSEA value of 588 when considering all students from transition to year nine.

Bob has been the principal at Willington School for five and a half years, having moved to the Northern Territory from overseas. He had previously worked as both a classroom teacher and school principal in his country of origin. As his career as an educator progressed, he found himself removed from classroom activities, and this was the catalyst for choosing to work in a small remote NT school where he could have a more direct impact at the classroom level. As Bob put it, 'I'm a teacher and my sideline is being a principal'. Despite his passion for teaching that was most evident when on-site, Bob indicated that his current role is extremely demanding:

> I do all the principal role stuff. I do the little stuff to the big stuff, you know, to development plans, school-wide development plans, the school, the reports, annual reports too. I do the whole lot. I do the student administration system, I do, I do the mundane stuff, I do it all. We do it all, you know, it might not be for a large number of students, but you do it all.

In enacting his role as both principal and teacher, Bob is guided by a philosophy for a remote education that is largely geared towards his students receiving an education *on Country* that affords them life choices. These life choices are predicated upon what Bob understands the community wants for their children:

> They do want their kids to receive education on land, on Country…they want what every parent wants really, that their kids learn to read, write and can go out the other side…and work, get jobs.

What is most interesting in this account is Bob's inference that local parents simply want what all parents want; schooling that leads to jobs. This orientation aligns closely with Western subscriptions to human capital theory that sees school as being a necessary step on the path to becoming an economically productive citizen (Guenther, Disbray & Osborne 2014). To achieve this function of schooling, Bob highlights the importance of his assistant teacher, Joanne, when he says, 'she's pivotal to the success of the school too because she's my link'. Joanne is seen as bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being and allows a way in to understanding the students' lifeworlds.

As highlighted in subsequent chapters, Bob utilises his leadership autonomy to influence local schooling in a range of ways; however in the area of student learning and achievement, he adopts a largely mainstream educational approach that finds synergy with the focus areas outlined in the NT Strategy. For Bob, this alignment presumably provides the best means of achieving the goal of affording students an education that will lead to life choices and employment possibilities.

4.3.3 Bluebird School and Principal

Bluebird School is the largest school involved in this study with an enrolment of over 200 students overseen by an executive contract principal and a total of forty local and non-local staff. While the school principal does not have a dedicated teaching role, she does 'fill in' where required if staff are absent. The school provides an education that extends from a Families as First Teachers program (birth to three years) through to year twelve and has an average attendance of 55%. Of these students, 99% are Indigenous, speaking a combination of a local language, Aboriginal English and SAE within the community. This local language is also utilised in school programs as Bluebird has bilingual educational status (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020).

According to *My School* data (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020), Bluebird School has an ICSEA value of 651 and in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy, students are considered to be 'substantially below' other Australian students in years three, five, seven and nine. Geographically, Bluebird School is located in excess of 300km from the nearest regional centre, categorising it as very remote.

Bluebird School places significant value on developing student capacities to be biliterate and bicultural learners. According to the SIP, school-wide actions are listed as needing to be 'contextual' and 'culturally relevant'.

Beth, the principal of Bluebird School, is an experienced educator, having taught in multiple Australian schools and jurisdictions. While coming from interstate for this appointment, Beth's career has included teaching and educational leadership roles in city and remote locales. The philosophical foundations that guide Beth's leadership practice are captured when she states:

> …my leadership style is about bringing people on board so that everybody is heading in the same direction and everybody has a shared commitment to what it is we want to achieve…It centres around a direction and it centres around where we're heading and a vision. It doesn't centre around a person…It has to be community focused. It has to be sustainable.

Beth's approach to school leadership is governed by a desire to utilise her leadership autonomy to try and connect, where possible, the school and the community. In an informal walk around the school prior to lessons beginning, Beth provided details about how she sees the school priorities, as noted in the following field notes:

> Beth highlighted this morning that she walks her talk. The school feels like a community school. Local staff and parents are everywhere – running the breakfast program, doing bus runs to pick up kids and working with other staff to do yard duty. When she talks [Beth] it is all about the community; what they've done [the school and community], what they are doing now and what the plans are for the future.

4.3.4 Riverglen School and Principal

Riverglen School consists of three classes that span the year levels from transition to year nine. The school is led by a teaching principal who oversees the teaching and learning of a senior class and also the leadership, management and administrative requirements of the school. Other staff at the school include two non-local teachers and one local assistant teacher. The school has an enrolment of fifty-five Indigenous students who have an average attendance of 63%.

The school has an ICSEA value of 565 and while students are represented by NAPLAN data (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020) as 'substantially above' students from similar schools, they are also considered 'substantially below' other Australian students for all areas of standardised testing. Riverglen School is over 200km from the nearest regional centre, categorising it as a very remote.

Josie, the principal of Riverglen School, was within the first six months of her principalship when initially involved in the study yet had worked at the school for six years prior in a range

of teaching positions. Josie originally came to the Northern Territory from interstate, as was the case with the two other non-local teachers working at the school.

As a relatively new principal, on-site observations noted that Josie was highly enthusiastic about her newly appointed role and was keen to both perform successfully and be viewed by others as successful. Field notes from my arrival at the school, indicate thoughts from our first meeting:

> Upon arrival at the school I was warmly and enthusiastically greeted by Josie who was keen to show me all of the school facilities. As we toured the school, Josie's passion was evident, but her commentary was indicative of someone who had a point to prove. While proud of her school, much talk was focused on how things might appear with lots of comparisons being made between the success of her school and the troubles that other schools within the region experience on a daily basis.

What was evident in themes established from both field observations and interview responses was that Josie's educational leadership philosophy is guided heavily by her predecessor who led the school for many years. She indicated that:

> I'm drumming the same messages…I have made it clear to them [the community] that I'm not changing [from previous approaches taken]

Josie also highlights in interviews that she is aware of her visitor status in the community and simply wishes to drive an education that affords students the best opportunities for the future.

> …it's the community's school, we work here. So, it's not us telling you. What do you want from us? We will drive it.

> …they [the community] want their kids to have an education to give themselves the best chance for a better future.

When analysing data in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy (chapter five), professional learning (chapter six) and school-community engagement (chapter seven), it is evident that there is a degree of superficiality in Josie's comments with regards to privileging community aspirations. While Josie is keen to link learning to students' lifeworlds, the greatest influences on her leadership of the school are the strategic focus areas as determined by the DoE. This has Josie using her leadership autonomy to position DoE priorities at the core of what the school does, whilst relegating community priorities to the periphery.

4.3.5 Sunshine School and Principal

Sunshine School is located over 450km from the nearest Northern Territory regional centre. The school comprises forty-four students, a teaching principal, two full-time non-local teachers and one non-local assistant teacher. The school is also supported by Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) personnel who seek to strengthen the bonds between the school and the community as a means of improving student attendance (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020). The school has an ICSEA value of 560 and students are considered to be 'substantially below' other Australian students across the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020).

Brian, the teaching principal was in his third year at the school when first involved in the study. Prior to this appointment, Brian had worked in his home state for many years as a classroom teacher and in school leadership roles in both mainstream schools and Indigenous community schools. The philosophy that guides Brian's leadership practice is a desire to appeal to the educational aspirations of all parties; in this case the DoE and the local community. Brian highlights this when saying, 'I try and be the piggy in the middle and achieve both sides'.

Brian recognises the expertise that he and his fellow non-local teachers bring to the school, but also recognises their collective limitations. It is at the site of these limitations that Brian welcomes the expertise that is found in the local community. He says:

> …we're on their land, they're the ones who know the kids the best.
>
> …we can come in and try and read the kids and stuff but they're the ones that have the knowledge.

While Brian attempts to navigate the space between the DoE and the community so that all stakeholders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, get what they desire, he admits that this can be challenging as 'at the end of the day, I'm employed by the department'. The principal at Sunshine School recognises the complexity of the landscape upon which his work is situated and tries where possible to approach the delivery of a remote education in a manner that appeals to two agendas that are not philosophically aligned.

4.3.6 School principal characteristics

These five principal portraits provide an understanding of contextual factors that impact the leadership practice of each research informant. While this portraiture sought to recognise and

illuminate many of the nuanced aspects that were unique to each school principal's educational setting, a number of common factors also emerged. These included:

- All principals spoke English as their predominant language;
- All principals originated from outside the Northern Territory;
- All principals brought considerable outsider perspectives and understandings with them to their roles yet minimal understandings that related specifically to the community context in which they were working;
- All principals indicated that every remote community context is different, however the requirement to use DoE school improvement plan proformas and select 'local priorities' from pre-determined departmental priorities, resulted in significant homogeneity in educational focus across all school sites;
- All principals recognised the omnipresent power and influence of the DoE, positioning them as controlling the master narrative in remote education;
- All principals expressed an acute understanding of departmental educational framings and the need to guide school processes in alignment with these orientations;
- All principals positioned themselves according to paired identities (themselves and the DoE, themselves and the community, themselves and the students, themselves and school staff). What was always present was their leadership role; a role that positioned them at the nexus of all localised education matters;
- Localised educational aspirations were only known by principals who had engaged in deep and ongoing dialogue with the community

4.4 Analysis

In order to make sense of what remote school principals are required to do under the existing DoE strategic management plan, invoking questions posed by Apple (2017) provides a useful conceptual lens. Apple (2017, p. 249) asks if new community-based models have emerged as part of leaderships' response to evolving movements in the field of education:

> …it would be useful to see what the traditions of leadership were in the racially segregated schools of the south in the United States or in First Nation schools in Canada, or in Maori schools in New Zealand, where everyday leadership had to often fight against an interventionist and racialising state. Did a more community-based and responsive form of leadership evolve? What contradictions and compromises had to be engaged in?

When ideas relating to community-based models are drawn upon, one of the most significant challenges for remote school principals is mediating their practice amidst an environment where the philosophical frames and measures of success of the DoE are misaligned with the context in which their leadership is enacted. To this end, one could ask how principals honour the diversity that exists across Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory when they are required to maintain a 'sharp and narrow' focus. How do school principals connect school processes to their students' local languages, land and culture (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016), when they are required to privilege the development of SAE? How do school principals engage in authentic dialogue with the community about local educational aspirations when the design principles explicitly outline an educational direction that has been pre-determined?

These questions highlight the complexity of the leadership practice landscape for remote school principals. They must on one hand adhere to the strategic imperatives of the DoE, but in doing so may be conducting their practice in opposition to what culturally responsive research suggests is in the best interests of their students. This indicates that the role of a leader in a remote Indigenous school is imbued with contradiction, ambiguity and liminality. This is a landscape where 'philosophical doubleness' (Platt 2009, p. 17) impacts the paradigm in which remote school principals work and where conflicting priorities must be constantly navigated.

An example of this is found in the statements of the principal at Rocky Cliff who stated that 'it works way better when you can deliver education in partnership with local people' but then admits that 'at the end of the day, I am here, I am employed to provide what the department is telling me I need to be doing'. This illustrates that the principal knows what is desired locally but is pulled by his employer to abide most attentively to their wishes. Similarly, in the words of the Riverglen principal: '…it's the community's school, we work here. So, it's not us telling you. What do you want from us? We will drive it'. This comment is suggestive of responsiveness to community needs, yet further discussion reveals a more fixed position: 'I have made it clear to them [the community] that I'm not changing [from previous approaches taken]'.

In both cases the words of the principals highlight that they exercise leadership according to ongoing paradoxical tensions. On one hand their work is guided and directed by macro-political, neo-liberal rationalities as evidenced in the NT Strategy; on the other hand these

directives are often incongruent with local educational aspirations that were foregrounded in the literature review according to the research of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016). Neo-liberal forces seek to influence education from beyond the school gate according to core-periphery modelling that favours very particular forms of principal subjectivity. This positions non-local school leaders as both the controllers and experts of remote Indigenous schools in an era where scholarship suggests that education should be based on models that actively seek community input (Krakouer 2015; Morrison et al. 2019; Perso 2012; Sarra et al. 2018).

The NT Strategy is a model of neo-liberal tooling that scholars have suggested reduces the scope of what schools do (see examples in Au 2011; Biesta 2016; Disbray 2014; Luke 2009; Smyth 2008). Under the strategy, school leaders and the staff they lead are considered to be empowered in their functionality, provided that they comply with the 'externally imagined' (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Kanno & Norton 2009) master narrative of their institutional employer. In the case of the DoE, this has a 'sharp and narrow focus' on English literacy and numeracy development. Additionally, as the DoE is a relatively small education department that falls under 'Territory accountabilities' to the Commonwealth of Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2020b), the distance upon which national influence can be exerted on localised schooling is relatively short. For the school principal this limits their autonomy as they may be more easily 'guided' in their micro-political leadership practice on the ground than some of their principal counterparts in larger educational jurisdictions across the nation.

This method of control is referred to by Foucault (2002) as a form of 'governmentality'. Foucault's use of this term is a portmanteau creation that brings together conceptualisations of government and mentality, describing how governments rationalise actions that are deployed to coerce societal functioning (Foucault 2002). Rose (1999) refers to governmentality as a distinctive form of neo-liberalism, where individuals are controlled through technologies of the self in which their own 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault 2002, p. 341) shapes how power, truth and discourse operate. Savage (2013, p. 97) suggests that these controls result in situations where:

> …individuals are now positioned to invest in and calculate about themselves in order to maximise both the productivity of themselves and of the organisations or institutions to which they are directly accountable.

These accountability narratives are evident in the NT Strategy. They use Western conceptualisations to measure local education achievement yet often fail to include remote Indigenous community framings of what educational success involves (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016). These accountability measures show scant regard for including either the interests of the community (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), student lifeworlds (Morrison et al. 2019) or local funds of knowledge (Johnson 2007; Moll et al. 1992). Thus, they locate school leaders who enact their practice within this neo-liberal framework under the constant influence of the dominant societal knowledge and power apparatus. This imposes restrictions on what principals can think, say and do because they are bound by the need to streamline much of their leadership practice according to discursive and panoptic system-determined educational purposes. While these orientations limit and control the autonomy of educational leaders, they also regard students in a school principal's charge as 'objects of the system' (Au 2011). Here, the connection between learning at school and the cultural and contextual dimensions of students' lives is residualised by the very system that purports to be working in their interest.

Principals in remote Indigenous schools therefore find themselves working at the site of complex competing forces (Guenther & Osborne 2018b): one force that limits their professional autonomy through neo-liberal agendas and another that recognises the benefit of connecting education to the local culture and context. The collective scholarship of Molla and Gale (2018) and Ball and Maroy (2009) that was foregrounded in chapters two and three has utility when considering how remote school principals mediate their practice when navigating competing demands.

The leadership practice of principals at Riverglen and Willington schools predominantly aligns with 'compliance / instrumental' orientations as they appeared content in cohering with the directives prescribed by the NT Strategy. Whether these practices are considered deliberate or the result of attempting to remain neutral, either way their approaches are unable to bring about full versions of culturally responsive leadership (Khalifa 2018). The educational philosophy of the principal at Sunshine School involved a 'compromise / hybrid' approach as he sought to 'try and be the piggy in the middle and achieve both sides'. At Bluebird School the philosophy of the principal aligns with the idea that citizenship begins at the school level and is central to democratic society (O'Bryan & Rose 2015). This ideological underpinning, combined with local structures that have historically supported local input at the school, identifies the Bluebird principal's practice as 'expressive' according to 'logics of

action' as conceptualised by Ball and Maroy (2009). Leadership autonomy is utilised here to try and 'prioritize community interests' (Khalifa 2018, p. 150) and is an example of authentic culturally responsive possibilities. In this case, a community-centric focus is privileged beyond a school or department-centric orientation. In saying this, it is however important to note that in addition to the evident efficacy of bilingual education in connecting learning to students' lives, Bluebird School enjoys a status and resourcing that is not enjoyed by other schools involved in the research. Therefore, this leadership practice cannot genuinely be regarded as a form of leadership 'contest' according to the scholarship of Molla and Gale (2018) as the principal is merely facilitating what the local community expect and have come to expect over many years.

The principal whose leadership practice orientation is the most difficult to locate is the Rocky Cliff leader. John explicitly indicated a desire through previous leadership roles to use his autonomy to 'work with' the community, yet due to the early stage of his appointment at a new school, this characteristic of his previous leadership work was not evident in on-site observations; something that John also discussed in detail during interviews as a goal that he wished to address over time.

In Australia, the imperative to 'work with' Indigenous people and communities rather than doing things 'to' Indigenous people has been strongly advocated for in the work of Indigenous scholar Chris Sarra (Ladwig & Sarra 2009; Sarra 2003; Sarra 2005; Sarra 2013). While this approach is widely accepted in literature as having utility, there is a disconnect between the NT Strategy and authentic collaboration and co-construction of strategic educational directives. The NT Strategy uses discourses such as 'equity' and 'shared understandings' and 'inclusive approach', yet there is an apparent superficiality to these terms that limits the extent to which a leader can utilise their autonomy to connect learning to the cultural and contextual aspects of their students' lives. This superficiality is evidenced in a strategic plan that appears to be counter to the educational aspirations sought by remote Indigenous communities (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Spillman 2017; Wildy & Clarke 2012) and is more akin to Western philosophical purposes and framings.

The goals and focus of the NT Strategy is characteristic of an approach that is tied to globalised models of 'what matters' (Biesta 2016) and 'what counts' (Au 2011) in education, which have a narrow view of what schools should do in order to adhere to contemporary educational trends. The danger of such directions is that universal approaches may lose some

of their relevance and innovation that is possible when developing education more generatively according to local needs and aspirations (Eacott 2018; Lingard 2018b). Where place and context are considered inconsequential to macro objectives, socially just forms of practice may be erased and replaced in favour of imperatives underpinned by hegemonic philosophies of the educational mainstream.

According to this research, the 'common principal profile' in a remote DoE Indigenous school speaks English as their predominant language, originates from beyond the Northern Territory and brings with them outsider worldviews and understandings. These realities combined with a need to adhere to neo-liberal-inspired departmental logics, delimits the capacity and agency that school principals have to practice leadership in a manner that meaningfully responds to students' lifeworlds. Drawing on community-based conceptualisations offered by Apple (2017), the strategic management plan of the DoE can be seen as highly restrictive. Consequently, it is currently upon the agency exercised at the site of the autonomy gap (Heffernan 2018) where a principal's practice shows its most culturally and contextually inclusive possibilities. This suggests that current DoE leadership framings are unfit for use in remote Indigenous contexts. The purpose of leadership in remote Indigenous schools needs to be further prosecuted in order to allow scope for practice to bring greater convergence between school functions and the cultural, linguistic and contextual needs of their students.

At present, remote school leaders are most responsive to an educational agenda that is philosophically distant to the community in which it is to be enacted. This dissertation suggests that until this orientation shifts, educational transformation in remote Indigenous schools remains unlikely. Transformational possibilities are reliant on the role of the community being re-centred, shifting the way we conceptualise the role of the school leader in the process.

4.5 Conclusion

The existing outcomes-agenda of the NT Strategy seeks to empower local school leaders, but it does so in highly restrictive ways. The challenge for principals of remote Indigenous schools is how to mobilise their leadership autonomy by filtering external educational demands in relation to community aspirations and the cultural and contextual needs of their students.

Through the use of principal portraits, the subjectivity and extent of leadership autonomy of the school leaders involved in this study has been highlighted. The portraits reveal the philosophical underpinnings of the five school leaders involved in the study that demonstrate their 'logics of action' according to DoE mandates and the educational goals of the local community. Accordingly, the remote principals can be seen as applying instrumental, expressive or hybrid forms of leadership practice. While possibility exists in all leadership orientations, the strongest connection between leadership practice and possibilities to authentically connect learning to students' lives came at Bluebird School that has bilingual status.

While variation is apparent in how remote school leaders utilise their agency and autonomy to mediate competing demands, there was also a common feature: they all practice their leadership at the site of significant contradiction, ambiguity and liminality. This manifests in educational leadership that is enacted within a paradoxical environment where neo-liberal rationalities and local aspirations are expected to co-exist despite an apparent incongruence. At the nexus of these competing demands, complexity continues to favour external, hegemonic educational objectives to the detriment of social justice objectives that could be established upon local educational aspirations. This study proposes that holding true to the status quo will not transform remote schools and improve remote Indigenous learning outcomes. Rather, alternative pedagogies of leadership practices are required so that new possibilities can be brought into fruition according to a more expansive definition of what it actually means to be an educational leader in a remote Indigenous school. Such a form of leadership would re-centre the role of the local community, allowing for the establishment of a collective educational purpose that meets the needs of all remote education stakeholders.

Chapter 5 – Curriculum and pedagogy in remote Indigenous schools

> First Nations children are often placed in environments that do not reflect their identity, language, history or knowledge-systems, and they are often placed in environments that deny and diminish their culture. Children are frequently subject to deficit-based and remedial approaches in education. Too often children feel like failures, which places both their educational outcomes and their wellbeing at risk (Children's Ground 2020, viewed July 14, 2020).

5.1 Introduction

Comber and Kamler (2004) argue that curriculum and pedagogy are core components of education as they emerge from the established purpose of education to determine what is taught and how it is delivered. These critical aspects of education are overseen at the school level by the principal who is regarded through extensive research as a leader of learning (see examples in Barber, Whelan & Clark 2010; Hallinger 2011a; Hattie 2009; Leithwood et al. 2004) because their role involves the continuous development of the school's learning vision (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2014).

This thesis draws upon the scholarship of Egan (2003) to define curriculum as a central component of schooling that is focused on critical content knowledge as determined by an overarching educational vision. Curriculum considers *what* is prioritised through teaching and learning and is determined by sets of 'norms, knowledge and skills' (Egan 2003, p. 9) that are regarded as salient for a society's continuance. Critical commentators such as Apple (2013), Biesta (2010), Berliner and Biddle (1996), Nichols and Berliner (2007) and Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) have long highlighted the connection between educational curriculum and political agendas. Collectively, these scholars argue that school curriculum is far from neutral. Rather, it is a political technology that favours the agendas of the privileged, whose powerful norms, values and ideologies are embodied within its design. Those with power and influence therefore determine what the purpose of schooling is and, having established grounds for why a particular focus is required, seek to establish not only what is included as part of educational curriculum, but also what is excluded (Ball 2019; Biesta 2016; Lingard 2018b). In the context of this study, the construction and implementation of the Australian Curriculum is a political act (Hayes et al. 2005), where 'official' curriculum knowledge is regarded as essential and Indigenous knowledges, and the knowledge of other

marginalised groups, are considered non-essential (Gramsci 1995; Klenowski 2009; Unsworth 2013; Wigglesworth, Simpson & Loakes 2011).

Drawing on the work of Green (2003) and Bouchard (2014), pedagogy can be defined as *how* learning takes place. For educators, pedagogy is the instructional dimension of their professional practice and is significantly influenced by the customs and practices of those who oversee the teaching and learning process (Hayes et al. 2005). Pedagogy relates and interrelates two important socio-cultural aspects of teaching and learning: content knowledge and the development of relationships.

The first aspect, teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Bouchard 2014; Huang & Ariogul 2006) includes the development of professional capacities to teach specific content. In the national education context, pedagogical content knowledge is currently articulated and officiated by standards described by the Australian Institute of Teachers and School Leaders (AITSL). These standards outline what teachers and leaders should be aiming to achieve at various points in their careers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2020b). The emergence of AITSL as a regulatory body in Australian education and its national influence over normalising teaching standards is important to note from a political perspective in this study because it positions school leaders as agents of its work.

Educators' capacities to build relationships that authentically connect with students' lifeworlds is argued as a second important aspect that relates strongly to appropriate and productive pedagogy (Klenowski 2009; Krakouer 2015; Luke & Woods 2009; Morrison et al. 2019). As such, teaching approaches that aim to connect with students across diverse lifeworlds must explicitly consider students' needs in order to provide meaningful learning approaches that cause no unnecessary harm (Delpit 1993). However, it is important to note that most school leaders and teachers largely originate from Australian urban experiences which feature Eurocentric linguistic, spatial and cultural norms (Lea et al. 2011b). This dynamic frames the context of complex pedagogic relationships in remote Indigenous schools where teacher-student relationships and interactions must traverse significant points of cultural disparity in the course of the school day.

When considering curriculum and pedagogical priorities that are enacted and endorsed by remote Northern Territory school principals, it is important to understand how the DoE currently and historically has aligned its educational strategy with national education literacy and numeracy programs. Since 1999, a number of educational reports and reviews

(introduced in 1.6) have considered how curriculum, pedagogy and other key educational drivers can be used to improve student achievement across a jurisdiction that includes a high percentage of remote Indigenous communities. These reports and reviews have a long trajectory and consistently locate Indigenous students within discourses of deficit across three areas: literacy and numeracy testing, teachers as lacking quality and capacity, and school leaders as not meeting their appointed professional obligations. Collectively, Collins (1999), Ladwig and Sarra (2009), Masters (2011) and Wilson (2014) have been highly critical of the DoE as failing to serve the needs of its Indigenous student population, suggesting that historically the vision for education has not matched the needs of the context in which it has been delivered.

The first of these reviews resulted in technical courses of action in the areas of DoE curriculum and pedagogy that have been maintained ever since. *Learning Lessons: An Independent Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (Collins 1999) was concerned with 'deteriorating outcomes from an already unacceptably low base' (p. 1) and subsequently recommended that the DoE should explore opportunities to provide remote schools with outcomes-based, sequential, easy to follow programs that assist in addressing low Indigenous student achievement in literacy and numeracy (Collins 1999). When compared with the more recent review conducted by Wilson (2014), the solutions to 'remote school problems' continue to skew curriculum and pedagogy in a similar technical, Anglo-centric direction that is consistently tied to standardised testing regimes. The focus in the latter review is on utilising evidence-based approaches to support literacy and numeracy development. It is upon recommendations from the 2014 Wilson Review that the current NT Strategy was formed and current remote school priorities are determined.

This chapter examines how principals in remote Indigenous DoE schools lead curriculum and pedagogy within a complex educational environment that Unsworth (2013) indicates is in a constant state of bounded instability. The description is underpinned by paradoxical tensions in balancing student needs and strategic imperatives that co-exist in remote Indigenous schools. The first section presents a range of themes from the research data that have been analysed to determine major narrative arcs in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. Consideration then turns to whether the leadership practice of remote school principals involved in this study was predominantly responsive to either the DoE or the cultural and contextual needs of their students. From this platform a range of leadership practices that connect educational leadership practice to students' lives through curriculum and pedagogy

are outlined, since these serve as possibilities for wider educational reform. Finally, this chapter synthesises accounts from each school principal and identifies how the analyses provide a unique contribution to knowledge in the field of remote educational leadership.

5.2 Remote school curriculum and pedagogy

Annual SIPs, annual performance reports and interviews with school principals produced a range of commentary in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy for remote DoE schools. Below, sections from school documents and the voices of principals from five remote Indigenous schools are organised according to themes to form major narrative arcs. From this basis the remote educational priorities of remote school principals are determined.

5.2.1 Remote educational priorities

Collective analysis of research data from this and previous studies indicates that remote school leaders generally prioritise departmental objectives over the educational objectives of remote Indigenous communities. By community objectives this thesis draws upon the combination of extensive scholarship in remote Indigenous communities and perspectives provided through research data. As initially outlined in the literature review, Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) sought the voices of remote Indigenous community members to better understand the framing of educational purposes in remote contexts. Their five-year study indicated that the highest educational priorities in remote Indigenous communities centred on land, home languages, culture, the ability to be strong in both worlds and future employment prospects. Similar perspectives were offered by principals in this study when asked what the local community sought most through education. A range of responses is provided below:

> Language and culture…our parents [also] want the kids to be able to read and write and speak English, to be able to survive in white fella world. The other half with the language and culture, I'm very open to having that happen in the school but I need the community support to do that. (Sunshine Principal)

> …the first thing that they would say would be around language, and would be that their first language, and culture were taught at school. And then they would say that they want their kids to speak English and be able to operate two ways like in both languages, and both cultures. I think the other thing they would say is they want their kids to come here and be safe and happy, and looked after. (Bluebird Principal)

> The community would say that their kids need to get an education to grow up strong…Because they are going to become the adults in this community, the community gets passed onto the next generation. (Riverglen Principal)

While most principals appeared to have a firm understanding of what local communities most desired in a remote education, their practice favoured the DoE's educational imperatives. This positioning aligns with purported opportunities afforded by a Western oriented education according to multiple research participants. In the words of the Willington principal:

> I have a few priorities for my kids and that is they are educated enough to be able to make decisions…they can make choices about their lives…they have to be encouraged to make the right choice…And just to be academically able to function in normal everyday life, to have all the necessary skills to do that. (Willington Principal)

An important question emerges from this commentary as to what determines being 'educated enough', what the 'right choice' is regarded to be, how 'normal' is defined and according to whose measures is 'function[ing] in normal everyday life' determined? Similar sentiments were consistently evident in principal interview data in this study, suggesting that the baseline upon which normative school curriculum is understood in remote Indigenous schools is that of the Australian mainstream. To this end, curriculum priorities in remote Indigenous schools led by teaching principals focus on two clear objectives; the development of SAE (Standard Australian English) literacy and numeracy.

While research data have indicated that communities do seek opportunities for their children to develop proficiency in Western-orientated forms of education, current offerings generally adhere to this at the expense of a child's own cultural and linguistic repertoires (Bat & Shore 2012). This limits students' opportunity to acquire the capacities of 'double power' (Yunupingu 1999) that would otherwise allow them to walk confidently in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts (Dolan & Miller 2011). Here, one form of education is privileged over another in a manner that is antithetical to culturally responsive approaches. As Abdal-Haqq (1994, p. 2) suggests:

> Curriculum that is culturally responsive capitalizes on students' cultural backgrounds rather than attempting to override or negate them.

In remote communities, the pre-colonial involvement of family and the wider community that guided Indigenous learning has been replaced with academic programs now designed predominantly around SAE literacy and numeracy. Progress is no longer determined by 'grannies and elders' from the local community (Price 2015); rather, it is judged against the

wider Australian student population (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b; Spillman 2017). This form of measurement is evident in principal interview comments such as:

> I think none of my kids are at an age appropriate level, but they're not miles behind. So, they are making small gains all the time, not at the rate of mainstream students, but they are making progress. (Willington Principal)

Student achievement metrics of this nature align neatly with global education trends that are focused on 'raising standards' (Sleeter & Stillman 2005) and cohere with Western priorities of what matters in education (Biesta 2016). Importantly however, they do not align as easily with Indigenous community orientations (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016). This scenario simultaneously 'others' (Said 1995) Indigenous knowledges by authorising non-Indigenous control of accepted standards (Broome 2010). In remote Indigenous schools, 'the most powerful knowledge [is] simply the knowledge of the most powerful' (Lingard 2018b, p. 56).

This shift towards 'formal disciplinary knowledge' that is determined by authorities who originate beyond Indigenous communities regards the non-local as the expert and often alienates locals through educational priorities that are unfamiliar (Zipin 2017). This practice codifies and brackets out specific knowledges as less worthy, altering perceptions of a student's capacities unfavourably. In this case, education is offered according to a limiting essentialist binary which does not draw on local expertise that could provide more expansive educational opportunities that are inclusive of the specific cultural and contextual needs of remote Indigenous students.

The place where connection between school curriculum and pedagogy was found to align more closely with students' lifeworlds was in the school where the educational priorities were established around a bilingual program that had been in operation for many years. At Bluebird School, students were not only taught according to Western-orientated curricula and pedagogies but were also exposed to 'dual-knowledge systems' (Parkinson 2015) that provide scope for students to become strong in two worlds. At this school, students' cultural capital (Bourdieu 2008) was viewed as a positive asset, as evidenced in the SIP that outlined the priority to develop bicultural proficiency. Bluebird was focused on tailoring learning to the cultural and contextual needs of their students, and therefore provided support to local and non-local teachers through resources that represented Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. The school also engaged the assistance of a curriculum expert to work with local staff

to map and integrate local theme cycles to the national curriculum so that school learning was relevant to students locally while also adhering to systemic requirements.

Collective analysis of data from all schools involved in the study indicated a disparity between small remote Indigenous school priorities when compared to the much larger, Bluebird School. For the smaller schools, leadership practice generally foregrounded DoE curriculum and pedagogical priorities and sidelined community priorities. In these school sites, teaching principals were largely obedient to systemic directives with only minimal deviation to include any cultural and contextual priorities of the community. At the larger Bluebird School, however, the principal regarded the only way to connect learning to students' lives was through integrating departmental imperatives within the local context. This located the linguistic, cultural and contextual repertoires of the student as a positive asset that school programs could build upon. While the above-stated distinctions were apparent, it is also worth noting that Bluebird School has a long and proud history of bilingual program operation at the school and is therefore able to draw upon resourcing and staffing that are currently not available in the smaller remote Indigenous school contexts.

5.2.2 NAPLAN as curriculum

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for Australian school students in years three, five, seven and nine. According to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) who have responsibility for managing the program, their official website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020a, viewed Dec 14 2020) indicates that NAPLAN assesses:

> …the types of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life. The tests cover skills in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy.

The results of these tests are then published each year on the *My School* website. This site, also overseen by ACARA, states its purpose clearly (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020, viewed Dec 14, 2020):

> The My School website provides information that supports national transparency and accountability of Australia's school education system through publication of nationally consistent school-level data.
>
> NAPLAN student progress information, published on My School, provides a measure of a school's impact on its students' literacy and numeracy outcomes – the difference

> schools have made to their students' learning between one NAPLAN test and the next, two years later.

For educators in all Australian schools, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides a framework that aligns the work of teachers and the principal through a series of standards in an effort to maximise students learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2020b) – learning that is displayed through NAPLAN results available on the *My School* website.

All research phases indicated that NAPLAN has a significant impact on remote Indigenous schools, rendering a program that was initially designed to measure student progress in basic skills (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020a), as now determining the key curriculum priorities. This was evidenced across school improvement plans that use NAPLAN as a key indicator of student performance, with two examples provided below:

> Improve students' two-year gain in NAPLAN writing in years 5, 7 and 9. (Rocky Cliff SIP)

> Increase students' two-year gain in NAPLAN writing in years 5, 7 and 9. (Riverglen SIP)

While the SIPs consistently indicate a desire for two-year gains in NAPLAN writing, it is worth noting that this refers specifically to writing in Standard Australian English (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020b). As the students in all schools involved in this study utilise English as an additional language, and it is argued by scholars such as Simpson, Caffery and Mcconvell (2009, p. 6) that 'young children learn best when taught through their mother tongue', NAPLAN can be seen as a form of educational assessment that extends well beyond the home languages of most students in remote Indigenous communities. This is evidenced by the Riverglen principal who indicated that 'all of our students are below their levels when it comes to something like NAPLAN and they know it'. An important question remains regarding what testing students' proficiency in their mother tongue might reveal.

Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012) claim that the desire for standardised testing regimes such as NAPLAN to result in learning improvement, particularly for 'at risk' students across Australian schools, has not been realised. With specific reference to Indigenous students, Vass (2014) agrees, indicating that NAPLAN is not a 'culture-fair assessment' (p. 178) and is

more akin to a ‘de facto form of assimilation’ (p. 179), and asserting that embedding the guiding tenets of this standardised test in remote Indigenous schools comes with detrimental consequences. Despite these consequences, remote Indigenous schools have little choice in the matter as federal education funding is intrinsically tied to standardised testing results (Vass 2014). As Matthews (2012b, p. 161) outlines:

> Since 2009 the Australian government has funded state and territory governments provided they commit to national school performance and reporting requirements involving national testing, national reporting, reporting to parents, publishing performance information and information for school-level reporting.

The impact of these reporting requirements is what Silverman (2017) refers to as ‘goal displacement’. In relation to NAPLAN and its effect in remote Indigenous schools, Unsworth (2013) concurs, stating in his PhD research that high stakes testing creates an educational environment where ‘tensions are generated between teaching to the test and teaching to Indigenous students’ funds of knowledge’ (p. iii). These ‘tensions’ are the product of NAPLAN moving from its intended purpose to be an educational metric that captures student progress to instead forming the basis of schools’ most significant priorities.

In order to achieve desired NAPLAN goals in the area of SAE, a new program, Read Write Inc., has been mandated for use across DoE schools. The comments below indicate how school principals view this new program as critical in achieving school and departmental goals in the area of SAE development:

> [SAE] Writing is mandated by the department. I personally believe that if kids can’t read well, writing is pretty hard. So, in our school improvement plan, we’ve actually put reading as a priority area as well. So, Read Write Inc. covers both of those. (Sunshine School)

> … [Read Write Inc.] it’s a phonics program so reading and writing and all those kinds of things are in there. But yeah, I think one of the departmental areas is to improve NAPLAN writing gains, so it’s one strategy that has been mandated across the Territory to try and boost that particular area. (Riverglen Principal)

This new mandated program can be seen as following the direct recommendations of 2014 DoE review (Wilson 2014) that suggested schools require access to outcomes-based, sequential programs in order to address Indigenous student disparity in the area of SAE literacy. Collective data analysis indicated that this departmental directive was something that many remote school principals embraced and were committed to:

> The strong implementation of the Read Write Inc. program, which is again something that's going Territory wide, so we don't want it to be a fad that comes in, trial for a bit and then leave. We are going to do it and we want to do it right, so that's embedded within the school. (Riverglen Principal)

Further support for the program was provided by the Willington principal who commented:

> I like the program. I think the program's got a lot of merit and if it's used in all remote schools I think it brings about you know when Indigenous kids move from one school to another…they know the process. (Willington Principal)

Across the remote Indigenous school sites led by teaching principals, widespread support for Read Write Inc. is apparent, as it was regarded by school leaders to directly assist their schools in achieving departmentally inspired NAPLAN goals in the area of SAE development. What it does not do is place any value on students' home languages (Wigglesworth, Simpson & Vaughan 2018) or provide explicit access to unique funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992). Scholars are wary of the impact of programs that seek to address 'the basics' because 'highly prescriptive pedagogic models tend to proliferate' (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b, p. 104) when teaching approaches are narrowed towards an exclusive band of desired learning. Culturally responsive literature is also critical of programs of this nature as they are biased in positioning only one language as the marker upon which educational success is determined (Abdal-Haqq 1994; Perso 2012) and utilise one size fits all, de-contextualised knowledge (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 2011) as the 'solution'. The key concern here is that if solutions are simply to be found in pre-packaged knowledge, that regards students as 'universal human subjects' (Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019), how does this effectively deal with place-based cultural variation between communities, and to what extent are educators required to use their professional skillset to tailor localised curricula to their students' explicit needs?

Across remote schools led by teaching principals, a suite of measures was undertaken to support the mandated implementation of Read Write Inc. (RWI) in an effort to achieve NAPLAN targets. This included classrooms being set up with a writing focus, staff being supported through on-site and external training in how to administer the program, evidence of RWI lessons planned for in teachers' programming and the use of assessment instruments to regularly monitor progress. Examples of common features that were evident across all remote Indigenous schools include:

> All staff plan for and teach RWI daily in all T-6 classes. Provide clear role clarification for Assistant Teachers. (Bluebird SIP)

> Student progress in writing (SAE) mapped against RWI continuum. (Rocky Cliff SIP)
>
> All staff have evidence of RWI lessons in their programs and day books. (Riverglen SIP)

While the details above relate specifically to data collected from teaching principals in remote Indigenous schools, as indicated earlier in this chapter, bilingual programs offer scope for connection between school and students' lives, therefore providing an example worth considering with regards to NAPLAN. At Bluebird School, the literacy program involves the local language and SAE. In the area of SAE development, however, they too prioritise the need to align student outcomes with NAPLAN through their aim to 'Grow students' [SAE] literacy progress in T-9 (one year's gain for one year's attendance)' which appears to be in direct response to the principal's comments that 'our NAPLAN results are terrible and English language levels across the school are really bad'. In this respect, while the school is able to offer a literacy program beyond SAE, NAPLAN metrics are still considered the educational tool by which student progress at the school is determined.

NAPLAN clearly plays a critical role in determining the curriculum and pedagogical focus of all remote Indigenous schools. Data consistently indicated that the only form of literacy that is deemed important by teaching principals appears to be SAE writing. This limits students' capacity to demonstrate learning through multi-model literacies including spoken, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial modes (Saurino, Ogletree & Saurino 2010) as SAE writing has been positioned as most important. Additionally, while the national curriculum extends across a total of eight learning areas, these five remote Indigenous schools appear to focus their attention predominantly in two areas – SAE literacy and numeracy – with multi-modal literacy development and other national curriculum learning areas being notably absent across school documentation, interviews, field observations and provocation interviews. This indicates that the approach taken by these remote teaching principals is NAPLAN as the unofficial curriculum. What has become a blueprint for educational success in DoE remote schooling is a scenario that Fogarty and Schwab (2012b, p. 102) expressly warned against when stating:

> …the problem comes when the performance tool begins to overshadow and dominate the teaching and learning it is designed to measure.

Unsworth (2013) indicates that scenarios such as that described by Fogarty and Schwab (2012b) can be regarded as an exclusionary use of standardized testing because NAPLAN is purely being used as a performance instrument to measure top-down, Western-orientated

educational capacities. In making this claim, however, Unsworth (2013) offers that NAPLAN does nevertheless have emergent possibilities that provide scope for it to be applied inclusively if used in conjunction with student funds of knowledge and other school approaches that take student learning contexts into consideration. In these cases Unsworth (2013) is pointing towards approaches that are more aligned with the tenets of cultural responsivity.

Efforts to operate inclusively are evident at Bluebird School as the bilingual program offers a structural mechanism through which students' local language and funds of knowledge can be mobilised. What is missing according to the school improvement plan and principal's articulation of the program are key performance indicators at either a school or departmental level to validate student progress in these areas. As a consequence, when discussing linguistic proficiency, the Bluebird principal, like her teaching principal counterparts, only discussed progress that was measured through NAPLAN.

Consideration of all data indicates that school principals generally follow a 'logic of conformity' (Ball & Maroy 2009) that ensures local curriculum is compliant with the macro agenda to improve NAPLAN gains. For the teaching principals, their leadership practice is aligned to maximising progress in accordance with systemic goals, positioning them as exhibiting degrees of cultural awareness and/or understanding but not cultural responsivity. At Bluebird School, the principal's practice is also guided strongly in the area of literacy development by NAPLAN, however the dual focus on local languages and SAE ensure that leadership is also nuanced towards connecting with students' lifeworlds (Morrison et al. 2019); developing culturally responsive teachers; promoting an inclusive school environment; and engaging students, parents and Indigenous contexts (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

5.2.3 Positioning of local languages

Of the five schools involved in the study, the four teaching principals notably excluded official bilingual approaches while the larger school, Bluebird, offered students the opportunity to learn through local languages and SAE.

Across the smaller schools, led by teaching principals, languages other than SAE were regarded as culturally inferior as they did not align with the goals of what a DoE education seeks to afford. This sentiment is captured by Josie, the Riverglen Principal:

> Every one of our students is English second language or third language or fourth language dialects and what not. So, you are coming at that as a major barrier… (Riverglen Principal)

Accessing Bacchi (2009) and her means of analysing what a problem is represented to be, the problem is stated here as a culturally biased 'barrier' where students lack the linguistic capital that is required to be successful according to normative educational structures. This also represents complicity with departmental norms that regard Indigenous students as 'lacking' because there are no performance indicators to measure progress in home languages, only progress in SAE. This is the antithesis of what contemporary scholarship in the area of cultural responsivity calls for in the education of Indigenous students (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 1999; Bishop 2007; Ladson-Billings 1995; Morrison et al. 2019; Sleeter 2011a; Villegas & Lucas 2007).

In the circumstance described by the Riverglen Principal, the home languages of students are only regarded as having value so far as they assist in their 'transfer-to-English' potential (Spittles 2006). This is how the principal described how local languages are being utilised:

> We don't discourage the use of language because we see it as another avenue to learn. Example, if you go in the junior class, they might be reading a book about a mouse; mouse in language is 'x', so they say 'x' and you go yes, 'x' is a mouse. Put the two together, you don't tell them they are wrong because that's a different language; in English we call it this. So, it's using one to support the other as opposed to saying one is right and we don't use the other one, because they are not wrong it is just a different language. (Riverglen Principal)

What the principal has described is a translanguaging approach that supports students to use one language to understand and learn another. As foregrounded in the literature review, translanguaging has significant capacity to locate a home language as an asset and in doing so enhance student identity and empowerment. While the example provided is most certainly representative of a nuanced version of culturally responsive practice, the underlying reason for its use could also have it surmised as a 'racialised' approach (Moreton-Robinson 2011) on the grounds that its adoption in this case suggests that the home language only has limited status and authority. This makes a strong statement about a student's linguistic worth since the primary form of communication used throughout the community is regarded as having only secondary importance at school.

At Sunshine School, the official school focus, as in the other small remote schools involved in this study is SAE; however Brian, the school principal, recognises that community

imperatives are also critically important. When asked what the community's educational priorities were, his answer was succinct: 'local language and culture'. Brian indicated that he had been keen in his time as principal to involve the local community where possible in school programs and this imperative is explicitly stated in school documentation. At first glance this could be misconstrued as a 'both ways' (Yunupingu 1999) approach, however, upon deeper analysis, the fact that power, status and authority are not shared, indicates that this is not the case. At Sunshine School, the input of the community in the area of language development is positive; however, it is also minimal as either a curriculum focus or pedagogical tool, meaning that it can only be considered as being given what Abdal-Haqq (1994) refers to as side-bar status.

At this school, students have English as an additional language / dialect and main language other than English status. According to research data, this has Sunshine School students speaking multiple languages / dialects, a consistent factor across all sites involved in the study. Historically, speaking and being educated in a mother tongue would have been regarded as both an asset and normative behaviour (Price 2015; Rigney 2018). Contemporary academic success in Australia, however, privileges Anglophone communication (Trimmer, Dixon & Guenther 2019) in the form of SAE and as such, consistently locates remote Indigenous students as 'substantially below' their non-Indigenous student counterparts. Scholars have suggested that this is a form of cruel accounting as it compares the proficiency of students who speak English as an additional language with students who speak it as their first language: an academic comparison that Dixon and Angelo (2014) claim is unjust.

At Bluebird School, local languages hold much greater significance than at any of the schools led by teaching principals. This is facilitated through the school's bilingual program that connects learning to students' lifeworlds through the dual use of local languages and the medium of SAE. The principal at Bluebird was very proud of the bilingual program, stating:

> …we've got loads of resources in first language, like there is you know posters like this everywhere where you've got you know everything written in [local] language, lessons for teachers and that. So, there is lots of language, and culture embedded in everything that we do, I'd say it's pretty strong. (Bluebird Principal)

Observations that took place while conducting interviews on-site, demonstrated that what the school principal at Bluebird was alluding to as signs, posters and teaching resources all used a combination of SAE and the predominant home language, being representative of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds.

The bilingual status of the school ensured that students' home language was used at the school and visible through the use of numerous resources, however the purpose behind local language usage appeared to be guided by neo-liberal rationalities that were predominantly focused on doing what is required to achieve DoE learning goals. As an example, in the Bluebird SIP, the use of local languages is aligned directly with attendance, not academic achievement. In the area of academic achievement, the only focus is on SAE literacy. This highlights that the bilingual program at Bluebird School is a 'subtractive model of bilingualism' according to logics provided by Morgan, Reid and Freebody (2017, p. 10). It is guided by transitional objectives that initially seek to get kids to school, upon which these languages are utilised to develop proficiency in 'settler languages' (Calderon 2014; Morgan, Reid & Freebody 2017; Spittles 2006). This is an initiative that has the appearance of equality, yet upon deeper inspection can be unveiled as only a quasi-version of equality as the underlying intentions are centred on developing Anglophone capacities that simply reproduce racial asymmetry. Invoking the work of Lee et al. (2016) that suggests 'a both-ways program must give status and authority to both sides' (p. 70), what is in existence at Bluebird School is not a model where linguistic authority is authentically shared.

The key difference across the five schools was how different languages were prioritised. SAE was always regarded as essential to student progress and while local languages were acknowledged in various ways by school principals, they were consistently peripheral to the predominant linguistic learning objectives. The conclusion drawn from analyses of data is that these remote DoE schools measure success according to a mono-linguistic bias. Additionally, while bilingual programs provide nuances of what culturally responsive school and leadership scholarship advocates (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), at present, they may do so predominantly to affirm the goals of Western educational logics.

5.2.4 How relationship building impacts pedagogical practice

All school principals indicated that relationship building assisted them and their staff in their pedagogical practice. In order to better connect with students, school principals focused predominantly on relationships with the wider community and relationships with local school staff.

The desire to build 'bridging ties' (Guenther & Disbray 2015) between the school and the local community is highlighted by John at Rocky Cliff, who indicated that relationships assist in filling non-local educators' gaps in knowledge and understanding:

> Nobody coming in with a different cultural background understands the layers to thousands of years of First People's culture. I would say from my experience, it's very much active listening and learning every day. I'm still learning and I've been doing it a long time. It's often through mistakes that you learn the most as well. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

With this potential disconnect between non-local educators and local students in mind, John utilises the school bus run to develop overlapping school-community relationships (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) that will inform his teacher's classroom practice.

> …we do a bus run to collect children to get them to school…I had all my staff do that. They quickly knew who lived where, or between what houses, and this is small, so you can do it this way. They were talking to families, getting to know people in context.
>
> Now, I'm not saying you should be out into everything and everybody's business, certainly not, but you need to connect enough to have knowledge around where your students are coming from. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

At Bluebird School, they too privilege relationship building where *on Country* learning allows non-local staff to see how members of the wider community teach their own children and extended family. These opportunities provide 'learnscapes' (Skamp 2009) where according to Yunkaporta (2019), all of the senses have been engaged through a process he refers to as haptic knowledge, allowing Indigenous kinship relationships to be deeply encoded. Dolan and Miller (2011) claim that programs that extend beyond the confines of the classroom allow students to interact with their environment in creative ways – approaches that Fogarty and Schwab (2012b) describe as connecting culture, community and learning because they are able to 'penetrate the boundaries between home and school' (p. 118). This connection between learning and students' lives is referred to by Khalifa (2018) as 'identity confluence' whereby 'students' academic identities are developed alongside local Indigenous identities' (p. 29). An example of this is provided by Beth of Bluebird School:

> There's lots of *on Country* learning that happens where people go out, and like we go out for a week as a school and do *Country* visits, and *on Country* learning, and regular bush trips, and there's lots of really good relationships there with that. (Bluebird Principal)

Beyond general relationship building, all principals consistently remarked on the benefit of developing 'bonding ties' (Guenther & Disbray 2015) with local staff as this provides non-local educators with critical connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. This was stated unequivocally by Bob at Willington School, who said the local assistant

teacher is ‘pivotal to the success of the school because she’s my link’. Such links were thought to allow teachers to be informed about local events and protocols that impacted how educators then enacted their pedagogical practice.

At Sunshine School, observational notes highlight how Brian’s leadership practice seeks to make the most of what he regards as ‘insider knowledge’ that local staff can provide. Upon initial arrival at the school the staff were involved in a daily debrief designed to elicit perspectives from all teachers about how students are doing in class, what is working, what is not working and how student progress may be impacted by particular family and/or community dynamics. These daily sessions serve as an opportunity for Brian and all his staff to collectively mentor each other, ensuring that educational challenges at the school actively seek localised understandings and solutions. Brian’s responses to follow-up questions highlighted the importance of this process involving all staff given that local personnel could provide important cultural and contextual detail to most discussions:

> I think for me an understanding of the context…that’s where the importance of our local staff come into play...in my first year, my local teacher was my teacher as well. He guided me through. A lot of the customs and things, like when someone’s family member passes away having to shake their hand, the protocols around this, saying sorry, all of that sort of stuff, because it’s different from place to place.
>
> …they [local staff] can give us that background knowledge of why a child might be acting the way they are and stuff. Yeah, very important people. (Sunshine Principal)

The word that was regularly used by school principals when referring to local staff is ‘context’. The inference was evident amongst all leaders that local staff hold insider capital since they generally have extensive experience in navigating two worlds; experience that is of critical importance to both non-local staff and the school students themselves. For both non-Indigenous school staff and Indigenous students, the employment of local staff at the school provides opportunities for increased understanding and connectivity through their capacities to guide pedagogic design in a manner that aligns authentically with students’ lives (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b).

To illustrate the critical nature of local staff, the principal of Bluebird School indicated what can happen when local staff are not involved in classrooms:

> …a lot of it [teasing between students] happens in first language, and so if you’ve got a local teacher in the classroom with a group of kids, they’ll pick up on all of it and you can stop it. But if that person’s not here, and you’ve just got the, you know, the teacher in the room who doesn’t speak the local language, a lot of that stuff can be

> bubbling away without anyone having any idea of it, and then suddenly it erupts. (Bluebird Principal)

Respectful relationships with local teachers ensure that in remote schools where priorities are often centred on Western philosophical underpinnings, the cultural and contextual lifeworlds of Indigenous students are not lost altogether. Concerns of this nature have previously been raised by scholars such as Delpit (1993) who suggested that educators who originate from dominant cultures outside the contexts in which they are teaching often produce and re-produce classroom approaches that make sense according to their own experiences and worldview, but not necessarily according to the lifeworlds of their students. This potential mismatch is alleviated in remote DoE schools through local staff who assist in translating two worlds for both staff and students, neutralising to an extent potentially deficit views while simultaneously facilitating greater inclusivity, respect, reciprocity and understanding (Arbon 2008).

Collective analysis of all schools involved in the study indicated an overwhelming connection between remote educational success and the building of authentic relationships, with the most evident themes centring on the critical nature of local staff. Notably, local staff provide a potential link between departmental priorities and localised teaching practice. This understanding is also represented in the research of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) who found a direct correlation between higher proportions of non-local staff and improved educational outcomes in remote schools.

Of interest to this study is that the important role in bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews that local staff afford is not always used by school principals for the same purpose. For example, the Riverglen Principal predominantly uses improved pedagogical connections provided by their local staff member to further advance departmental language priorities in the classroom. In contrast, the Bluebird Principal promotes the use of locally determined pedagogical practice to try to create school conditions that align with students' lives. The difference in these orientations is significant and they produce vastly different educational experiences for students. The first of these approaches gestures towards a gentler version of assimilation that tries to 'push students into new identities' (Khalifa 2018, p. 131), but in a manner that is dehumanising and could be conceived as a form of ethnocide. The latter approach views the local culture as an asset in its own right, humanising the educational

landscape and bringing confluence between the school and students' lifeworlds in a manner that seeks to be inclusive (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019).

5.3 What is remote school leadership responsive to?

Data analysed from each research participant indicated that, while they were predominantly responsive to DoE requirements and mandates, the extent to which localised learning was connected to students' lives did vary. At one end of the spectrum, principal subjectivities centred on their students being at deficit, positioning Western cultural prescriptions as the normative benchmark upon which all learning was to be judged. In these cases, it is students who must be most responsive as their local schools consider them primarily as lacking many of the skills and capacities of their mainstream counterparts. At these schools, educational practice is 'done to' students in an environment that determines success monoculturally and mono-linguistically.

The leadership practice of the principal at Sunshine School moves beyond this framing however, given that he attempted to link learning to the students' social contexts, utilising local input where possible. Nevertheless, despite these efforts to 'work with' both the department and the community, local languages and culture are positioned at the periphery of the school's curriculum focus, not the core. At Sunshine School, the focus, as with all other schools involved in the study, remains the development of SAE literacy and numeracy that is tied to national standardised testing programs in the form of NAPLAN.

The school that appeared most responsive to students' lifeworlds through their curriculum and pedagogy was Bluebird. The school's bilingual status requires that local and non-local staff work together in order to provide students with 'both ways' learning opportunities. This ensures that students develop linguistic proficiency in home languages and SAE, providing the opportunity to develop biliterate and bicultural capacities. Bluebird School found connection with the following tenets of culturally responsive schooling suggested by Morrison et al. (2019):

- Strongly connected to student's lifeworlds
- Recognition of cultural difference as a positive asset.

With regards to curriculum and pedagogy the Bluebird School principal also demonstrated all four characteristics of culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016):

- Critically self-reflects on leadership
- Develops culturally responsive teachers
- Engages students, parents and Indigenous contexts
- Promotes an inclusive school environment.

While the Bluebird School principal displayed self-awareness and a critical consciousness that led to a desire to work with the local community, what is taught and how it is delivered is still bound by the departmental requirement to 'lift performance' in relation to NAPLAN. This highlights that while there is valid cause for optimism when considering this principal's practice against culturally responsive criteria, a remote educational leader's subjectivity remains significantly constrained by external, neo-liberal forces. At Bluebird School, what initially appears as equality of learning opportunity, is still predominantly responsive to and controlled by the DoE. This reality is due to a power imbalance that currently favours departmental educational imperatives that regard Anglocentric educational outcomes as normal, natural, desirable and essential and local outcomes as 'other' and non-essential.

5.4 The site of curriculum and pedagogical possibility through educational leadership

Through data analyses a number of leadership practices that support or inhibit the provision of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy became apparent. In this section a deliberate decision has been made to explicate the most supportive leadership practices, because these are deemed to provide scope for educational transformation in remote Indigenous schools. Two leadership models of practice that were found to connect the school curriculum and pedagogical approaches to their students' lifeworlds were:

1. *Bilingual programs:* while a program of this nature was only in existence in one school involved in the study, it represented a significant point of connection between learning and students' lives. The principal indicated that the program was a source of great pride within the community as students' mother-tongue was formally validated. This ensured that what was educationally imagined as important at the local level had a direct impact on the school's curriculum and pedagogical approaches. According to

contemporary research, students who are exposed to a bilingual education are likely to have the following attributes: improved academic self-concepts, an increased understanding of educational content (Devlin, Disbray & Devlin 2017; Disbray 2014; Simpson, Caffery & Mcconvell 2009), strengthened identity formation (Rigney 2018) and enhanced code switching capabilities (Yunupingu 1999). Given these benefits, it is suggested that a wider official adoption of bilingual programs in remote Indigenous schools should be based on the validity that home languages have in their own right (Disbray 2014) and should not be utilised only to boost attendance or for their 'transfer-to-English' potential (Spittles 2006).

2. *Deliberate and purposeful inclusion of local staff and the wider community in teaching:* leadership practice that prioritised the involvement of both local staff and members of the community was described as providing students with learning experiences that grounded schooling both culturally and contextually. It also enabled non-local staff to develop deep pedagogical understandings through working alongside those who called the community home. In this model, both students and non-local teachers benefit pedagogically from positioning the community's needs, values, interests and knowledge as critical assets to be mobilised in local schooling.

5.5 Summary

In all schools involved in this study, departmental curriculum framing centred on the development of SAE proficiency in terms of how it aligned to NAPLAN metrics. While this is a process that is often used by educational bureaucracies as a tool for educational reform (Au 2011), narrowing the educational focus in alignment with standardised testing is also regarded as problematic (Fogarty, Lovell & Dodson 2015), culturally unfair (Vass 2014) and highly likely to impact teachers' pedagogical approaches (Commonwealth of Australia 2014). Departmentally desired reform is evidenced in annual SIPs, annual end of year reports and mandated programs such as Read Write Inc. that are regarded as important components of the educational solution. In such cases, neo-liberalism attempts to simplify a complex element of remote schooling by providing a technical remedy that emanates from the cultural determination of the dominant society. Drawing on post-colonial theory, a power imbalance is evident whereby the presumed superior Western curriculum priorities take precedence over other knowledge systems and subsequently impose solutions upon those who are regarded as subordinate (Said 1995; Spivak 1988). Here, normative boundaries are established that

constrain the work of school principals and their staff, resulting in a predominantly ‘us and them’ approach to curriculum that privileges external perspectives and marginalises local perspectives.

A narrow, generic curriculum of this nature residualises student experiences (Disbray 2014), since responding to ‘the strategy’ becomes more important than responding to ‘the child’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 2011). This results in an over-emphasis being placed on the need for the development of technical skills and knowledge in just one domain of learning: SAE. This locates the available curriculum as ‘Euro-centric’ (O’Bryan & Rose 2015), ‘pre-packaged knowledge’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 2011) and ‘racialised’ (Moreton-Robinson 2011), because the landscape upon which curriculum is decided is neither neutral nor apolitical (Gilbey 2014). The simultaneous privileging of Western knowledge and dismissal of local Indigenous knowledge is a form of epistemic violence (Spivak 1988). Not only does this limit ‘higher level cognitive development’ (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b, p. 103) through a removal of learning in the areas of socialisation and subjectification (Biesta 2016), but program offerings are based on ‘one size fits all’ models that treat all students as the same. In turn, curriculum offerings are de-contextualised as opposed to recognising the significance of culture, context and lifeworlds. Britzman (1989) regards educational orientations such as this as devaluing the breadth of cultural expression, because the official curriculum moves to supress diversity that may otherwise disrupt the existing hegemony.

Throughout this study, school principals were identified as needing to prioritise Western worldviews that concomitantly de-legitimised Indigenous worldviews. This indicated that remote schooling is ‘incomplete’ (Daniels-Mayes & Sinclair 2014), because the use of institutional powers limits the thoughts, actions and agency of marginalised subjects through the essentialised binaries of logic that Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004) explicitly warn against. While students are disadvantaged through a reductive and ‘rigid cognitive curriculum’ (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 2011, p. 57), disadvantage also extends to educators who work within the current system, since their creative input and professional decision-making capability is impeded through technologies of control that currently define the student’s existing cultural capital as the problem. In turn, this suggests that non-local educators in remote schools need not reflect too heavily on curriculum matters or pedagogical practices as existing programs are already designed to address ‘student deficiencies’.

What is happening in remote Indigenous schools can be seen as antithetical to the 2009 *National Indigenous Languages Policy* that suggests that 'the situation of Australia's Indigenous languages is grave and requires urgent action' (Australian Government 2009, p. 1, cited in Disbray 2014). Despite the apparent importance expressed by this policy, the actions of the participating remote school principals in the Northern Territory suggest otherwise. Only one of the five schools involved in the study had a bilingual program in operation and, while it appears logical that bilingual programs place Indigenous knowledges 'in a position of equality alongside non-Indigenous staff [and the] English language curriculum' (Disbray 2014, p. 134), this could be considered a superficial understanding that does not fully capture what is really at play. While the Bluebird program had clear merit and a canon of research points to bilingualism as having significant culturally responsive potential, the fact remains that its existence at Bluebird School remains a 'subtractive model of bilingualism' (Morgan, Reid & Freebody 2017, p. 10). The program is currently guided by immediate goals that do not centre on the primacy of local language development but rather on transitional objectives that seek to simply use local languages to develop proficiency in settler languages. This situation is not unlike that at Riverglen, where the Principal used translanguaging, another approach that has culturally responsive potential. In neither situation is power shared equally (Osborne 2016b); instead local languages only have value in so far as they can be used to achieve core objectives in the area of SAE. Consequently, this research advocates for bilingual approaches and the use of translanguaging but also suggests that their adoption will only fully reveal a student's cultural and linguistic repertoire when status and authority is equally shared with SAE.

Pedagogically, research in remote Indigenous schools across Australia provides a consistent message about what is currently required (see examples in Anderson et al. 2018; Disbray 2014; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Hall 2016; Hall & Guenther 2019; Spillman 2017), a direction that is succinctly captured by Guenther (2015a, p. 3) when stating that:

> Culturally and contextually responsive pedagogy, including the use of home language in schools, is crucial to respecting and addressing the learning needs of students in remote schools.

Partington (1998) similarly indicated that confluence exists between culture and pedagogy. As he states, 'culture and pedagogy go hand in hand, and having knowledge of one without the other is not enough' (p. 246).

While school principals were generally keen to try and connect teaching and learning approaches to their student's needs, they can also be seen as primarily being based on didactic, Western-orientated models. Examples of this are the mandating of generic educational programs such as Read Write Inc. that must be delivered in a particular way, regardless of the culture or context in which they are delivered. While the NT Strategy indicates that departmental actions are based on evidence, it may also be prudent to ask why student achievement data that shows no statistical improvement since the inception of NAPLAN (Unsworth 2013) has the DoE requiring remote schools to follow a concentrated course of action that has proved to be anything but successful?

Biesta (2010) is critical of how approaches come to be regarded as 'evidence-based', questioning the interests and educational purpose upon which the evidence is established. Consequently, he warns against a 'democratic deficit' in pedagogy that threatens to overtake the professional judgement of educators who work directly with students. To this end, current DoE policy prescriptions may not only be disconnected from what remote Indigenous students require, but may paradoxically be distending further the education gap that governments and education departments have been aiming to close (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b). Possible solutions to curriculum and pedagogy that are overwhelmed by dominant educational agendas can be found in the work of scholars such as Biesta (2010) and Rigney (2018) who advocate for a plurality of approaches that encompass wider understandings of the purpose of education. Data from this study highlights that remote school leaders are generally keen to access a broader range of approaches; however they are also bound by specific role responsibilities in the enactment of their work. This presents remote school principals with an ongoing and complex professional dilemma.

Fogarty and Schwab (2012a) call for pedagogic design that privileges place-based approaches. While such approaches appear to be available through *Keeping Indigenous Languages and Culture Strong: A Plan for the Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in Northern Territory Schools* (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016) and *Changing the Conversation – A Blueprint for Language Education in Northern Territory Schools* (Northern Territory Board of Studies 2015), these DoE educational initiatives were notably absent in all data provided by principals in this study. According to annual SIPs and an extensive range of interview responses by these school principals, Anglocentric teaching and learning is regarded as central to a 'successful' education in remote schools. This locates many Indigenous students' cultural and linguistic

capital as inferior to what is required at school, significantly impacting how learning is required to take place. This is an example of what Au (2011) refers to as an 'ends-means rationality' (p. 34) since what is required to be taught determines how it is taught and how the student is positioned according to philosophical and ideological rationales.

The strongest agreement across all data on pedagogical approaches was the positive impact of involving local staff and the wider community in teaching. Drawing on the scholarship of Khalifa (2011) and Gay (2000) allows clearer understanding of this insight from remote Indigenous Northern Territory Schools. Khalifa (2011) suggests that sharing a cultural background can impact the way that students are responded to in the classroom, thus concurring with the notion that local staff and the wider community have significant utility. Gay (2000) however indicates that simply sharing cultural membership does not automatically provide someone with the capacities required to teach successfully. She claims that pedagogical effectiveness is assisted through understandings of cultural heritage, experiences and perspectives. When the research of Khalifa (2011) and Gay (2000) is considered alongside data from this study, what is seen to be required in remote Indigenous schools is local knowledge combined with pedagogical teaching capacities – the type of combination that may be found when local and non-local staff work together to ensure that cultural and educational expertise coalesce.

What local staff and the wider community provide is an invaluable, intricate knowledge of culture and community that provides a bridge of understanding in all facets of schooling. Without this knowledge that supports both students and non-local teachers, problems can arise. Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) concur, suggesting that classroom approaches should be anchored in the foundational worldviews of the student cohort in order to avoid the potential of simply reproducing worldviews that may exist for non-local educators. These positions align with the scholarship of critical theorists who have expressed their suspicion of approaches that are wholly or predominantly aligned to a unitary worldview that may serve to maintain the existing stratification if left unchecked or unchallenged (Freire 1993; Horkheimer 1982). Of note is the fact that for schools involved in this study, the connections that local educators enable are predominantly being used at present in the pursuit of an agenda that is external rather than local in nature. While culturally responsive pedagogical opportunity exists in what local educators can provide, this opportunity is not being fully maximised for the benefit of local students.

The status quo in remote Indigenous schools is one that requires school principals to adhere closely to bureaucratic imperatives in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. These imperatives are powerful and as such, currently limit the extent to which leaders are using their agency to link learning to students' lives. While all school principals are required to be complicit to some extent in a project that can disconnect school from the lifeworlds of students, possibilities for culturally responsive practice do exist – possibilities that can be found in bilingual programs and the deliberate and purposeful inclusion of local staff and the wider community in school learning programs. These are possibilities that CRSL affords, because leaders are not required to select one policy or practice to the exclusion of another. Rather CRSL explicitly advocates for inclusive school environments, providing scope for a more expansive range of curriculum offerings and pedagogical approaches.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter used data collected from all three phases of research and has indicated that, while contemporary literature advocates for educators to be responsive to the needs of their students, the practice of leaders in these remote Indigenous schools is predominantly responsive to the curriculum and pedagogical imperatives of the DoE.

Despite the significant demands placed on school leaders through accountability measures which are heavily aligned to the development of Anglophone proficiencies, possibilities to connect curriculum and pedagogy were evident in the areas of bilingual programs and the activation of the local community in school learning programs. In each of these circumstances, students' cultural and linguistic intelligences are seen as assets that provide scope for the full potential of their learning capacity to be revealed.

The identification of these culturally responsive school leadership possibilities provides a unique contribution to knowledge. While the collective research of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018) provides a useful framework for understanding culturally responsive school leadership, their review of literature and insights about a Michigan-based educational leader have some limitations when applied in remote Indigenous contexts in Australia. This study agrees with the recommendations that student 'culturally nuanced expressions of language' (Khalifa 2018, p. 123) need to be accepted in the classroom and teachers should 'allow students to use their native language whenever they want' (Khalifa 2018, p. 115). However it also advocates that students' home language should be utilised as a language of instruction in remote Indigenous school contexts through bilingual approaches.

Further, while Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018) promote local community input in the areas of curriculum and instruction, data collected from participating Northern Territory school principals indicates a need for non-local educators to directly learn from local community members who are encouraged not only to advise, but deliberately and purposefully be included in teaching programs.

A new theoretical edge is also evident when considering this study alongside the culturally responsive scholarship of Morrison et al. (2019). Their research in CRP has been mainly focused on metropolitan and regional settings in Australia, not remote Indigenous contexts; this study therefore adds another layer of theoretical insight in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy for the broader Australian educational landscape.

Chapter 6 – Professional learning in remote Indigenous schools

> For Indigenous education to be successful, teachers should be trained to gear their teaching towards a culturally appropriate way for Indigenous students (Craven, Yeung & Han 2014, p. 85).

6.1 Introduction

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2020a) frames professional learning as involving formal and informal learning experiences that aim to improve the professional practice of individuals and the collective effectiveness of schools in which they work. This reflects a desire to incorporate both training and professional development under the banner of professional learning. To this end, 'training' provides scope for the acquisition of technical skills and operational fluency (McCallum 2000), whereas 'professional development' is concerned with personal and professional growth as part of overarching strategic imperatives (Grimmett 2014). In this thesis, 'professional learning' is used collectively to describe any deliberate and purposeful activity that is engaged in by an educator in order to facilitate either their own operational role requirements or the strategic requirements of their employer.

Literature pertaining to professional learning indicates a range of potential benefits including the capacity to assist professionals in remaining informed about evolving aspects of their field and being able to connect new research and professional theory to enhance practice (Schwartz & Bryan 1998). In education, professional learning has operational and strategic utility that is centred on supporting educators in developing their practice to 'enhance the quality of student learning' (Craven, Yeung & Han 2014, p. 85). To have the greatest impact, professional learning in education must be underpinned by specific philosophical markers. As Danling et al. (2005, p. 396) point out, this includes the need to:

> …recognise the complexities of teaching and learning, value teachers as professionals, and foster communication and collaboration amongst stakeholders.

The emphasis here on the need to 'foster communication and collaboration amongst stakeholders' finds synergy with the broad conceptual framework of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger 1991). This theory considers how meaning and identity is mobilised through collective social practices that require joint negotiation as opposed to the

advancement of the knowledge and interests of a single person, organisation or group. In this regard, the scholarship of Schwartz and Bryan (1998) is useful as they invoke a range of questions that consider who decides what professional learning is required, who should be responsible for conducting professional learning and upon whose interests professional learning is centred. These questions highlight that for all the benefits professional learning is deemed to afford, it is not immune to political influences.

In the Northern Territory, the narrowing of the curriculum as outlined in the previous chapter can be seen as a political move that advances the DoE's agenda beyond that of remote Indigenous communities. When coupled with professional learning, the scope of what training or professional development may entail is delimited, significantly reducing the opportunity to connect educator practice with the lives of remote Indigenous students. This orientation aligns with national objectives that link professional learning with improvements in educator productivity (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2020a) – a direction that adheres to the logic of neo-liberalism where control is externally modulated in order to maximise efficiency.

The manner in which professional learning is experienced varies and can involve individuals working to develop their own capacities, groups collaborating on shared projects or departments and associations setting a learning agenda that they deem salient for all persons within a particular field or profession to develop (Schwartz & Bryan 1998). Participation in professional learning may also be understood through a range of categorisations used by the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. These categorisations include 'formal' (official learning), 'non-formal' (learning that takes place outside officially sanctioned offerings) and 'informal' (ad-hoc, often unplanned, learning) and are useful touchstones upon which contemporary professional learning may be understood (Schwartz & Bryan 1998).

Regardless of composition and categorisations, for professional learning to be established upon culturally responsive foundations that align with the needs of Indigenous students, it must adhere to a number of critical tenets. Its purpose should be geared towards the linguistic needs of students who speak creoles and traditional languages as their primary form of communication (Department of Education Training and Employment 2014); it should also be culturally and contextually relevant (Danling 2003) and should incorporate Indigenous values, histories and perspectives. In order to be culturally synchronous with student needs,

professional learning benefits from incorporating Indigenous community members to facilitate understandings about worldviews that may be outside the experiences of many non-local educators themselves (Craven, Yeung & Han 2014). All of these foundations ensure that professional learning allows participants to see through the eyes of the students they teach, maximising the connection between capacities that educators develop and what their students need (Danling 2003). A pre-requisite underpinning all of these factors however is a commitment 'to the underlying principles of educational social justice' that Morrison et al. (2019, p. 30) note as the ultimate determinant effecting whether professional learning geared towards cultural responsivity has a chance of succeeding.

DoE job descriptions for principals of remote Indigenous schools consistently state that professional learning is a key leadership responsibility (see appendices K and M). Such responsibilities can be seen as stemming from *A share in the future: Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (Wilson 2014) that was unequivocal about the role that professional learning was to serve when stating (Wilson 2014, p. 27):

> Remote principals and teachers should be provided with professional development, mentoring and coaching focused on department goals.

The underlying message in this statement is a need to maintain a commitment to what the DoE determines to be most important. As this currently involves an outcomes agenda that aligns with global and national student achievement logics, professional learning is being mobilised as a political technology that is most interested in improving NAPLAN results in remote school settings. According to Wilson (2014), this requires that principals and teachers remain focused on 'department goals'. This study however suggests that this comes at a price because 'staying on track' with current monological and monocultural strategic directions of the DoE limits the deep philosophical work that is required through cultural responsivity to connect educator practice to student lifeworlds. While the directive made by Wilson (2014) actively seeks to maintain focus on the existing educational direction, the present study is interested in exploring new possibilities.

This chapter provides an analysis of data collected in relation to professional learning and the responsibilities carried out by remote school principals. Four sections are utilised with the first focusing on major narrative arcs as determined by the professional learning priorities of the DoE. Second, consideration is given to what remote principals are predominantly responsive to in the area of professional learning at their respective school sites. From this

platform leadership practices that support cultural responsivity through professional learning are outlined before synthesising the accounts of each school principal. Finally, this chapter makes a contribution to new knowledge by highlighting how the leadership practice of educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools can provide new possibilities to connect professional learning to the lifeworlds of their students.

6.2 Remote school professional development

When examining professional development according to the leadership practice of leaders in the five schools involved in this study, both formal and non-formal opportunities were considered.

6.2.1 Formal professional learning

The rationale behind professional learning for remote school educators, as well as its intended effects, is evident in SIPs, annual school reports and the voices of remote school principals. This rationale responds directly to student learning outcomes in numeracy and SAE literacy after more than a decade of failing to meet *Closing the Gap* performance indicators (Caccetta 2018). As part of the current strategic approach to 'lift performance', the DoE confers significant responsibility on school principals in overseeing and supervising professional learning that accords with their own objectives. Across all five sites, the DoE's professional learning priorities were evident in three distinct categories:

- The development of students' SAE proficiency to improve NAPLAN results
- Adherence of educators to AITSL standards and
- The efficiency and effectiveness of schools

The first major priority of the DoE noticeably originates from the review conducted by Wilson (2014, p. 125) where it was stated that:

> …the role of phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics suggests that if all teachers are to engage effectively and knowledgeably with these areas, two things will have to occur: the department will need to endorse an approach based on these areas and provide evidence for its effectiveness, and teachers will require professional development opportunities in the foundational knowledge and skills involved.

The need for DoE professional learning that is focused specifically on phonological awareness was evident in SIPs of each school involved in the study. This indicates a clear

connection between recommendations from external reviews, current DoE educational goals and professional learning priorities of remote Northern Territory Schools. Examples include:

> Teachers will undertake professional learning in NAPLAN writing assessment, confirmation activities and Read Write Inc. (Riverglen SIP)

> Have all staff trained in Read Write Inc. (Bluebird SIP)

When principals were asked during interviews about the rationale behind professional learning of this nature, the link between the NT Strategy, improved NAPLAN results and professional learning for remote school staff was made explicit:

> …this program [Read Write Inc] is being implemented to support that because one of the things is for the NT, is like improvement in writing by two years, in the NAPLAN years. (Willington Principal)

The mandatory nature of Read Write Inc. resulted in remote school staff receiving both external and internal formalised professional learning support. Initially this involved staff attendance at workshops held in regional centres:

> ...the Read Write Inc. program that's mandated across all Territory schools…we [teaching principal and local assistant teacher] went and we did that together. (Willington Principal)

> Some of the more major ones [professional learning] for example, we just had last week was training and that was the whole staff going to [regional centre] on a two day Read Write Inc. training course and we come back out again. So, in that kind of setting the school had to close because staff had to go do it. (Riverglen Principal)

In these examples, the professional learning that staff were involved in is a form of operational training providing them with skills deemed essential to perform their roles in accordance with the NT Strategy. The importance of the training is apparent as it involved all local and non-local teaching staff, fully trained teachers and assistant teachers and in the case where relief staff were unable to cover employees who needed to travel for the professional learning, the school simply closed until they returned. Once back at school, ongoing support for classroom teachers continued:

> So, we did a Read Write Inc. PD today…this afternoon where I went through the structure of the lessons and what the program was all about. And then for the last 20 minutes or so, my teachers got into pairs and actually practiced teaching the lessons to each other. (Sunshine Principal)

The imperative for developing professional capacities in the area of SAE is also captured in annual performance reports that highlight strong links to an accountability culture that is interested in inputs, in this case in the form of professional learning, and outputs, as detailed in subsequent school reports. An example is provided from the Sunshine School Annual Performance Report:

> Teachers participate in pedagogical and content knowledge professional learning opportunities to build own expertise in the area of [SAE] writing and reading.

The second professional learning priority of the DoE involves educators managing and guiding their own conduct in alignment with AITSL standards. This limits the range of educator choice in professional learning as focus must be aligned to prescribed programs. SIPs included action items such as:

> All staff to complete AITSL self-reflection tool. Probation and induction processes completed correctly. (Rocky Cliff SIP)

> All staff to complete AITSL self-reflection tool. All staff will complete a performance and development report. (Riverglen SIP)

As detailed in chapter four (4.2.2), part of the monitoring process with SIPs involves identifying a person who is responsible for overseeing the key priorities that are detailed. In the examples procured from Rocky Cliff and Riverglen Schools, the person responsible for this is the teaching principal. Their role includes providing staff members at the school with resources and proformas directly supplied by AITSL and the DoE to assist in the self-reflection process. This ensures that the reflections are completed according to AITSL's own standards and parameters. Once complete, the teaching principal engages in a guided discussion with the staff member, providing a second layer of monitoring and accountability. At Rocky Cliff and Riverglen Schools their target for AITSL self-reflection completion was 100% of all staff at the school.

The final professional learning priority of the DoE is captured in an agenda that is focused on advancing efficiency and effectiveness measures across Northern Territory schools. To do this the department is very deliberate about what is formally offered as DoE sanctioned professional learning and who is selected to present or facilitate these offerings. The principal at Rocky Cliff provided an account of a recent professional learning experience he was involved in:

> We have had professional learning for principals and the way that we would work with our staff and get our staff to perform well. Sort of what makes a good school, everybody being on board and stuff like that. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

This is an example of formal DoE professional learning that is attended by school principals throughout the school year at what they term 'school business days'. Having principals come together on set days allows the DoE to define what is required to 'perform well', what makes a 'good school' and also ensures that all remote school leaders and the staff they oversee are 'on board' with this direction.

To further focus the attention of educators, the DoE selects key agents to deliver professional learnings that align with their own strategic directions. For example, the Rocky Cliff principal noted how the department had accessed professional learning support through Lyn Sharratt who provided a 'clarity workshop' that aligns with the DoE strategic design principle that is centred on a 'sharp and narrow focus'.

Across the three formal, departmental professional learning priorities that emerged through collective data analysis, the DoE is strategically using professional learning to advance interests that are deemed to be essential to themselves as the provider (Reid 2017) under the auspices of the NT Strategy. Notably, Read Write Inc. workshops provide technical and operational forms of professional learning that directly align with the goals to improve NAPLAN results in the area of SAE writing. In an effort to provide consistency across all Northern Territory schools the department employs a form of what Biesta and Osberg (2010) call 'complexity reduction' that simplifies what educators are required to do by providing them with 'the solution'. Extensive research is critical of such approaches that regard teachers as passive consumers of this type of professional learning as opposed to being active producers of tailored responses to individual, contextualised problems of practice (see examples in Craven, Yeung & Han 2014; Danling et al. 2005; Morrison et al. 2019). As a consequence, educators are de-professionalised and their practice may not necessarily be linked to the specific learning needs of the students they teach.

The scholarship of Anagnostopoulos, Lingard and Sellar (2016) views program development of this nature as utilising a form of 'globalised filtering' that aligns with evidence used by those with power and authority to promote their own courses of action. Additionally, minimal deviation from Gillies (2013) notion of the 'grand plan' is assured through mechanisms such as the AITSL self-reflection process: a process where adherence to externally imagined standards promotes alignment with systemic directionality (Fitzgerald & Savage 2013) and

where such standards are the yardstick by which educator performance and professionalism are judged.

The final measure of control is exerted through professional learning offerings where the DoE determines the agenda and facilitators of officially sanctioned workshops. By controlling these critical elements, the macro objectives of the DoE are upheld, since minimal room exists to penetrate professional learning experiences that fall outside their own parameters.

Notable omissions that were evident when analysing the formal DoE professional learning priorities were community narratives, aspirations, worldviews and approaches. When asked about this explicitly, the principal of Riverglen School was very clear in articulating whose priorities were most valued by the DoE:

> …being directed from the community, I don't think that's where professional learning is coming from. (Riverglen Principal)

This statement indicates much. It highlights that DoE professional learning objectives are privileged while community priorities are either silenced or marginalised. Given that scholars indicate that members of the community have unique insider capital into the lives of students who attend remote Indigenous schools (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016), professional learning established upon platforms that privilege one group over another run the risk of forfeiting collective knowledge contributions that can be established through more collaborative communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991).

6.2.2 Non-formal and informal professional learning

While all school principals involved in the study recognised and adhered to formal departmental professional learning, two leaders were also keen to access a range of informal and non-formal learning opportunities that existed beyond departmental offerings. One of the key reasons cited was a disconnect that Beth, the principal of Bluebird School, indicated is present in formal DoE professional learning:

> I found the professional learning here, like the system's professional learning can be quite disconnected from what we're doing…a lot of the professional learning opportunities that we get sent out don't match where we're at and what we're doing. (Bluebird Principal)

In attempting to facilitate learning that matches the professional needs of her staff, Beth found that her teachers benefited from two levels of professional learning. The first involved

informal learning that takes place between local and non-local staff who teach together, often referred to as 'team teaching'. Unlike remote DoE schools led by teaching principals where professional learning centred only on students' achievement of SAE proficiency, Bluebird School's goal to develop students who are biliterate and bicultural, requires teaching teams to work together in a way that recognises all educators' (local and non-local) expertise. This expertise is used in the classroom by both teachers, increasing cultural understandings for all parties over time (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016).

Non-formal professional learning was also sought by the principal and involved regular and ongoing sessions led by community members. When discussing this mode of professional learning, Beth was adamant that it is beneficial, stating:

> What makes it good is that, well it is focused on what the community wants…So that push which is not a department push, which is a community push is the real focus of those weeks, and because it's focused around that and how to develop local learning and how to balance English and [local language] side by side. All of those discussions happen, that's what makes it good, is that every day is talking about things that the community is really invested in. (Bluebird Principal)

In further discussions it was evident that while local school staff and the wider community were responsible for leading these sessions, participants included both local and non-local educators, sometimes within the community, sometimes at school, but wherever possible, *on Country*. This ensured that all school staff had an opportunity to participate in professional learning that was uniquely connected to the spiritual, cultural and place-based contextual needs of their students (Lowe et al. 2020). Through this process, the school principal recognised that all staff needed time to develop greater understanding through the co-construction of deeper knowledge available to them within their own school community. Here, professional learning is utilised as a tool for collective sense-making that can inform teaching practice. Similarly, for many staff, this type of professional learning may involve degrees of 'un-learning' (Thomson 2016) of previous approaches in order to take up new pedagogical practice that is responsive to student needs. This approach steps beyond binary, cross-cultural limitations of an 'us and them' approach that Lea et al. (2011b, p. 274) suggest 'seldom moves beyond abstract projections to intimate knowledge'. Instead this professional development focuses on developing intercultural understandings where learning takes place *through* culture rather than just being *about* culture (Dolan & Miller 2011) in what can be conceived as a shared 'both/and' model.

The Sunshine School Principal was also keen that he and his staff benefit from professional learning beyond DoE offerings, with the goal to better understand the explicit learning needs of their student cohort. Brian and his staff attended a language course that can be categorised as non-formal since it operated outside officially sanctioned DoE offerings. This professional learning was regarded as having significant benefits:

> …the great thing about John's course is, it's not just about the languages, it's a whole cultural immersion as well.
>
> So, my staff has come back with a greater understanding of how to respectfully work with locals rather than go in whitefella way, all guns blazing, this is our way or the highway sort of thing. I think from a community perspective, whenever I talk to the community about that stuff, they absolutely love the fact that we're learning their language. (Sunshine Principal)

The program is explained by Brian as having strong cultural and linguistic significance for the specific context in which his school is located. He also indicated that the expertise of the workshop presenter allowed hidden meanings in local language conventions to be understood that would allow his staff to better connect with students at school. Brian suggested:

> …that gives them [non-local school staff] the understanding of the cultural perspective…and John was great...he was able to unpack the cultural ramifications of that as well, and the hidden meanings of what was in the dialogue, which was really, really good... it was a fantastic workshop.
>
> For my classroom teacher and myself, we gained a better understanding…we were able to gain a really good understanding of how the local language is structured. And that then helps us to work to identify the language errors and things that the kids might make with English. (Sunshine Principal)

What is noticeable in accounts provided by these two school principals is that sources of professional learning that allows staff to develop deeper understandings of their students' lives are available. When accessed, this provides an opportunity for educators to step beyond the limitations of operating only according to their own experiences, histories, worldview or paradigmatic thinking and instead provides scope for professional learning to be intrinsically connected to what each school site determines as useful for their unique context. While this study highlights that such opportunities exist, they must generally be accessed beyond DoE offerings and usually in an employee's own time.

6.3 What is remote school leadership responsive to?

Principals' leadership of professional learning in remote DoE schools is predominantly responsive to DoE goals and directives for improving the acquisition of SAE and NAPLAN results. This move to centralise professional learning is a deliberate and purposeful action of the DoE who are currently aligning efforts to recommendations from educational reviews that suggested professional learning should promote 'effective central workforce planning' (Wilson 2014, p. 192).

While remote school principals are bound to implement the DoE professional learning agenda, a requirement fulfilled by all participants involved in this study, the leadership practice of two school principals also sought greater connection to the cultural and linguistic dimensions of their local communities. At Bluebird School this involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff raising each other's understandings through ongoing team teaching in the bilingual program and through community-led professional learning experiences. At Sunshine School the principal was keen that he and his staff attend language and culture workshops in order to better understand the language conventions and cultural nuances of their students. While the latter principal recounted numerous benefits of unpacking aspects of language and culture that pertained directly to his students, accessing this workshop involved attendance in the school holidays to workshops that were not offered by the DoE.

Analysis of data from this research highlights that while it is possible for school principals to provide staff with professional learning opportunities that are responsive to the lives of their students in remote DoE schools, this is challenging. Participation in such learning requires considerable effort because formal professional learning is centred firmly on the achievement of systemic objectives, not the cultural and contextual learning objectives of remote communities themselves.

When considered collectively, the leadership practices of the Sunshine and Bluebird School Principals adhered to three tenets of culturally responsive schools (Morrison et al. 2019):

- Strongly connected to student's lifeworlds
- Recognition of cultural difference as a positive asset
- Promoting learning and/or multi-model literacies

With regards to culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), these two principals collectively adhered to all four characteristics:

- Critically self-reflects on leadership
- Develops culturally responsive teachers
- Engages students, parents and Indigenous contexts
- Promotes an inclusive school environment

The conclusion drawn from data analysis in the area of professional learning is that all principals were system responsive, however only principals who, according to their own subjectivities, experience and existing school structures, extended opportunities beyond formal departmental offerings were able to provide their staff with professional learning that can be regarded as culturally responsive.

6.4 The site of professional learning possibility through educational leadership

Analysis of research data highlighted a number of factors that support or inhibit how professional learning is used to connect the work of educators with the lifeworlds of their students. While school principals are required as part of their remit to facilitate, oversee and supervise a range of Western-orientated professional learning imperatives that specifically align with the strategic plan of the DoE, scope does exist for their practice to mobilise whole school professional learning that is tailored to the specific educational needs of their students and the educational imagination of the local community. Two practices that school leaders across the study utilised to connect professional learning to their students' lifeworlds in inclusive ways were:

1. *Learning together* – where members of the local community had authentic responsibility in professional learning, the cultural, contextual and linguistic repertoires of the students were privileged. This was found to exist in two main forms with both being dependent on local and non-local staff working together. One form was informal team teaching that took place in the classroom on a daily basis; the other was non-formal professional learning sessions that were planned, developed and operated by the local community. These opportunities provided genuine cross-cultural and inter-cultural understandings for all parties and enhanced the connection between professional learning and the lifeworlds of the schools' students. Further, these opportunities maintained the educational integrity of all educators whether they were Indigenous or non-Indigenous. For members of the community, their investment and inclusion in localised education was considered essential in the overall success of the

school due to their insider understandings of students, culture and community dynamics. For non-local staff, learning in teams provided opportunities for their pedagogical toolkit to expand through the development of cultural understandings that extend beyond their own prior knowledge and experiences.

2. *Privileging of place* – it is widely acknowledged in extensive literature and by all research participants that each remote Indigenous community has unique characteristics (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Luke 2013; Stewart & Warn 2017). This understanding indicates that professional learning that seeks to be responsive to place, must be tailored accordingly. Accounts provided by a principal who utilised this practice in his leadership indicated that professional learning allowed all school staff to understand local language structures more explicitly, ensured previously hidden cultural meanings could be unpacked and understood; and provided scope for educators to attune their practice to the local context. By doing so, it was suggested that this not only assisted educators to perform their roles but also strengthened relationships between the school and the community in the process.

6.5 Summary

Data analysed throughout the study highlighted that the current professional learning landscape in the Northern Territory is the product of recommendations from former DoE education reviews. These reviews suggested that professional learning should be used to facilitate the achievement of departmental goals: goals that prioritise improvement in NAPLAN through numeracy and SAE literacy. The sharp and narrow focus of the DoE currently sidelines the input of local communities in professional learning provision and as a consequence, inhibits educators from accessing professional learning support that enables meaningful connections between their own practice and the cultural, linguistic and contextual needs of their students. According to post-structural and post-colonial critique, this is an example of cultural alterity creating a binary upon which a power imbalance allows the dominant societal group to determine and control the direction of professional learning by silencing the voices of those who are considered subordinate (Foucault 2002; Said 1995; Spivak 1988).

This positioning is counter to what an extensive body of culturally responsive scholarship (Bishop 2012; Brayboy et al. 2012; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Krakouer 2015; Ladson-Billings 1995; Morrison et al. 2019; Sleeter 2011b; Vass 2017; Villegas & Lucas 2007)

highlights as pertinent for the professional growth of educators who work in First Nations educational environments. Collectively, scholarship indicates that professional learning is maximised when aligned with the contextual needs of users, directed by educators themselves according to generative themes and taking place over extended time periods so that adaptive processes can be embedded organically in practice (Flynn & Bruce 2019).

Despite what such scholarship indicates, at a systemic level professional learning in the Northern Territory is part of an improvement agenda that places little value on educational purposes that are conceived beyond their own framings. According to analysed research data, the DoE appears unconcerned with joint activity through the collaboration of all remote Indigenous education stakeholders. Instead, efforts are adroitly targeted according to the discursive logics of performativity and accountability. The DoE has significant power at their disposal which is being used in the area of professional learning to exclude and/or reject orientations that do not align with their own objectives, allowing the predominant focus to remain on their own rigid agendas (Biesta & Osberg 2010; Reid 2017). Here, the DoE exerts its influence as a form of disciplinary power to increase its control, and in doing so forfeits the opportunity to support deeper understandings about students' lives that could be achieved through more dialogic and pluralistic approaches to professional learning. This reductive approach simultaneously simplifies professional learning offerings and de-couples Indigenous worldviews to ensure that technical control according to only Anglocentric priorities is maintained. According to scholars including Au (2011) and Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson (2015), this is characteristic of neo-liberal logics impacting the educational landscape in a manner that limits and de-skills staff in their capacity to tailor learning programs to the cultural and linguistic intelligences of their students.

Current DoE professional learning offerings privilege Western practices and either surrender Indigenous practices altogether or relegate them to the periphery. Not only does this fail teachers who are denied professional learning that would greatly support the enactment of their roles, but it also fails students who are then taught according to a narrowed focus that circumscribes their teacher's capacity to connect with their lifeworlds. Additionally, this situation disadvantages the wider Indigenous community who could otherwise offer mentoring and support if professional learning opportunities were expanded to incorporate 'Indigenous values, history and perspectives' (Craven, Yeung & Han 2014, p. 85) in tandem with non-Indigenous knowledges, values, perspectives and practices.

Under current arrangements, the school principal is required to uphold a professional learning directive that accords with departmental goals under the NT Strategy. While this is not always a problem, existing structural obligations limit the extent to which remote educational leaders can connect professional learning to the specific contextual needs of their students. Nevertheless, possibilities to incorporate Indigenous knowledges, values and ways of being do exist. These approaches are vital as they provide an opportunity for Anglocentric, deficit orientations of students to be disrupted (Vass 2017). To mobilise professional learning that connects to the diversity, cultural intelligences and funds of knowledge of remote school students requires school leaders to search beyond formal departmental offerings. Instead, they need to establish professional learning opportunities for educators that respond directly to student learning needs within the school or community in which they are based. At two schools involved in this study, leadership practice centred on forms of counter-action that critical theorists would claim affords degrees of liberation for persons and groups who have been historically marginalised (Freire 1993; McLaren 2007). In these schools, a both/and approach towards professional learning recognises the criticality of DoE objectives but also values, respects and sees benefit in honouring community-based educational aspirations. This is professional learning that seeks to afford all persons, local or non-local, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, opportunities to move beyond the limitations of cross-cultural difference and instead facilitate inter-cultural modes of operation that are underpinned by deep mutual respect, reciprocity and social justice (Arbon 2008). New possibilities exist, but these possibilities must be founded upon leadership that seeks to bring all stakeholders together so that professional learning can advance knowledge according to a balance between departmental and community interests, ultimately allowing educators and their students to benefit from all of it.

6.6 Conclusion

Analysis of data indicated that professional learning for educators who work in remote Indigenous schools in the Northern Territory centres predominantly on systemic agendas that are aligned to global, neo-liberal education logics. This logic seeks to build educator capacity to improve student learning that is directly linked to the goals of the DoE as detailed in the NT Strategy, but in doing so limits professional learning that appropriately develops culturally responsive educators.

Despite the significant responsibilities that principals in remote Indigenous schools have in upholding the professional learning imperatives of the DoE, possibilities to develop the instructional repertoires of their teachers in accordance with students' specific cultural and linguistic needs are in existence. These possibilities are found in leadership practice that recognises the utility of accessing local staff and the wider community in professional learning experiences and also through tailoring professional learning to the place in which a particular remote school is located. Through leadership practice that privileges these approaches, educators can develop their instructional capacities in collaboration with persons who deeply understand the lifeworlds of remote Indigenous students and can generate solutions to local education challenges that are fit for purpose.

In order to establish culturally responsive school leadership practice possibilities in the area of professional learning, this study used the collective scholarship of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016), Khalifa (2018) and Morrison et al. (2019) as lenses through which data could be analysed. While the emergent possibilities seek to add to a growing body of knowledge in the area of culturally responsive professional learning, it does so in a manner that builds upon existing scholarship. As with Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018), this study advocates for professional learning that utilises community knowledge and input. However, while their studies indicated a need to access knowledge through the provision of community advice or seeking community involvement on a periodic or ad hoc basis, this study indicates an additional pathway. Where remote Indigenous contexts in Australia are unique is in the daily team teaching that local and non-local staff engage in, with this evidently providing an ongoing, highly contextualised form of professional learning that has significant utility for both parties.

The uniqueness of remote Indigenous contexts also positions these insights as critical, given that the scholarship of Morrison et al. (2019) is limited to more highly populated geographical regions of Australia. While the authors advocate for the utility of professional learning in preparing teachers to work with culturally diverse student cohorts, they also indicate that models of professional learning cannot unproblematically be transported from one location to another, highlighting the primacy of what this research has been able to illuminate.

Chapter 7 – Community engagement and remote Indigenous schools

> Indigenous communities can reform education by inserting their own educational aspirations into schools. In this way, the community's goals can become aligned with those of educational delivery (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b, p. 107).

7.1 Introduction

The critical importance of community engagement in education is captured in a proliferation of national and international literature (Bishop 2012; Fogarty & Schwab 2012b; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Khalifa 2012; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Lowe 2017; Sarra et al. 2018). In the Northern Territory, the relative importance that school principals have in developing and maintaining connections between the schools and the local community is conferred in DoE principal job descriptions and the NT Strategy (see appendices K, L and M).

Drawing on the scholarship of Lea et al. (2011b), community engagement in the Northern Territory is regarded widely as having utility; however it is an educational imperative that is seldom defined. In order to assist in framing how community engagement is conceptualised and ultimately utilised in this thesis, the combination of past and present DoE policies and wider educational scholarship that pertains to community engagement in remote Indigenous education contexts is beneficial.

In early DoE reviews such as *Learning Lessons: an independent review of education in the Northern Territory* (Collins 1999), the phrasing 'community involvement' was used to articulate the need for developing 'effective partnerships between Indigenous people and the education system' (p. 163). Later reviews such as that conducted by Wilson (2014), use the phrase 'community engagement' and associate this with a stronger voice for Indigenous people that is required to achieve educational success. While 'involvement' is regarded by Huff Sisson, Shin and Whittington (2021) as lacking the agentic and inclusive possibilities of 'engagement', a thorough read of both the Collins (1999) and Wilson (2014) reviews suggests that their respective use of 'community involvement' and 'community engagement' imbues similar relational functions and intends similar desired effects. In 2014, Wilson drew upon the collective thoughts of review participants when highlighting the significance of

strong links between schools and the communities in which they are situated (Wilson 2014, p. 77):

> There is a widespread view in the Northern Territory (NT) that the engagement of communities in the education of Indigenous children is critical to their success. Community engagement is seen as both a right and a condition for the effective governance of schools and their capacity to respond to local culture and meet local expectations.

According to research conducted in remote Indigenous communities by Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016), the manner in which schools and the local communities engage with one another varies; however joint activity regularly centres on processes such as 'consulting, networking, partnering, collaborating, coordinating, empowering or participating' (p. 17) that seek to provide points of connection between the local school and the wider community itself. While forms of engagement vary, they consistently follow a similar logic that is underpinned by a desire to develop 'bridging ties' (Guenther & Disbray 2015). This logic is based on presumed correlations between establishing welcoming school-community relationships and/or partnerships (Commonwealth of Australia 2012; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations 2010) that may enhance student engagement, increase attendance and positively impact student behaviour to facilitate improved educational outcomes (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Lea et al. 2011b).

As foregrounded in previous data analysis chapters, education is imbricated with political motives – motives that also influence how schools choose to engage with their local communities. According to contemporary scholarship, community engagement in remote schools is used primarily to support pre-determined departmental objectives (Fogarty, Lovell & Dodson 2015; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Lea et al. 2011b). Lea et al. (2011b, p. 278) articulate this phenomenon when stating:

> For all that engagement is seen as an inarguable good, actions undertaken in its name are more often focused on assisting parents to reinforce the values of the school, and less about ensuring the school is congruous with the total ecology of the student's neighbourhood.

The community engagement described by Lea et al. (2011b) does not adhere to the underlying tenets of cultural responsivity because it positions existing school priorities as being most important and requires parents to fall into line with this direction. Culturally responsive forms of community engagement can however be conceived as involving dialogic, co-constructed processes that aim to pursue joint partnerships, programs and activities with

shared educational and community benefits (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019). Throughout this thesis, it is this understanding of community engagement that has been utilised.

When data was analysed in this research it was recognised that school principals utilise their agency in a range of ways in the area of community engagement. In order to organise and understand the bandwidth of leadership practice orientations in this area, accessing the work of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) is useful. Through their scholarship, remote school community engagement is framed in three distinct ways:

1. *Targeted engagement* – engagement of the community in order for the school to achieve its own pre-determined short-term goals. This model of engagement is regarded as unsustainable as the community is required to be compliant rather than having authentic ownership of the particular program in which their assistance is sought.

2. *Mutual benefit engagement* – longer term partnerships where the school and local community share power in decision-making about aspects of local schooling. This model is regarded as having sustainability potential as stakeholders have the opportunity through dialogic processes to provide their own philosophical stance on matters that may impact education at the local level.

3. *Symbiotic engagement* – an integrated, long-term approach that involves the school, the community and other organisations to achieve goals that are not limited only to education. An example may include the school and community working in collaboration with local businesses to forge future employment pathways for students.

Throughout this chapter the practice of school leaders is considered in terms of how it relates to community engagement through a culturally responsive lens. Initially, the themes established throughout the research are utilised to form major narrative arcs at the nexus of educational leadership and community engagement in remote Indigenous schools. Next, consideration is given to what remote principals are predominantly responsive to in the area of community engagement in their respective contexts. From this platform leadership practices that support cultural responsivity through community engagement are outlined before synthesising the accounts of all research respondents. Finally, an original contribution to knowledge is offered through extending the boundaries of what has been theorised in

relation to community engagement as it applies to educational leadership, cultural responsivity and remote Indigenous education.

7.2 Remote school relationships

7.2.1 The purpose and nature of engagement

As outlined in chapter four (4.2.1), the NT Strategy (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017) has four specific focus areas with community engagement described as critical and where, 'strong partnerships with children, students, families, the community and industry inform our decisions' (p. 2). School principals echoed a similar sense of importance regarding community engagement with the principal of Rocky Cliff summing it up this way:

> …without the partnership with community, you're just sitting here in your own silo, and it will never, never happen. You can want desires as big as you want but without those relationships and that partnership, it's very difficult to achieve those successful things. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

John, the Rocky Cliff School Principal, explicitly linked community engagement to the NT Strategy, stating that 'the most important [focus area] is community engagement'. Despite the strong rhetoric, engagement was not featured in the school's SIP, suggesting more work is still to be done in translating these ideas into tangible actions. This gap between rhetoric and reality was also evident at Willington School where the need for community engagement was expressed, yet commentary about actions that involve the school and community related predominantly to 'sorting out problems' so that school goals could be achieved.

At both these schools the purpose of community engagement could be described as 'targeted' since relationship building was focused solely on achieving school priorities. This approach accords with the NT Strategy that, despite some level of ambiguity, appears to seek connection according to their own (the DoE's) educational priorities. The design principle states that: 'Students and their families, educators, the system and our partners have a shared understanding of our direction' (Northern Territory Department of Education 2017, p. 1). While not only being 'targeted' this design principle also raises questions about the extent of agency that school leaders have to operate beyond departmental directives.

Restricted autonomy to move outside of DoE prescriptions is also apparent at Riverglen School. Josie, like her teaching principal colleagues at Rocky Cliff and Willington, was adamant that community engagement was imperative, yet data suggested that any importance given to this area was generally aligned to achieving school objectives that had already been

defined – objectives that according to the SIP, do not require action that includes the local community. When discussing community engagement, the principal stated 'The community knows what to expect from us and when I say us I mean the school' before going on to indicate that she was not interested in moving beyond this mode of operation. This position is again indicative of a 'targeted' approach to community engagement that views harmonious relationships as beneficial, but mainly in order to uphold the status quo according to school and departmentally determined objectives.

At Sunshine School, community engagement was regarded as having critical value and consistently featured in the SIP, the Annual Performance Report and all interviews, as well as being noted as a priority in research field notes. Brian, the school principal, indicated that improvements in school and community relations that he and his staff had made in recent years were due to a deliberate focus on re-establishing local links since he started:

> …we've talked an awful lot about community engagement and school culture and for me when I came to the school, they were the key things that needed to happen first. We couldn't teach until we had those things in place and…you can't teach if you don't have bums on seats. (Sunshine Principal)

At this school, developing relationships also involved the school principal utilising his position of authority and influence to advocate in overlapping school-community spaces (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). An example is provided below where Brian spoke for and on behalf of a family in its dealings with family welfare:

> Sometimes you also need to be a voice for our community. I'm hesitant to sort of say that in an offhand way. An example for me, I would see it as a leadership trait that I have, is this lady from family welfare and this poor family had been having trouble with their foster child for quite some time. But she was, right or wrong, just bullying them and making them feel so bad about this, so this child could be relocated. So, in this three-way meeting that I had, I said, 'look the main concern is hearing the voice of our family'. I said, 'at the moment we're hearing very strongly where you're coming from. Both of you know what the thoughts are of the school and what we can offer but I think it's important that we listen to the family'. And just to see them sit up and go, hey, someone's on our side, they were then able to go no…so at that point, they were sort of, we probably should give her yet another go. At the end of the day, they were like, no, someone's on our side. (Sunshine Principal)

The Sunshine School principal also extended his involvement with the community beyond students' immediate families. Instead, local sporting facilities, ranger programs and local councils were also involved in symbiotic engagement that placed the relational bonds of this school and their school leader within a network of local activity. Invoking a research finding

from the scholarship of Khalifa (2012), the high visibility of this leader, both in the community and in his advocacy work, has potential to develop 'trust, credibility and rapport' (p. 439) at the local level.

Like all other principals involved in the study, Beth at Bluebird indicated strongly that community engagement made a difference to how the school functioned and how students interacted with the school. As with the principal of Sunshine School, Beth's words aligned with school documentation. The SIP used a range of phrases and initiatives to indicate the importance of connections between the school and the local community such as outreach programs, school celebrations, the use of home visits and meetings between local and non-local staff. For these meetings the actions included the need to engage 'elders, parents and community in [the] children's education'. At Bluebird School, mutual benefit engagement was underpinned by a desire to include members of both the school and community in collaboratively determining the purpose and direction of the school.

Collective data analysis reveals that, while community engagement is regarded as critical by the DoE and all school principals, what differs is the purpose attributed to this departmental focus area. In three schools led by teaching principals, these leaders took an approach that was similar to the DoE as they sought stronger relational bonds in order to advance school imperatives via targeted engagement. At Sunshine School, local industry, sporting clubs and the community council were involved in a symbiotic relationship where the school sought to advance relationships with multiple organisations for the ultimate long-term benefit of students. Finally, mutual benefit engagement was evident at Bluebird School where relationships were based on joint negotiation and reciprocity.

Amidst variations in the purpose that underpins community engagement from one school to another, a common feature was evident across all remote sites. While community engagement was overwhelmingly understood by each principal as imperative, an examination of the NT Strategy indicates that there are currently no 'measures of success' that schools can use to indicate their performance progress. When teamed with the notion that we 'measure what we value' (Ainscow 2005, p. 120) and 'what gets measured gets done' (Ainscow 2005, p. 119), community engagement can be viewed as an outlier in the DoE's accountability framework given that the normally explicit indicators of performance are notably absent in this area.

7.2.2 Educative and non-educative engagement

Drawing upon Yunkaporta (2009b), engagement that is conducted superficially between cultural groups is described as leading to little more than an exacerbation of difference. The alternative he poses is a commitment to deeper inter-cultural engagement that provides scope for increased understanding by all parties. Similar sentiments are also found in educational literature that is replete with arguments that advocate for dialogue to be used in developing connections between schools and communities (see examples in Bishop 2012; Guenther 2015a; Morrison et al. 2019; Sarra et al. 2018).

While all remote school leaders indicated a strong consensus towards the primacy of dialogue to develop relationships, variation was evident in whether school leaders mobilised dialogic interactions only through non-educational engagement, or whether they found ways to engage the community both educationally and non-educationally.

Non-educational interaction was found in activities that included school celebrations such as barbeques and morning teas or in school and community negotiations over the use of shared facilities. While activities of this nature were common in research data collected from the teaching principals, the Riverglen Principal provided an example of where school and community relationships are developed according to the student's academic progress:

> We also have our open day where we hand out reports so the community is invited into the school…every single student will have their report given to them [by their teacher] when they talk to the families. (Riverglen Principal)

The principal at Bluebird School was keen to utilise a range of educative and non-educative approaches to community engagement approaches. This involved hosting community events that sought to build general school and community rapport and also engaging in deeper connections that Beth said would impact the 'core business of the school'. This phrasing was used when stating the form of engagement that she values most: 'community involvement that supports kids' learning'. When expanding further, it was evident that this was not just about the community assisting in meeting the educational goals of the DoE, but about mobilising the community in culturally synchronous ways that could assist the school in its mission to provide a biliterate and bicultural education. Examples of community engagement that were specifically tied to learning include school-based cultural days, cultural and linguistic resource development by local community members, professional learning developed and led by local staff and the wider community, bush trips where learning was

conducted by community representatives *on Country*, and curriculum mapping of the bilingual program to the national curriculum. In each case, the leaders practice sought to 'engage communities without merely reinscribing schoolcentric perspectives' (Khalifa 2018, p. 27).

The varying approaches utilised across the school sites require different levels of investment from all parties. Where the school and community only interact through informal celebrations, the capacity for members of the local community to influence learning programs in substantive ways is restricted. Drawing on the scholarship of Morrison et al. (2019), limiting approaches to celebration where potential for pedagogical reform is absent is an example of what cultural responsivity *is not*. Where a combination of educative and non-educative engagement is utilised, scope to strengthen relational bonds for all parties remains intact but it does so knowing that ongoing opportunities also exist for the community to shape the school's learning practices and programs in ways that they regard as relevant and meaningful.

Similar positioning was also evident in how school councils or parent advisory groups were either in operation or completely absent across each of the school sites. At the four schools led by teaching principals, no parental advisory groups were in existence. The principal of Rocky Cliff explained:

> …we are meant to have a school council or advisory group [parent consultative group], depending on the size of your school. So, then I find because I've worked in small schools, getting out on the ground and actually talking to local people is what then can help me in the decisions I make…as opposed to formalising things sometimes. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

While none of the smaller remote Indigenous schools led by teaching principals had councils or advisory groups in operation, Josie, the principal at Riverglen, expressed that she was likely to soon be involved in the local authority committee where key personnel from local organisations and local community members meet regularly to discuss matters of importance. As Josie indicated:

> Only being new in the position [of school principal], I'm not on the local authority yet, but there is a vacant position available and I have been nominated to go onto it. So that to me says that community is requesting for me to be on there, so that's…yeah, it's that respect they have for me and for the position of principal at the school. (Riverglen Principal)

At Bluebird School, their formalised meeting structure was quite different to all other schools involved in the study:

> We have a school council group and there's 18 members of that group including myself and staff reps and then community family reps. (Bluebird Principal)

The relative value attributed to community input in school activities is inscribed through these contrasting approaches. At sites where there is no active school council or advisory group, the community are viewed through a deficit cultural lens (Chenhall et al. 2011), locating them as 'passive consumers' of education (Dolan & Miller 2011) because any substantive influence that they may have on the school's educative functions has been eliminated. In one decisive action (or inaction), this move disconnects families from the school and removes the potential for place-based envisioning (Smith 2012) to impact the school's educational purpose and direction. Here, educational leaders can be seen to be excluding community perspectives, limiting the potential for all parties for deeper engagement that Yunkaporta (2009b) suggests is required to facilitate increased levels of understanding. A far more comprehensive and nuanced pedagogy of leadership and community engagement is needed to move towards deep ethical listening and learning on both sides as described through examples such as *dadirri* or *kulini* that were outlined in chapter two (2.3.2).

In many remote Northern Territory schools, the educational vision of the DoE is simply redistributed through the departmentally appointed principal. Without a platform for local voices to challenge the prevailing conditions and reshape education for their children, a 'power over' model (Davids & Waghid 2016) is routinely applied by leaders who retain an assumed mandate to determine the required direction of the school. This arrangement is a double-edged sword as remote school leaders enjoy significant localised educational power, but in instances where a deeper connection with the community is not apparent, the principal may be rendered 'impotent' when trying to operationalise new initiatives that require broader support (Dolan 2018). This represents a system-created 'low trust climate' (Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019) where authentic joint activity has not been engaged in, removing all possibilities for co-constructed knowledge production. This is an approach to education that 'excludes as much as it engages' (Lea et al. 2011b, p. 266). Removing parents and the wider community from educative forums inhibits the development of a non-local staff's 'contextual literacy' (Wildy & Clarke 2012), displaces localised educational goals and disables the

opportunity for place-based culture to be embedded beyond school functions such as discos and barbeques. This effectively removes a key component of sense-making and identity formation (Daniels-Mayes & Sinclair 2014; Yunkaporta 2009b) from the schooling experienced by remote Indigenous students.

This analysis highlights that any suggested 'partnership' by schools who only engage with the community in non-educative ways is nothing more than an illusion, because it is not founded upon generative, inclusive and democratic practices. This is an approach that Freire (1993, pp. 66 & 68) cautions against when stating:

> Authentic education is not carried on by A *for* B or by A *about* B, but rather by A *with* B [….] …one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding.

In contrast to power laden approaches where those with authority privilege their own interests over others, potential for greater community input is found where the school leader may be directly involved with the local authority committees. These structures show significant culturally responsive promise; however they are also limited because they deal with a myriad of local matters, diluting to some extent how educative goals can be actioned. Where structural mechanisms were shown to indicate significant culturally responsive potential was through formalised school-community meeting structures such as school councils. The principal at Bluebird utilised a school council that actively sought mutual school and community benefits through a commitment to sustained, participatory processes. This privileged three features – place-based culture, local knowledge and educational aspirations – through an existing and ongoing platform where the school's educational vision could be decided through collaborative negotiation. This is indicative of leadership practice that operates according to a collectively determined mandate where formalised joint activity is considered an integral component in determining the school's vision. Such practice is underpinned by 'inclusive input, collaborative endeavour and agreed values' (Dolan 2018, p. 193) that ultimately forms a version of school leadership, mobilising engagement where parents and members of the community have potential to be 'fully present – both physically present, and in positions of power and policy making' (Khalifa 2018, p. 12).

At Bluebird School, the principal actively encouraged deep school and community engagement, but felt that more could still be achieved through a commitment to ongoing innovation:

> …we don't have parent teacher interviews here. They've never done it. I don't know why not because we could, and they might look slightly different, but I think we should have a parent meeting type thing. Whether that's us going out into the community for a day, teachers just go out to families or whatever. However it looks it might have to be a bit different here, but I don't think we should just not do it, because it might not look like what parent teacher nights look like anywhere else. (Bluebird Principal)

Collective analysis revealed that while all school principals value community engagement, not all community engagement can be regarded as the same. This study found that most community engagement in remote Indigenous schools is established upon the school's terms in non-educative ways. While this is the most common approach, it is not the only possible approach. Where a willingness exists to be open to both educative and non-educative engagement, strong culturally responsive possibilities are found. Such approaches recognise that developing harmonious relationships through celebrations is important but so too is the opportunity for the local community to be able to shape the educational direction of the school according to their cultural and linguistic intelligences.

7.2.3 The impact of time on relationship building

In research conducted by Khalifa (2012) it is posited that persons from outside the cultural background of the local community often have much to prove and learn, thus requiring significant 'face time' in order to build trust. Overwhelming support for this insight was provided by all school principals who explicitly drew correlations between the amount of time spent in communities and the depth of relationships forged. The general consensus was that the development of deep 'bridging ties' between schools, families and communities (Guenther & Disbray 2015, p. 4) required a collective investment of multiple years. This is a process that according to the principal of Sunshine School, evolves organically over time:

> …the first year you're finding your feet and people are wondering if you are staying or going. When you turn up for the second year, they're like, "oh, you're back." Okay. So, there's greater acceptance. Like I know with my local teacher, there was a lot of stuff that she wouldn't tell me about culture until that second year when she felt that she knew me better and knew I was going to stick around for a little while. (Sunshine Principal)

All principals indicated that locals in remote Indigenous communities are accustomed to external workers from a range of occupations arriving, staying for a short time and then departing. For this reason, new school leaders can expect that their initial arrival to a community will rarely be met with overt enthusiasm as locals are keen to see if you will simply be another itinerant remote school educator:

> The first six months, if you're just new to a teaching principal gig, you're figuring out the systems, and if you're new to the community you're figuring out if you're going to stick around. There's not necessarily buy in in that first six months, because who knows, you might be going. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

Collective analysis revealed that 'consistency of behaviour' was critical in the development of relationships between the school and local community. It was indicated that social capital was established as school principals learned the flow and patterns of the community and, equally, locals recognised the values that underpinned the school leader's responses to various circumstances:

> …you build a relationship with the people within the communities and that relationship takes time to build and they get to know you and they get to know your behaviours…and you're consistent in what you do, so from that consistency, they build trust and knowing you, then you start to build and get to know the people. So, it's not something that happens overnight. It happens over time (Rocky Cliff Principal).

When pressed explicitly on a time frame that is required to develop deep, reciprocal, trusting relationships between school leaders and the local community, principals indicated that two to three years was the 'sweet spot':

> I think the community you build much stronger relationships and people have gotten to know you and trust you and I think it takes a good two years. When you are back again after the second year into your third year everybody they know you, they know what to expect, and they know everything about you kind of thing. I think it brings stability and calmness. (Willington Principal)

> At the two-year mark, if you've created procedures and routines and developed relationships, it's about the two-year mark. (Rocky Cliff Principal)

> I'd say maybe three years would be the sweet spot of where you've tried things a couple of times and you might be a bit more confident and competent. (Bluebird Principal)

> I reckon the third year is the year where you've really got a good handle of the routines and what happens historically throughout the community as well from time to time. (Sunshine Principal)

Josie, the principal of Riverglen School was the only school leader who did not indicate a specific time period of two to three years to develop trusting relationships with the community. Of note however, Josie had worked at the school for a number of years in various classroom teacher roles prior to her appointment as principal, with this phase of relationship building considered critical to the relationships she had already established:

> I already knew the community and what is expected of the school. I knew the families, I knew the students, I knew the services within the community. All those things you need to be able to build trust in the community before you can lead and be productive. And I think having that before I stepped into the role has allowed me to fast track into making good progress and being productive, because I didn't need to build those relationships from the ground up. (Riverglen Principal)

While time is suggested by principals as a key factor in establishing trust between the local community and non-local educators, this study suggests that time alone is not enough. Drawing on collective scholarship (see examples in Guenther & Disbray 2015; Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019; Yunkaporta 2009b), time must be matched by a commitment by each party to taking each other to higher levels of trust and understanding so that joint activity can have reciprocal benefits to both the community and the school.

7.3 What is remote school leadership responsive to?

While all principals indicated strongly that community engagement was integral to successful remote schooling, the manner in which they responded through their leadership practice to this imperative did vary. The community engagement framing of Guenther, Osborne and Disbray (2016) identifies three schools as using a predominantly targeted approach given that their engagement with community was mainly focused on school and department priorities; one school adopted symbiotic engagement that aimed to facilitate goals that extended beyond educational framings; and the final school utilised shared decision-making processes to facilitate mutual benefits for the school and wider community.

Analysed data indicated that schools were responsive to a range of factors; however leadership practice that centred on symbiotic and mutual benefit engagement both have culturally responsive potential. Across all school sites, the majority of school leaders only exhibited minor, nuanced alignment between their community engagement approaches and

the tenets of CRP (Morrison et al. 2019) or CRSL (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). At Bluebird School the principal adhered to a total of five:

- Strongly connected to student lifeworlds (Morrison et al. 2019)
- Recognition of cultural difference as a positive asset (Morrison et al. 2019)
- Critically self-reflects on leadership (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016)
- Engages students, parents and Indigenous contexts (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016)
- Promotes an inclusive school environment (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016)

In sum, the educational leadership practice of the teaching principals was predominantly responsive to the development of relationships that support the system they are employed by. In all cases, the lack of school council or advisory group required them only to be responsive to the DoE as the community had no substantive input in the school's vision or operations. Across these schools some deviation was apparent as the leader at Riverglen School engaged the community educationally in a minor way through student progress discussions and the Sunshine Principal sought to strengthen the bonds with various organisations within the community for ultimate student benefit. At Bluebird School, a divergent form of practice was apparent as the principal was responsive to generative directions that were co-constructed between the school and the community and sought to align local educational practice with the cultural and contextual needs of the students. The formalised nature of meetings at this school ensured that local voices were actively sought, providing scope for community aspirations to guide the school's direction.

7.4 The site of community engagement possibility through educational leadership

Analysis of data highlighted a number of factors that support or inhibit a remote school leader's practice with respect to community engagement. Where the most significant possibilities lay was where reciprocity was evident through both educative and non-educative forms of engagement between the school and the local community. This involved moving beyond school-centric imperatives so that the needs, values, interests and aspirations of the community could surface.

Every school involved in this study showed some signs of non-educative community engagement requiring a commitment by school leaders and their staff to interact with the community through various celebrations and other events. Where the greatest opportunities lie for educational transformation of remote Indigenous schools is in a more widespread adoption of educative engagement through structural mechanisms like school councils. These structures provide scope for schools and communities to determine the school's vision collectively and upon a plurality of worldviews, experiences and intelligences. They also provide scope to strengthen local affiliations in substantive ways where reform is not about replacing one form of essentialism with another (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods 2004), instead providing potential for new possibilities to be revealed by locals and non-locals working together for the ultimate benefit of the school's students.

While benefit is apparent in the existence of formal meeting structures, this study recognises that simply having these mechanisms in place does not ensure they will work in educationally inclusive ways. The greatest possibilities are likely to be experienced when collaborative meeting structures are utilised by socially just school leaders who seek the ongoing commitment of a willing local community to shape the school's educational vision according to both school and community needs.

7.5 Summary

Data collected as part of this research highlights a gap between the significance afforded to this focus area through the NT Strategy and the approaches taken by the majority of school principals involved in the study. While all leaders foregrounded the necessity of community engagement in one or more phases of data collection, not all leaders utilised their subjectivity for the same purposes.

The principal of Sunshine School adopted symbiotic engagement that involved advocating for community members in overlapping school-community spaces (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and also extending school relationships to include a range of local organisations. What this school did not do, however, was engage the local community in formalised meetings, disabling substantive local input into the educational direction of the school. This was a practice also shared by all other small remote Indigenous schools involved in the study. Langton (1993) suggests that this type of power laden engagement represents a destructive form of racism as it centres on rendering a group 'invisible'. In this case, making the community invisible in the education of their own children is an example of a targeted

community engagement approach where hegemonic hierarchical structures serve those who already have power and further marginalise those who occupy subaltern positions (Spivak 1988). Here, asymmetrical power is used to value the knowledge and educational purposes of the system over those of the community (Hall & Guenther 2019). This works in opposition to the notion put forward by Normore, Anthony, Rodriguez and Wynne (2007, p. 656) that:

> The people with the least amount of power must be central to the decision-making process that impacts their everyday personal and political lives, but especially their educational lives.

The ultimate result of this situation in small remote Indigenous school contexts is a lack of informed debate between the school and the community, which positions locals as 'foreigners' on their own land (Schulz 2007) as they are significantly constrained in their ability to effect change in the education of their children. Similarly, according to logic offered by Moran (2016, p. 183), approaches of this nature lack humility and respect as they presume to know all the answers in advance.

Such moves can be regarded as deliberate in view of the fact that the NT Strategy seeks to serve its own educational outcomes agenda, as foregrounded in earlier chapters. According to this logic, removing community input makes sense in that distraction is minimised, but does this come at a price? According to Spittles (2006), not fully engaging with the community leaves non-Indigenous workers operating from 'uneducated assumptions' that are based on being either under-informed or uninformed. A similar sentiment is found in the scholarship of Disbray (2014), who indicates that monologic approaches have a deleterious effect as the impetus for community 'support and collaboration' (p. 137) has been removed. This disadvantages the school and their staff through their own doing as the community's opportunity to invest in the local school's direction has been removed, indicating a highly tenuous relational connection (Dolan & Miller 2011) that is predicated upon socially unjust practices that Morris (2017) refers to as a form of 'false equality'. Morris (2017) claims that 'no person or community can truly take responsibility unless they have power' (p. 226). In this case, any potential for the community to influence the school's direction has been removed through their absence of authority.

The superficiality of relationships through a subversion of community input ultimately reduces the possibilities for any parties to the relationship (the DoE, the school and the community) from being able to be authentically reflexive and learn from each other. This situates all remote school stakeholders as 'stuck'. Freire (1993) advocates for

‘conscientisation’ where open, honest dialogue widens the potential for co-constructed knowledge (Cazden & Luke 2019), providing opportunities for reciprocal benefits through stakeholder partnerships (Trimmer, Dixon & Guenther 2019). This process of learning from each other also ensures that authentic feedback loops are established, allowing all parties to the process to learn and be guided by each other over time (Fullan 1992). This same notion is also advocated by Sarra et al. (2018, p. 5) who posit that:

> In this space [collaborative dialogue space], it becomes possible for everyone to sit together as equals, agree on what expectations should be, and create a way forward in a genuinely collaborative manner. In this space, there is time for dialogue, a conversational process that focuses on synthesising or building on multiple perspectives and enables collective sense-making and consensual decision making. Dialogue involves being prepared to challenge and replace personal perspectives and assumptions. Dialogue accepts the uncertainty of ‘not knowing’ and as such enacts an engaged curiosity about what others bring.

Only Bluebird School operated in a manner that strengthened community agency in making decisions about the school through dialogic processes (Bishop 2012; Freire 1993) and generative themes (Eacott 2018). The practice of this educational leader is focused on developing socially just, mutually beneficial relationships, providing scope for collective sense-making (Sarra et al. 2018) and inter-cultural collaboration (Simpson, Caffery & Mcconvell 2009; Yunkaporta 2009b). At Bluebird School this specifically involved capturing the narratives of the wider community who were recognised as having deep local, cultural and linguistic knowledge, experience and expertise.

While the practice of establishing dialogue is called for widely in academic literature and is identified as a focus area in the NT Strategy, the translation of community engagement practice on the ground in Northern Territory Schools requires considerable rethinking. At present, the unilateral nature of approaches being enacted by remote teaching principals is doing damage to the potential that community engagement is designed to foster. Despite these concerns, possibilities do exist in the agency of school principals to mobilise community engagement for reciprocal school and community benefit. While this may involve a broad range of potential advantages for the community and for remote Indigenous schools, the most significant benefit is the scope for envisioning new educational futures that align meaningfully with the specific needs of students.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter used data collected throughout the research to explicate how DoE principals in remote Indigenous schools use their leadership in the area of community engagement to connect the vision and functions of their school to student lifeworlds. While educational literature, the NT Strategy, and all remote school principals advocate the utility of community engagement for educational success, research data also highlighted a range of approaches that are currently being utilised by these principals in remote Indigenous schools across the Northern Territory.

Across this range of approaches, the strongest culturally responsive possibility was found to exist when leadership practice was focused on reciprocal benefits for both the school and the community. To support this, structures such as a school council were considered important because they ensured that school purposes and vision could be collaboratively designed, acted upon and re-shaped according to the specific needs of students within the community.

In making this theoretically informed and empirically substantiated claim, this researcher agrees with the eminent scholarship of Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) and Khalifa (2018), who call for leadership that engages schools and communities in overlapping spaces. This is critical work that provides self-determination potential; however accounts that are captured by Khalifa (2018) highlight contextual differences between an urban high school in the United States and a primary school or primary-secondary combined school in a remote Indigenous community in Australia. To enable greater voice to shape the school environment, Khalifa (2018) indicates how useful rap sessions are in providing conversational spaces for students and all school stakeholders, including parents, teachers and the principal, to engage in critical educational dialogue. He claims that rap sessions allow students a means of speaking back about their educational experiences. As the contexts of the present study conducted in remote Indigenous schools involved one school with a Families as First Teachers program that caters for birth to three year old children and all schools with a high percentage of younger primary aged students who spoke English as an additional language, having parents advocate for their children in formal settings through a school council or advisory group is considered most appropriate for this context. These structures, while not deterministic in their own right, do provide an ongoing formalised structure in which the interests of the students and wider community can not only be voiced but also acted upon.

The research of Morrison et al. (2019) actively encourages culturally responsive practices that nurture respectful relationships between educators and the wider community. While the authors advocate for strong school-community relationships as part of culturally responsive pedagogical practice in schools, the literature review provides no specific detail about how this may be achieved.

Chapter 8 – Meta-analysis: remote Indigenous school leadership practice possibilities

> …school leaders can play a pivotal role in shifting power between educators and community in equitable ways. They can choose not only to hear community voice, but also to listen to it, to embrace, validate, and promote it (Khalifa 2018, p. 49).

8.1 Introduction

This thesis captured ethnographic accounts from school principals in order to better understand remote educational leadership practice through listening to the voices of those who currently perform these roles in DoE schools. Data collected throughout the research, has been analysed to not only provide scholarly critique of the status quo but also to enable the development of new conceptual tools upon which future leadership practice in remote Indigenous schools may be considered.

This chapter presents four critical aspects of the study: the research findings, examples of where leadership practices from respondents aligned with the tenets of cultural responsivity, a continuum of culturally responsive school leadership possibility and finally a re-framing of a remote school principal's role.

The research findings provide answers to the guiding question posed by this study, 'what are the leadership possibilities for culturally responsive practice in remote Indigenous schools?' Each finding is based on data that was collected and analysed through culturally responsive lenses (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019). These findings are subsequently located alongside a range of examples of remote school leadership practice that is currently being used to connect remote Indigenous education to students' lives in inclusive ways. Each example provides an understanding of how principals are applying nuanced leadership approaches to their unique educational contexts. From this platform the dissertation offers a continuum of culturally responsive school leadership possibility that can be utilised by school leaders across culturally diverse educational environments to understand how their practice connects schooling with their students' lives. Finally, this continuum is used to offer a new conceptualisation of how the role of remote school principals may be framed. This involves the generation of a more expansive definition of remote school

leadership that centres on providing a democratic, socially just, culturally and contextually relevant education for all Indigenous students in remote DoE schools.

8.2 Research findings: culturally responsive remote school leaders

Data collected throughout this study highlighted that principals in remote Indigenous schools find themselves positioned amidst complex and contradictory educational purposes and agendas. This requires school principals to engage in an ongoing leadership dance where they feel it is almost impossible to serve the agendas of both their employer and the local community authentically. If principals prioritise the DoE, they are undermining the community and negatively impacting the connection between learning and students' lives. If they collaborate only with the community, they will be neglecting the full remit of their employment. This thesis suggests that there is an alternative path forwards; a path that is not determined by binaries of us and them but a path that is focused on more plural conceptualisations that are reliant on 'and/both' thinking and practice.

A forensic analysis of the data revealed a total of four key research findings. Each of these findings identifies enabling conditions upon which the practice of remote school leaders may contribute to the transformation of remote education in the Northern Territory, providing scope for the simultaneous achievement of DoE and community aspirations.

This new theoretical approach requires a paradigmatic shift that deliberately steps away from the limitations of power-laden, hegemonic practices that currently disconnect the DoE and remote communities from one another. Instead, culturally responsive remote school leadership traverses a relational bridge between the institution that educational leaders represent and the community in which they work. From this position, principals are charged with the responsibility to facilitate the formation of ongoing, democratic, participatory, power-sensitive, mutually beneficial relationships so that remote educational directions can be envisioned and enacted collectively.

Data from this study revealed that remote schools in the Northern Territory currently require Indigenous families and their children to do the majority of adapting and responding. These are places where a student's cultural capital is presently given little consideration once they pass through the school gate. This must change so that schools becomes sites of responsivity (Children's Ground 2020; Morrison et al. 2019), preparing the learning environment in a way

that valorises the cultural and linguistic repertoires of students and provides them with a robust, meaningful and relevant education that delivers local and global opportunities.

Culturally responsive remote school leadership practice centres on facilitating learning environments where a student's cultural identity becomes the starting point from which their formal education begins and is forever grounded. This ensures that students can make sense of their own unique place in the world (Welch et al. 2015) while simultaneously developing their capacity for global citizenship. To enable leadership of this nature, this study has found that culturally responsive remote school leaders:

- Co-construct school policy with all educational stakeholders
- Privilege place-based languages, cultures and pedagogies
- Develop culturally responsive teachers
- Pursue community engagement as being of high relational and educative value

Each of these research findings re-centres the way in which school leaders work with local communities. Not only does this re-cast the community as essential but also offers scope for sustainability of educational practice through an increased local investment in remote schooling. Through this increased local investment, context and culture are taken seriously, providing genuine opportunities for remote Indigenous students to navigate local, national and international contexts. In what follows, each of the four research findings is outlined in relation to what this study deems to be the central leadership practices of culturally responsive remote school leaders.

8.2.1 Co-construct school policy with all educational stakeholders

According to analysed data, the predominant leadership practice in these remote DoE schools is enacted monologically and monoculturally. This is an educational leadership practice orientation that is stultified by an overwhelming adherence to only one worldview through an exclusion of other ways of knowing and being. Such positioning was prevalent in school improvement plans and subsequent interviews and provocation phases where DoE inspired, Anglocentric constructs were entrenched, often leaving little room for local knowledge, skills or practices to find a place in remote Indigenous schooling.

The limitation of establishing educational reforms according only to a macro, system-centric agenda is the positioning of the local community as a mere object of contemporary education innovation as its perspectives are silenced and/or marginalised. This remote school reality

must give way to dialogic co-construction of educational policy (Fogarty & Schwab 2012b), ensuring that all parties have collaborative agency to engineer socially just reform pathways that take each other to new levels of cross-cultural and inter-cultural understanding and ultimately position all users as jointly invested (Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019), interconnected and interdependent (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2014).

At the site of school policy co-construction, power-laden approaches that have historically legitimised Western approaches and dismissed Indigenous approaches (Khalifa et al. 2014a) are exchanged for power-sensitive relationships (Osborne 2018) where shared thinking must determine the school's direction. For the principal who prioritises collective envisioning of educational policy, such practice aligns with the tenets of CRP (Morrison et al. 2019) and the characteristics of CRSL (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). This practice orientation recognises that expertise comes in a range of forms according to multiple worldviews and life experiences and only when a leader enacts their practice accordingly can students benefit from the full spectrum of what is available.

8.2.2 Privilege place-based languages, cultures and pedagogies

While all school principals involved in this study indicated the need to be considerate of contextual factors when delivering a remote school education, the embedded use of local languages, culture and pedagogic approaches only existed in a substantial way in one remote school setting. Of note is the fact that this school was located within a larger community where access to a range of human, physical and economic resources is more plentiful, allowing local language, culture and pedagogy to be delivered through bilingual programs. For smaller communities, meaningfully incorporating local languages, cultures and teaching approaches does require continued attention through further DoE funding and resource allocation, however a range of existing possibilities are already available through initiatives such as *Keeping Indigenous Languages and Culture Strong: A Plan for the Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Languages and Cultures in Northern Territory Schools* (Northern Territory Department of Education 2016).

In this study, where language and culture were privileged, the practice of the school leader was both culturally responsive and socially just, given that opportunities were afforded to the students to learn according to Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, learning was conducted at school and *on Country*, education involved the pedagogical expertise of both

school staff and the wider community, and literacy had a dual focus on the development of a student's mother tongue and SAE.

According to contemporary scholarship, practice that regards existing funds of knowledge and home languages as assets, positively impacts the development of student identity (Bishop 2007; Castagno & Brayboy 2008; Devlin 2011; Hynds et al. 2011; Villegas & Lucas 2007; Wigglesworth, Simpson & Vaughan 2018). While no evidence exists to highlight that learning multiple languages is detrimental to students' educational outcomes (Nicholls 2005) the inclusion of a student's home language does aid general school understandings (Devlin 2011), allow students to understand their own world and that of other cultural groups (Nicholls 1998), enable the maintenance of traditional knowledges (Lee et al. 2016), promote strong identify formation through linguistic citizenship (Heugh 2014, 2020 in press), provide students with cognitive and social benefits (Lee et al. 2016) and ensure that school is not regarded as a foreign place (Devlin 2011).

To lead a school that seeks to step beyond the limitations of monolingualism and monoculturalism requires leadership practice that is anti-racist, socially just, transformational, instructional and community based (Khalifa et al. 2014a). Leadership practice that honours home languages, place-based culture and local pedagogic approaches aligns with the tenets of CRP (Morrison et al. 2019) and the characteristics of CRSL (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016), providing remote Indigenous students with educational opportunities that are relevant and meaningful.

8.2.3 Develop culturally responsive teachers

As noted in extensive literature, a key responsibility for educational leaders is the ongoing development of their teaching staff (see examples in Craven, Yeung & Han 2014; Danling et al. 2005; Hayes et al. 2004; Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). Across the remote educational sites involved in this study, students' cultural capital was understood by school leaders in variegated ways. Those principals who displayed nuances of culturally responsive practice consistently viewed students as capable and their cultural knowledge as an important asset. Furthermore, these leaders highlighted a desire to reject deficit views through an ongoing commitment to working with staff to fill knowledge and practice voids by recognising the strengths of their students and the wider community.

At one school, regular meetings between local and non-local staff provided a platform for authentic and 'courageous conversations' (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) between all staff.

The sharing of multiple viewpoints in this environment ensured that the specific lifeworlds of the student cohort were centred through professional dialogue that aimed to inform school practices. At the same school, the existence of a bilingual program was also shown to promote the development of culturally responsive teachers. Teaching according to both SAE and local languages required curriculum mapping of contextual theme cycles to the national curriculum as well as subsequent joint lesson planning by local and non-local staff. This culture of joint operation also extended beyond interactions between employed staff to include the wider community in *on Country* learning, providing further potential for teachers to develop capacities specifically attuned to the local context.

A final leadership practice noted in this study for developing responsive teachers is the prioritisation of professional learning concerned with place-based culture and language. According to two principals who utilised this approach, benefits were found in deeper understanding of local language conventions, unlocking hidden meanings in contextual Indigenous customs and deepening non-local educators' appreciation of *Country*. Professional learning of this nature provided a platform for non-local staff to move beyond cultural competence and towards cultural responsivity in their professional practice (Burgess 2019a) since learning was no longer confined to being 'about' culture and instead was facilitated 'through' culture.

Developing culturally responsive teachers requires a myriad of leadership approaches that are instructional, transformational, social justice and anti-racism oriented, culturally responsive and community-based (Khalifa et al. 2014a). Leadership practice that is focused on developing culturally responsive teachers provides scope for whole school environments to be culturally safe – an approach that aligns with the tenets of CRP (Morrison et al. 2019) and the characteristics of CRSL (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016).

8.2.4 Pursue community engagement as being of high relational and educative value

All school leaders involved in the research foregrounded the need to work in collaboration 'with' community for remote Indigenous education to succeed. While this imperative is also contiguous with the NT Strategy, the non-existence of formalised advisory groups at all schools led by teaching principals limited engagement activities to informal school celebrations and events. While this thesis recognises the efficacy of informal community engagement in strengthening important relational bonds, it also asserts that the purpose of

community engagement must include educative matters in order for staff, students and the community to realise the full scope of opportunity that engagement affords.

In schools where only informal engagement was in operation, the community's role in the local education was disconnected, situating community participation as non-essential. In these cases, the local community had no direct way of impacting the prevailing orthodoxy of their local schools. In contrast, nuances of cultural responsivity were found in one school leader who displayed a form of relational leadership (Eacott 2018; Giles 2018; Gillies 2013; Sleeter 2011a) through ongoing work with a school council that had been in operation for many years. Through this council, possibilities exist for community needs to impact the education direction of the school that adheres to the guiding tenets of cultural responsivity (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019).

8.3 Nuanced culturally responsive leadership practice

Data collected throughout the research provided a range of examples of school leaders who sought to utilise their leadership practice to be inclusive of students' cultural and linguistic repertoires. While examples illustrated through this research form the basis of new educational leadership possibilities for remote Indigenous schools, examples provided cannot be considered as exhaustive in nature and may best be described as representing a portion of leadership performativity that aligns with cultural responsivity.

As each community context is different and the availability of resources varies from one setting to another, principals applied their leadership in nuanced ways according to their specific educational contexts. Examples of leadership practice found in this study that accord with the tenets of cultural responsivity (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Morrison et al. 2019) are provided in table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Examples of nuanced culturally responsive leadership practice

Research finding	Examples in leadership practice
1. Co-construct school policy with all educational stakeholders	➢ An operational school council ➢ Leader presence on the local authority council or equivalent
2. Privilege place-based languages, cultures and pedagogies	➢ Bilingual programs ➢ Provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate learning resources ➢ Learning with and from local staff ➢ Learning conducted *on Country* (at school and beyond) ➢ Translanguaging pedagogies
3. Develop culturally responsive teachers	➢ Team teaching between local and non-local staff ➢ Collective mentoring ➢ Professional learning that is tailored to local culture and context ➢ 'Bush trips' conducted *on Country* and led by community members ➢ Leader modelling of culturally responsive practice
4. Pursue community engagement as being of high relational and educational value	➢ An operational school council ➢ Ongoing discussions between school staff and families regarding student progress ➢ Linking with other government and business organisations in the community ➢ Liaising with community through home visits where appropriate ➢ Encouraging school-community overlap through attendance and/or involvement in local events ➢ Shared use of school facilities for community events ➢ Advocating for community projects and its members ➢ Interacting informally with families and community members ➢ Informal school celebrations and events

8.4 Possibility continuum of culturally responsive leadership

This study has highlighted that while leadership practice differed across the group of principal participants, a desire to better connect learning to students' lives was also evident. The collective practice of research participants demonstrated a range of nuanced practices that aligned to the central tenets of culturally responsive schools (Morrison et al. 2019) and culturally responsive school leadership characteristics (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). To outline this, a continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility has been developed. This continuum, displayed in figure 6 (next page), highlights three distinct educational leadership orientations: conditions of culturally responsive impossibility, conditions of partial culturally responsive possibility and conditions of full culturally responsive possibility.



Figure 6. Continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility

The leadership practice orientations of most school principals involved in the study can be seen in either the conditions of impossibility or partial possibility. Where conditions are considered impossible, the leader's practice is predominantly aligned with current DoE directives that are guided by externalised educational objectives. This framing deliberately avoids authentic co-construction of remote school functions with local communities and, in doing so, forfeits the greatest asset available to remote leaders – the rich embedding of place-based culture through local knowledge and expertise. In doing this, a remote student's education is incomplete since both their identity and ability to make sense of the world has been removed by positioning community input as non-essential. This in-turn limits community investment in education as it fails to cohere with constructs that have authentic meaning in students' lives.

Much hope is found for transformation of remote Indigenous education in existing school leadership practices that involve conditions of partial possibility. Here, school principals shifted their gaze from highly prescriptive departmental directives in order to utilise their agency at the site of the autonomy gap (Heffernan 2018) and privilege the cultural and contextual needs of the local community in a range of nuanced ways. In these moments, the leadership practice of the principals in remote Indigenous schools moved away from being solely system responsive in order to make space for practice that was student responsive. When leadership responds to students' democratic educational rights, schooling becomes relevant and meaningful. The challenge now is to move beyond practice of this nature being ephemeral, towards this being a new form of orthodoxy.

If remote school transformation is to come into fruition, the primacy of place and culture must be recognised in educational leadership framings. In this regard, the conditions of full realisation of culturally responsive leadership possibility are provided in the continuum as a goal to aspire to. This a goal that in a colonised settler state such as Australia, a constitutive outside effect is likely to continue providing significant and ongoing challenges. While full realisation is the ultimate goal, there remain a number of significant socio-political hurdles that must be dealt with for this worthy ambition to be achieved.

8.5 Re-framing the leader's role in a remote Indigenous school

The application of the continuum of culturally responsive school leadership allows for the role of educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools to be re-framed according to student needs. This provides an opportunity for leadership practice to move beyond prevailing

institutional frameworks that may be considered dysfunctional in their inability to recognise and respond to cultural and linguistic proficiencies of Indigenous students, and also seen as un-educational through the overwhelming preoccupation with neo-liberal logics that disconnects learning from students' lives (Wilkinson, Niesche & Eacott 2019).

Through conceiving the role of the school leader differently, new possibilities emerge to bring the DoE and the local community closer together, so that all stakeholders can begin pulling in the same direction. In presenting the new conceptualisation of remote school leadership through figure 7, this dissertation draws heavily on the voices and experiences of the research informants, the voices of Indigenous community members and academic scholarship in the area of cultural responsivity.

Educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools recognise the immense responsibility they have in providing an education that finds its purpose, relevance and meaning only when deeply considered according to the place in which it is enacted. These leaders understand that the vast array of knowledge and experience they bring to the role must be matched by the mobilisation of equally vast knowledge and experience found only in persons and places within the local community. This is knowledge that must be accessed if the leader is to successfully connect learning to the lifeworlds of students who attend the school. Leaders must not only privilege multiple worldviews, multiple ways of being and a plurality of life and educational values, but seek to continually move their practice towards inter-cultural forms of collaboration. Remote school leaders should navigate their roles through ongoing communication with the education department and the local community, acting as a bridge between these interconnected and interdependent educational stakeholders. In all cases their leadership should centre on processes that are socially just, democratic and have reciprocal benefit. These leaders recognise that home languages and culture are imperative to identity formation and, as such, position these educational elements at the core of student learning. This is an understanding that requires the active and ongoing recognition of community expertise as central to localised school policy development, curriculum planning, pedagogical approaches and continued development of culturally responsive

school staff. Here, learning takes place through culture; it is not just about culture. For remote school leaders, the development of their practice is part of a journey upon which they will never 'arrive'. They must commit to reflexive praxis that seeks to use locally embedded learning to connect to global matters so that their students can thrive within and beyond the community in which they live.

Figure 7. Culturally responsive conceptualisation of remote school leadership

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

> Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (Freire 1993, pp. 13-14).

9.1 Introduction

In recent decades much research into Indigenous education in Australia has focused on outlining disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student learning outcomes. Most recently this has been evidenced in successive *Closing the Gap* reports that indicate the greatest educational disparities are apparent in remote Indigenous communities (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2020; KPMG 2017; O'Bryan & Rose 2015; Ockenden 2014; Unsworth 2013; Welch et al. 2015). While an abundance of commentators have stated *what* the problem is conceived to be, this has been through deficit orientations. In contrast, the present research has taken the view that new possibilities are dependent on thinking about the problem differently so that alternative practices can direct future educational reform.

Part of thinking differently involves recognising that the historical preference for school and system-centric priorities in remote Indigenous communities has failed, and therefore shifting the educational focus to more fully include community priorities offers significant potential. This involves recognising that Indigenous children are experts of their own lifeworlds (Rigney 2020) and connecting education to this fact provides opportunities to reveal their true academic capacities. In this research, educational leadership is recognised as a critical lever in educational transformation (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and as such, new possibilities have been considered through the practice of leaders holding the position of principal in remote Indigenous schools.

Educational leaders are considered to have a significant and broad influence (Cranston 2013; Leithwood et al. 2004) that extends across whole school sites (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) and are consistently regarded as persons who can provide solutions to educational problems (Niesche 2018). Throughout this study, the theoretical lens of cultural responsivity and, more specifically, conceptualisations of lifeworld (Morrison et al. 2019) and community-centred approaches (Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016) have been

utilised. These lenses facilitated understandings about how remote school principals are moving beyond the limitations of Western only leadership orientations that prevent Indigenous students from reaching their full potential (Morrison et al. 2019). The utilisation of culturally responsive approaches is recognised globally as being a hopeful strategy for improving education trajectories for First Peoples in settler colonial countries (Bishop 2007; Castagno & Brayboy 2008; Khalifa 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016; Sleeter 2011a; Villegas & Lucas 2007), yet this field remains under-theorised in connection to both school leadership and remote Indigenous contexts in Australia.

This research was guided by the question 'what are the leadership possibilities for culturally responsive practice in remote Indigenous schools?' Through the application of a methodology that was ethnographically informed, this study sought to learn from the voices and lived experiences of five remote DoE school principals to answer the research question and consider how possibilities may be re-imagined. The use of the selected methodology provides transformative potential and has resulted in the study's research findings being used to establish a continuum of culturally responsive leadership possibility and to re-frame the role of school leaders in remote Indigenous schools.

This chapter draws all aspects of the study together and is organised into three sections. The first section highlights how the ethnographically informed methodology utilised by this research revealed findings that were ultimately used to develop a new theory of possibility for how remote schools may be led. Next, the key underpinnings of the thesis are outlined. Here, the role of the remote school leader is considered integral in developing a remote education that is deemed relevant and meaningful in Indigenous contexts. This important educational role is discussed as being enacted at the site of significant contradiction and complexity where an extensive leadership skillset is required – a skillset that requires remote school leaders to re-position the role of local communities if educational transformation is to be realised. Finally, implications of the research for leaders of remote Indigenous schools, for Indigenous students, for remote Indigenous communities, for the DoE and for further research are considered.

9.2 Relations of methodology and theory

An ethnographically informed methodology was selected to drive the research as it provided scope for the voices of remote school principals to be heard and ultimately used to inform new educational leadership possibilities. When first conducting interviews on-site, each principal, despite busy schedules was very willing to be involved in the study as they recognised the potential for their unique and demanding roles to be better understood. Throughout each phase of the research this sentiment was repeated; the informant group felt that their professional leadership roles were generally misunderstood, and they saw the research project as a means of capturing the realities of their daily work. To each school leader, I am forever grateful and hope that what you have shared will make a positive contribution to the future practice of leaders in remote Indigenous schools.

Through conversations with leaders, two unexpected details emerged and it was upon this information that a more complete understanding of remote school leadership practice was formed, as follows:

1. All remote principals face numerous additional pressures beyond being an educational leader. On many occasions, the informant group cited the experiences of their city colleagues who can leave their professional responsibilities when they depart school each afternoon. This is not the case for remote principals who receive endless after hours phone calls from staff, contractors and the community; who deal with government housing concerns; who assist the community when generators stop working and plumbing is blocked; who deal with extreme weather events that may have them cut-off from the outside world for periods of time; who act as counsellors to an array of non-local employees across a range of industries who are struggling with remote living, and the list goes on. This is a relentless pressure that helps to understand why so many leaders in remote Indigenous schools simply burn out.

2. As research has in recent years so consistently called for non-Indigenous persons and organisations to stop doing things *to* Indigenous people and instead start working *with* Indigenous people, I expected to see this happening more widely than I did. As part of participation selection, DoE personnel at the Regional Director of Education level were consulted in regard to suitable sites to research the leadership practices of school principals who were deemed to actively engage with their local community and displayed reflexivity in their leadership practice. As such, I anticipated that the

> research would include a group of principals who all linked authentically with the communities in which they worked. While nuances of this were evident in the practice of all leaders of remote Indigenous schools involved in the study, the limited extent to which this was evident was a surprise. It is now apparent that the sheer weight of the DoE's neo-liberal influence is quite overwhelming in its impact on leader practice, limiting the extent to which the community's involvement is sought in localised education.

Data collected throughout each phase of the research has been used to inform new knowledge generation in the form of a culturally responsive remote school leadership possibility continuum presented in chapter eight (8.4). This is a theoretical continuum that has been informed by a combination of existing scholarship in the area of cultural responsivity, the conceptualisations of lifeworld and inclusivity, and the lived experiences of people who currently have the responsibility to lead remote DoE schools. It is upon their words, combined with existing scholarship in the areas of educational leadership, remote schooling, cultural responsivity and Dewey's concept of *oeuvre* that new possibilities have been generatively developed.

9.3 The main thesis

In the thesis introduction it was foregrounded that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2014) advocates for contextualised, learning-centred, responsive educational leadership. This leadership standard does not align comfortably with practice requirements of DoE school principals who are also required to enact a particular educational reform agenda according to policy contours of the NT Strategy. The DoE agenda, despite new initiatives that indicate a commitment to Indigenous culture and language, is in practice predominantly monocultural and monolingual. This locates current educational directions in the Northern Territory as largely unresponsive to the very people it is ostensibly designed to support. If educational transformation is authentically sought in remote Northern Territory Schools, this dissertation joins a chorus of voices (see examples in Disbray 2014; Guenther & Disbray 2015; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Spillman 2017) in suggesting that a continued focus on the current strategic objectives will not achieve the desired goals.

Indigenous students who study in remote Indigenous DoE schools have a democratic right to an education that is culturally and contextually relevant, yet this is not what is currently on offer. Instead, current educational prescriptions are institutionally unjust (Bishop 2020).

Mainstream, Western educational priorities are considered essential, while place-based community priorities are regarded as non-essential. As noted in chapter five (5.2.1), literature in the field indicates that Indigenous communities are supportive of their children developing capacities that allow them to navigate a Western world (Bat & Shore 2012; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016); what they seek is a space for their own culture to also be valorised in contemporary educational offerings (Fasoli & Farmer 2012; Huijser et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2016). This renders present educational realities in remote Indigenous communities as incomplete because the means by which students make sense of the world and form identity is not prioritised. The current educational vision for remote Northern Territory schools is one where neo-liberalism has ushered in a form of neo-colonialism. This is where the DoE sets a direction for all schools in its jurisdiction with one eye permanently closed.

If transformation is to be achieved, we need to focus on 'finding ways of doing things differently' (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews & Woods 2004, p. 14). Existing policies and practices must be reconsidered and reframed (Patrick & Moodie 2016), allowing a more expansive landscape of educational possibility to be revealed. This is an approach that seeks to integrate rather than assimilate (Pearson 2017) through 'unity, not uniformity' (Tierney 2018, p. 413). Achieving this goal requires that the local community be re-positioned to the centre of critical school decision-making so that they can join the DoE and their local representatives to form educational directions through collaboration and joint agreement. Ensuring that locals are recognised as the place-based experts they are provides new possibilities for students and new possibilities through improved educational understandings at a macro level. These new understandings provide scope to move beyond the confusion and disorientation that so many non-local educators experience in remote Indigenous school settings, allowing them to be supported through deep engagement with the very people who best know the students, the language and the culture. By tapping into what exists locally, remote Indigenous schooling can be shaped to fit the students rather than the other way around.

This study highlighted that leaders in remote Indigenous schools are aware of the need to activate the local community. What they are unsure of is how to do it, and this is where this thesis makes its most significant contribution to new knowledge. In chapter eight (8.4 & 8.5), new theoretical tools have been offered to empower and support school leaders to orient their practice in a manner that is culturally responsive. These tools are the product of what remote school principals have shared and what contemporary scholarship advocates, and as such

provide mechanisms through which leadership practice on the ground can respond to students' needs. The contributions to knowledge have implications for remote school leaders, for students and remote communities, for the DoE and for further research.

9.4 Implications of the research for theory, policy and practice

This study has highlighted that remote DoE school principals are required to comply with departmental policies as part of an 'externally imagined' (Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016) reform agenda. Here, Western orientations predominantly frame how leaders are expected to enact their work in order to ameliorate an 'educational problem' that has been determined monoculturally. This limits the educational leadership practice of remote school principals who are required as part of their professional remit to adhere to educational policy logics that are based on one size fits all, neo-liberal theoretical models. By definition, models that are based on a single idealisation of practice are unable to respond appropriately to the heterogenous demands of remote Indigenous communities. The by-product of such leadership is an education that fails remote students because their cultural and linguistic capital has little value in a school that is only interested in Western truths.

This study calls for a more expansive understanding of what school leadership in remote Indigenous contexts involves and of possible processes which entrust principals with the autonomy they require to work more collaboratively with communities to shape an education that is locally relevant. This is where hierarchical, monological and monocultural forms of leadership must give way to theoretically informed approaches that are inclusive of multiple worldviews and multiple educational aspirations and that are developed generatively through ongoing dialogue with all remote education stakeholders. This is leadership practice that moves away from binary limitations of 'us and them' to embrace the possibilities of 'both/and' approaches that allow the DoE and remote Indigenous communities to set and act upon an educational vision together. This is leadership practice where remote education is founded upon a deep purpose – a purpose that is intrinsically connected to the lifeworlds of students, thereby providing the foundations for a future that can be considered by all with genuine optimism.

According to this study, optimism in the area of remote Indigenous education is reliant on school leaders, the DoE and remote communities all moving in the same direction for reciprocal educational benefit. Each has an important role to play as detailed in section 9.5.

9.5 Implications for leaders in remote Indigenous schools

This thesis captures the voices of remote school leaders. It hears their concerns, their challenges, their pride, their joy, their hopes, their fears, their sadness, their confusion and the myriad of other emotions that are part of operating in a highly complex, cross-cultural educational environment. It recognises that much of the daily work of remote school leaders involves traversing significant cultural points of difference between their employer and the communities they seek to serve.

Beyond explicitly acknowledging the complexity of a leader's role and the extensive skillset required to fulfil professional duties in remote educational settings, this thesis provides new tools, an alternative framing of the leader's role and a discursive shift that seeks to empower and support leaders to connect remote schooling more meaningfully to their students' lives. These are tools that aim to contribute to educational transformation, encouraging all remote stakeholders to involve themselves in joint activity that is power sensitive, inclusive of multiple worldviews and genuinely student-centred. This thesis provides a theoretical basis for a paradigmatic realignment of how remote school leaders enact their practice. This is an approach that now requires the commitment of existing educational leaders in remote Indigenous schools to ensure their students receive an education that affords them the cultural mobility to navigate local, national and international contexts.

9.5.1 Implications for the Department of Education

In the early stages of a five-year study of remote Indigenous schooling in Australia, Guenther, Bat and Osborne (2013, p. 101) posed an important question:

> What if the desirable outcomes of education in remote Australia — particularly in the remote communities where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live — were different than those that are desirable elsewhere? What if the underpinning assumptions about curriculum, pedagogy and professional standards were somehow wrong?

This question flagged a concern with tacitly held departmental assumptions that make correlations between educational success and the accumulation of predominantly Euro-centric knowledge through a prioritisation of Western approaches. Data collected and analysed through this PhD research indicates that the system, despite intentions to make a positive difference, is actually failing its remote Indigenous students. Consequently, the DoE is strongly encouraged to look introspectively and interrogate its own structures and philosophical orientations if it aims to transform education. At present, one educational

agenda is prioritised at the expense of all other possibilities with publicly available data indicating that this approach is not working. Change is essential because existing structures disconnect the DoE and remotely located staff from accessing the greatest ally at their disposal – the local community (Khalifa 2012, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden & Davis 2016). At present, asymmetrical power places departmental priorities at the centre of remote education and relegates local aspirations to the periphery. The end result is an undemocratic and socially unjust education. But this need not be the case. While the DoE are a significant cause of the current problems, they are also critical to new solutions as they have the power and agency to bring about change. For example, this dissertation recognises that the DoE is beginning to make positive moves with regards to language and culture, as foregrounded in chapter two (2.4.3). What is now needed is greater resourcing, funding and structural shifts that allow leaders of remote Indigenous schools to enact practice that is more inclusive of their students' needs. Transformation is possible and the DoE controls many of the levers that determine what happens next. The question is how will the DoE use their power, influence and agency? Perhaps they will recognise that many of their school leaders in remote Indigenous schools are already displaying nuanced versions of culturally responsive practice without system support, therefore providing significant transformational opportunities that could be achieved through minimal departmental investment in professional learning and school resourcing. Alternatively, they may simply tighten their neo-liberal grip on remote education, further distancing the value that communities have in being part of the journey towards new educational possibilities. Only time will tell what direction they choose.

9.5.2 Implications for students and remote communities

This study recognises that prior to European arrival in Australia, the education of Indigenous students was highly relevant and meaningful as it authentically connected children to land and kin (Rigney 2018; Welch et al. 2015), through culture and in accordance with the local context (Price 2012, 2015). As the longest surviving civilisation on earth (Pascoe 2013), Indigenous education has been heralded as 'the most ancient form of higher learning' (Welch et al. 2015, p. 11) as it pre-dates education by any other cultural group on earth. While schooling in remote Australian communities will never completely return to the way it was prior to non-Indigenous arrival, this thesis has been guided by Indigenous voices, research and scholarship for educational approaches to take Indigenous contexts and cultures seriously (see examples in Anderson et al. 2018; Fasoli & Farmer 2012; Guenther, Osborne & Disbray 2016; Huijser et al. 2015; Morrison et al. 2019; Sarra et al. 2018). This study is committed to

the principle of working with Indigenous persons for a more socially just education for all students who live in remote Northern Territory communities. The theoretically informed tools provided by this research seek to facilitate the convergence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational aspirations through the leadership practice of remote school principals. This research has been guided by the aspirations of Indigenous persons; what is now needed is for school principals and education departments to seek the same guidance, for which the assistance of remote communities will be essential as the process unfolds.

9.5.3 Implications for further research

Throughout this research, related areas have become evident that require further investigation. These areas are:

1. *Development of remote Indigenous school educational guidelines*

   The DoE is made up of six school regions. While commonalities exist in communities across these regions, they cannot be considered heterogenous and, as such, context is a critical factor in how schools ensure that learning aligns with localised factors.

   To ensure that local educational aspirations drive practice in remote Indigenous schools, greater local involvement is required. This study suggests that further research is needed to establish 'Remote Northern Territory School Guidelines'. This research would consider how models such as the *Alaska Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools* (Assembly of Alaska Native Educators 1999) has provided educators in these jurisdictions with an overarching document that outlines general standards for schools to adhere to. It would then consider how an Australian remote version may be created.

2. *Research across multiple remote Australian educational jurisdictions*

   This research was limited to one educational jurisdiction: the Northern Territory. However, remote Indigenous schools exist in other states across Australia and consequently extending the reach of the study would allow finer grained understandings of how school leaders operate in accordance with the tenets of cultural responsivity more broadly.

   Given the geographic, cultural, linguistic and social diversity that exists across the nation, studies that recognise the nuanced leadership required in different locales have the potential to better serve the needs of students who attend the diverse range of remote Indigenous schools throughout Australia. While the tools provided by this study may

serve as a sound starting point from which remote educational leaders and their communities may further connect learning to students' lives, the establishment of leadership practice that is fit for contextualised purpose is recommended to ensure that place-based needs are appropriately considered.

Colloquially, the 'scab has now been lifted' and has revealed much from which future policy and practice can be informed, but further work must be done to allow more nuanced understandings of how leaders enact their roles in this salient space in the field of education.

3. Community engagement tools need to be developed in partnership

Community engagement was foregrounded by all school principals involved in this research as critical to school and student success, and is further evidenced as imperative through considerable research in the educational field. Despite the apparent efficacy of community engagement, how school leaders link with community and report on progress is inconsistent and often devoid of community narrative. This is an area that requires urgent attention. At present, the *National School Improvement Tool* (Australian Council for Educational Research 2016) which addresses 'school-community partnerships', provides a sound platform upon which tools that specifically address remote Indigenous community schools' requirements needs to be developed. Tools in this area should involve the collective wisdom of communities and educational staff working together to ensure that emerging products are truly responsive to the needs of schools and communities themselves, and ultimately to ensure that community voice finds its rightful place in shaping the educational direction of their children's local schooling experiences.

4. Developing more educational leaders locally

All principals involved in this study originally resided outside the Northern Territory (interstate or overseas) prior to taking up their leadership roles with the DoE. Given the significance principals place on understanding community contexts, and the need for practice in schools to be more sustainable, this is suggestive of a need to invest in developing leaders who hail from the Northern Territory. Research in this area may centre on both the educational and economic impact of 'growing one's own leadership' as opposed to consistently seeking it from other jurisdictions.

9.6 Conclusion

Current DoE structures stymie the scope of educational leadership autonomy of remote school principals. The ‘autonomy gap’ (Heffernan 2018) describes the space where leaders make their most authentic connections between schooling and their student’s lives. In these moments their practice utilises an Indigenous socio-cultural base to prioritise respectful, reciprocal relationship building before all other matters, ensuring that families and the wider community have authentic agency in shaping localised schooling matters according to place-based priorities. This is where the educational leader in remote Indigenous contexts facilitates the centralisation of community experiences, understandings and aspirations through ongoing dialogue with all remote educational stakeholders. This is where a student’s cultural and linguistic capacities are fully utilised so that Indigenous children can be proudly Indigenous in all facets of their remote education journey. This is where Indigenous students are rightfully recognised as capable and competent, where their funds of knowledge are valued both in their own right and for their utility in connecting to matters of global interest. This is where students can truly walk confidently both within and beyond the communities in which they currently live (Yunupingu 1999). This is where the culturally responsive school leader ensures that education at the local level seeks at all times to reflect students’ lifeworlds, be strengths-based, culturally safe, academically demanding and affords students the opportunity to achieve their full educational and democratic potential.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Approval to conduct research (NT)

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Research Subcommittee
Level 14, Mitchell Centre
55-59 Mitchell Street, Darwin
Postal address GPO Box 4821
DARWIN NT 0801
Tel (08) 8999 5829
Fax (08) 8999 5788
researchapps.det@nt.gov.au

EDOC2018/105470

Mr Stephen Corrie
Principal Researcher
University of South Australia

13 December 2018

Dear Mr Corrie

RE: Application to Conduct Research: "Educational leadership: culturally responsive schooling in remote Australia" Ref 14282

I am pleased to advise that your application to conduct the above research has been approved.

Please note that the decision to participate in this project will be at the discretion of the relevant school principals and individuals.

Your research will be included in an online listing of research approved by the Department, due to launch later this year. The Department is interested in the findings from your research and, as such, I look forward to receiving a copy of the final report and publishing it on our online research library.

If you require any further assistance, you may contact the Research, Innovation and Evaluation Team on telephone (08) 8999 5829.

Yours sincerely

Anna King
Chair, Research Subcommittee

Appendix B: Approval to conduct research (UniSA)

Human ethics: Application approved – email received Nov 2, 2018 at 12.04pm

Dear Applicant

Re: Ethics protocol "Educational Leadership: Culturally responsive schooling in remote Australia" (Application ID: 201417)

Thank you for submitting your ethics protocol for consideration. Your protocol has been considered by the E3 Committee Review Group.

I am pleased to advise that your protocol has been granted ethics approval and meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. You may now commence your research.

Please regard this email as formal notification of approval.

Ethics approval is always made on the basis of a number of conditions detailed at http://www.unisa.edu.au/res/forms/docs/humanresearchethics_conditions.doc; it is important that you are familiar with, and abide by, these conditions. It is also essential that you conduct all research according to UniSA guidelines, which can be found at http://www.unisa.edu.au/res/ethics/default.asp

Please note, if your project is a clinical trial you are required to register it in a publicly accessible trials registry prior to enrolment of the first participant (e.g. Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry http://www.anzctr.org.au/) as a condition of ethics approval.

Best wishes for your research.

Executive Officer
UniSA's Human Research Ethics Committee
CRICOS provider number 00121B

This is an automated email and cannot be replied to. Please direct your query to humanethics@unisa.edu.au.

Appendix C: Participant information sheet

University of South Australia

Research Participant Information Sheet

Your Invitation

As a School Principal in a very remote Aboriginal community, you are invited to participate in research that aims to:

- Examine what School Principals deem to be their role when working in remote Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory
- Consider the extent to which culturally responsive leadership practice guides the directionality of the school
- Understand the contextualised leadership behaviours that make a difference in remote Aboriginal schools

Scope of Research Involvement: 4 phases of research

1. School Profile Check	Completion Time: 10 minutes. Read over the researchers school profile 'snapshot' to ensure that school details collected from *My School*, the school website (if available) and school improvement plans, are true and correct.
2. Interview	Completion Time: 60 minutes (conducted in-person on-site at your school). Discuss contextualised leadership behaviours that work plus the supportive and inhibitive factors relating the role of a principal in a remote Aboriginal school.
3. Provocation	Completion Time: 30 minutes (conducted via online conversation with the principal researcher). Discuss research findings from stages one and two and provide further details where required. This phase of research also aims to consider school principal's recommendations for policy, practice and support mechanisms required for leaders in remote Aboriginal schools.
Time Commitment	Total direct time commitment will not exceed 2 hours for all phases of the research

Benefits of Involvement

- Your involvement will assist in better understanding the role of school principals in very remote Aboriginal schools. This research may lead to new support mechanisms for educators in such roles both nationally and internationally, that ultimately aims to improve student learning outcomes.
- In a spirit of reciprocity, all research participants will be provided with a copy of research findings at the completion of the study.
- As part of the research all participants will be required to reflect on current school practice that may potentially impact student achievement.

Considerations

- It is not anticipated that there are any risks to participation in this study beyond those encountered during everyday life.
- Participation in this research is voluntary in nature.
- All efforts will be made to maintain the anonymity of research participants, the school and the geographic location of the community. School principals are required to assist in maintaining confidentiality regarding their involvement in the study.
- Should the participant experience any difficulties as a result of the research they may choose to discuss concerns with the principal researcher or have the option to withdraw participation at any stage. Withdrawal will result in related data not being used for the project. If looking to withdraw, the participant should notify the researcher in writing no later than one month after the provocation phase has been conducted.
- Audio of interviews will be kept securely at University of South Australia, Magill Campus for a period of 5 years after the research is conducted. During the research process, computer files are stored on Uni SA computer (blue plate 276173) in office G1-34 at Magill Campus and can only be accessed via password and username. All other research data will be stored in a locked, secure filing cabinet in office G1-34, Magill Campus. At the end of the research, data will be stored in store room C1-66A at Magill Campus.
- All records containing personal information will remain confidential and no information which could lead to identification of any individual will be released, unless required by law.
- At the conclusion of the PhD thesis, all participants will receive a copy of the study findings.
- This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118, Email: vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au

- Any complaints from participants or third parties who wish to lodge a complaint about either the study or the way it is being conducted should contact the Executive Officer of UniSA HREC in the first instance, email: humanethics@unisa.edu.au or tel: +61 8 8302 3118

Researcher on Site

- The researcher, Steve Corrie has sought ethics approval for this research from the University of South Australia and the Northern Territory Department of Education. Steve Corrie has worked as a principal in very remote Aboriginal schools and as such is conscious of not impacting on the educational environment at the school when on-site for the interview phase of the study.
- The researcher is fully self-sufficient with regards to transport (4WD), food and accommodation (rooftop tent). It is however requested that the researcher's vehicle be positioned on school grounds overnight, prior to or directly after the interview phase. It is also requested that the researcher have access to the school bathroom during the on-site visit.

Any questions regarding the research can be directed to Steve Corrie on 0439 975 759 or at corsa004@mymail.unisa.edu.au
Principal Supervisor – Distinguished Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Lester.Rigney@unisa.edu.au
Co-Supervisors – Dr Samuel Osborne, samuel.osborne@unisa.edu.au, Dr Paul Unsworth, paul.unsworth@unisa.edu.au

Appendix D: School Council consent form

UniSA | Research and Innovation Services

Human Research Ethics Committee
CONSENT FORM

School Council Consent Form	
This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: humanethics@unisa.edu.au	
SECTION 1: CONTACT AND PROJECT DETAILS	
Researcher's Full Name:	Stephen Corrie
Contact Details:	Phone: 0439 975 759 Email: corsa004@mymail.unisa.edu.au
Supervisor's Full Name:	Distinguished Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney
Contact Details:	Phone: 08 8302 4529 Email: Lester.Rigney@unisa.edu.au
Co-Supervisors	Dr Samuel Osborne and Dr Paul Unsworth
Contact Details	samuel.osborne@unisa.edu.au and paul.unsworth@unisa.edu.au
Protocol Number:	201417
Project Title:	Educational Leadership: Culturally responsive schooling in remote Australia

SECTION 2: School Council Consent

Dear School Council Members,

My name is Stephen Corrie and I am currently completing PhD research at the University of South Australia. My study focuses on the work of school principals in remote Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory. The role of school principal is one I know well having previously been the principal at Minyerri School (Katherine Region), Ramingining CEC (East Arnhem Region) and Bulla Camp (Katherine Region). My study is also overseen by Indigenous scholar and academic, Distinguished Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney.

I write to seek your consent to enter the community to talk with the school principal regarding their role as part of a wider study that focuses on educational leadership. It is anticipated that this will require me to travel to the school in mid-2019 with an exact date and time to be arranged with school staff. The trip should be no more than two days in duration.

Should any member of the school council wish to know more about the study, I am happy to answer any questions you may have (please see my contact details above). Similarly, I am more than happy to meet with any school council members during my visit if so desired.

If the school council is happy to support the community visit to talk with the school principal, can you please have a council representative sign acknowledgement of consent below.

Kind regards,

Stephen Corrie
PhD Candidate

The school council is supportive of Stephen Corrie visiting the school to talk with the school principal as part of the research on educational leadership with an exact time and date to be determined with local school staff.

School Council Representative's Signature	Print Name	Date

Appendix E: Participant consent form

UniSA Research and Innovation Services

Human Research Ethics Committee
CONSENT FORM

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: humanethics@unisa.edu.au

SECTION 1: CONTACT AND PROJECT DETAILS

Researcher's Full Name:	Stephen Corrie
Contact Details:	Phone: 0439 975 759 Email: corsa004@mymail.unisa.edu.au
Supervisor's Full Name:	Distinguished Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney
Contact Details:	Phone: 08 8302 4529 Email: Lester.Rigney@unisa.edu.au
Co-Supervisors	Dr Samuel Osborne and Dr Paul Unsworth
Contact Details	samuel.osborne@unisa.edu.au and paul.unsworth@unisa.edu.au
Protocol Number:	201417
Project Title:	Educational Leadership: Culturally responsive schooling in remote Australia

SECTION 2: CERTIFICATION

Participant Certification

In signing this form, I confirm that:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future. Withdrawal will result in your own data not being used for the project. If looking to withdraw, the participant should notify the researcher in writing no later than one month after the provocation phase has been conducted.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential, unless required by law.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview and provocation phases of research.
- I understand that the audio of the interviews will be kept securely at University of South Australia, Magill Campus for a period of 5 years after the research is conducted. During the research process, computer files are stored on Uni SA computer (blue plate 276173) in office G1-34 at Magill Campus and can only be accessed via password and username. All other research data will be stored in a locked, secure filing cabinet in office G1-34, Magill Campus. At the end of the research, data will be stored in store room C1-66A at Magill Campus.

[NOTE: All persons involved in this research must be school Principals in very remote localities in the Northern Territory. The school should be either a primary school or primary-secondary combined with an Aboriginal enrolment of 90%+.

Participant Signature	*Printed Name*	*Date*

Researcher Certification

I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher Signature	*Printed Name*	*Date*

Appendix F: Contextual data sought for schools

School profiles were developed according to publicly available sources (ie *My School* website and individual school websites where available) and included the following details:

- School location
- Student year range offered
- Enrolment and attendance
- Student composition – number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students
- Staffing – roles, number of local and non-local teachers
- Index of community socio- educational advantage
- School budget
- Specific educational programs on offer
- National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy data
- Other matters of interest

Further details about the school were sought from individual school improvement plans and annual school performance reports and included:

- School governance, leadership and ownership structure
- Identified values and vision for education
- Metrics utilised for evaluation of school processes
- Processes undertaken for school reviews and reporting
- Extent and nature of engagement between the school and community
- Budget allocations and priorities
- PD of staff
- Future directions for the school

Appendix G: Interview questions – phase 2

Interview Questions – Phase 2

1. What brings you to your current role and how long have you been in this position?
2. Can you tell me about the school's successes, challenges and opportunities?
3. If families in the community were asked what they desire for their children in a localised education, what responses are they likely to provide?
4. How are the language and cultural needs of students catered for in teaching and learning at the school?
5. How do you support your teachers to be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs that you just mentioned?
6. What are the top priorities for your school in the next 12 months to two years and how are these priorities supported by both the community and the education department?
7. What does being an effective leader in a remote Indigenous school entail?
8. As a leader, how do you mediate competing interests at the school?
9. How is community involvement in the school encouraged and to what extent does your role take you into the community itself?
10. Are there any impacts to daily schooling that shape your practice as an educational leader? If so, can you provide details?
11. What lessons have you learned that would be useful for principals who are new to educational leadership in a remote Indigenous school to understand?
12. What resources, mentors, theories, professional learning do you utilise to support your work as an educational leader?

Appendix H: Provocation questions – phase 3

Provocation Questions – Phase 3

1. Since we last talked, what have been the most significant leadership challenges for you personally and how have you approached them?

2. On page 2 of the NT Strategy, it is indicated that the department is keen to build adaptive and distributive leadership capability. Are you able to provide details about what this is explicitly referring to and how you as a school principal have been involved in this process?

3. In initial interviews with school principals in remote schools across the Northern Territory it was indicated that community engagement was critical to the success of schools locally. This is also reflected in the NT Strategy focus areas. When looking at 'How we will measure success', are you able to provide details about the departmental metrics that align with the focus area of community engagement?

4. With regards to community engagement, the *Education NT Indigenous Education Strategy* refers to 'community-led schools' [see Appendix F]. Are you able to explain what this initiative involves and what impact, if any, this is likely to have in your school community?

5. All school principals indicated during the initial interviews that Read, Write, Inc was departmentally mandated in the Northern Territory and as such professional development was supporting this initiative. Are you able to provide details about any professional learning (for leaders or teachers) that aligns specifically with the educational aspirations and directions determined by your local community?

6. A) Would you say time impacts the productivity of remote school principals? B) Is it possible for a principal stay too long?

Appendix I: Northern Territory Education Strategy (2018-22)



EDUCATION NT STRATEGY 2018-22 ACTION PLAN

QUALITY TEACHING

Children and students engaged and learning

Teachers are the key influence in child and student progress and achievement and will be supported to deliver quality teaching and learning.

What we will do:

- Establish a system of coaching and mentoring to build teacher and school leader capability.
- Support schools to effectively attract, retain and manage their staff.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Strong partnerships with children, students, families, the community and industry inform our decisions

How schools and the education system can most effectively work with parents and communities to benefit the children they serve.

What we will do:

- Empower communities to be more involved in the education of their children.
- Implement the Community Led Schools initiative.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Leaders lift performance

Leadership teams apply expert organisational, personal and relational capabilities to a whole school improvement agenda.

What we will do:

- Build distributive and adaptive leadership capability.
- Develop pathways to attract and grow future leaders.

How we will measure success

Across all levels of schooling, improved:

- Participation, attendance and retention
- Enrolment
- Perception
- Literacy and numeracy growth and achievement
- Completions and ATAR

Across our agency:

- Improved staff retention
- Increased number of Aboriginal staff

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

DATA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Systems inform and improve practice

Ready access to data and accountability systems help to determine school performance and assist communities to make the best decisions for child and student learning and growth.

What we will do:

- Develop and implement quality standards for school and system performance.
- Target investment in technologies to drive data informed decision making from the classroom to the boardroom.

DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Tailored, evidence-based strategies support our schools

The planned and targeted allocation of resources to support schools as they embed their individual improvement agenda.

What we will do:

- Develop and implement a school improvement methodology and service delivery model.
- Target investment to the right support for schools.

Appendix J: Job description – Principal Level 1

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

JOB DESCRIPTION

Agency	Department of Education			**Work Unit**	Alyarrmandumanja Umbakumba School
Job Title	Principal			**Designation**	Principal Level 1
Job Type	Full Time			**Duration**	Fixed from 23/07/2019 to 13/12/2019
Salary	$128,539			**Location**	Umbakumba
Position Number	18708	**RTF**	165122	**Closing**	26/05/2019
Contact	Kerry Hudson, Senior Director School Improvement and Leadership Palmerston, Rural and Arnhem on 08 8944 9260 or kerry.hudson@nt.gov.au				
Agency Information	www.education.nt.gov.au				
Information for Applicants	**Applications must be limited to a one-page summary sheet and an attached detailed resume/cv**. For further information for applicants and example applications: click here				
Information about Selected Applicant's Merit	If you accept this position, a detailed summary of your merit (including work history, experience, qualifications, skills, information from referees, etc.) will be provided to other applicants, to ensure transparency and better understanding of the reasons for the decision. For further information: click here				
Special Measures	The NTPS values diversity and aims for a workforce which is representative of the community we serve. Therefore under an approved **Special Measures** recruitment plan, ATSI applicants will be given priority consideration and preference in selection for this vacancy if they meet all essential selection criteria and are suitable at the position level. For further information: click here				
Apply Online Link	https://jobs.nt.gov.au/Home/JobDetails?rtfId=165122				

Primary Objective: The Principal plays a vital role in delivering the strategic plan of the Department of Education and is the leading educational professional in the school who inspires students, staff and community members to optimise the learning of all students.

Context Statement: Alyarrmandumanja Umbakumba School is located on Groote Eylandt, 650km east of Darwin and 50km off the Arnhem Land coast in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Alyarrmandumanja Umbakumba School is one of four schools servicing the Groote Eylandt Archipelago. The school provides education to approximately 80 Indigenous students from early years to senior years, the majority of whom speak English as an additional language. The school has a Families as First Teachers program. The school also has a trade training centre that doubles as a cyclone shelter. In 2018 the school will transition from Direct Instruction for literacy and maths to the Literacy and Numeracy Essentials (LANE) program.

Key Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Lead the development of the school's vision with a focus on a shared respectful culture that challenges and sets high expectations of both students and teachers to drive student outcomes, and effective teaching that promotes capable and independent learners.
2. Deliver strategic leadership, lead and drive the direction of the school, including strengthening partnerships and marshalling resources to achieve leading edge outcomes with the school's students, the school council and school community and manage the school's resources, to produce and implement clear evidence-based improvement plans and policies.
3. Establish the expectation for all staff to achieve high standards and builds the staff's capacity through professional development and performance management.
4. Develop relationships with families and community groups to enrich the school and its value to the wider community.
5. Work with other principals and the department to drive the development of education services at a regional and system level.

Selection Criteria

Essential:

1. Demonstrated leadership in the development of teaching and learning in a school environment.
2. Proven ability to build the capacity of self, others and high performing teams.
3. Demonstrated strategic leadership in partnership with a school council (or similar) to drive innovation and change to achieve school improvement.
4. Demonstrated ability to lead the management of the school's physical, financial and human resources.
5. Demonstrated ability to build a shared culture of high expectations, while developing and maintaining effective interpersonal and cross cultural relationships within and beyond the school community.

Further Information: Registration with the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory and a Working with Children Ochre Card is required in this position.

Appendix K: Job description –Teaching Principal 2

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

JOB DESCRIPTION

Agency	Department of Education			**Work Unit**	Willowra School
Job Title	Teaching Principal			**Designation**	Teaching Principal 2
Job Type	Full Time			**Duration**	Fixed from 28/01/2020 for 12 months
Salary	$123,962			**Location**	Willowra - Wirliyatjarrayi
Position Number	7992	**RTF**	177437	**Closing**	18/11/2019
Contact	Jenny Carew, Director, Remote Schools Support Unit, Alice Springs on 08 8951 1644 or jenny.carew@nt.gov.au				
Agency Information	www.education.nt.gov.au				
Information for Applicants	**Applications must be limited to a one-page summary sheet and an attached resume/cv** For further information for applicants and example applications: click here				
Information about Selected Applicant's Merit	If you are selected and accept this position, a detailed summary of your merit (including work history, experience, qualifications, skills, information from referees, etc.) will be provided to other applicants, to ensure transparency and better understanding of the reasons for the decision. For further information: click here				
Inclusion & Diversity	The NTPS values diversity and aims for a workforce which is representative of the community we serve. We strongly welcome and encourage people from all diversity groups to apply and strive to accommodate people with disability by making reasonable workplace adjustments when required. If you require an adjustment for the recruitment process or job, please discuss this with the contact officer.				
Special Measures	Under an approved **Special Measures** recruitment plan, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants will be given priority consideration and preference in selection for this vacancy if they meet all essential selection criteria and are suitable at the position level.				
Apply Online Link	https://jobs.nt.gov.au/Home/JobDetails?rtfId=177437				

Primary Objective: The Teaching Principal is responsible to the Director Remote Schools Support Unit for leading a team of staff in the planning, development and delivery of programs to ensure effective educational outcomes for students, as well as the development and maintenance of a safe and supportive learning environment, reflecting community values.

Context Statement: Willowra School is located 300km northwest of Alice Springs in the community of Willowra (Wirliyatjarrayi). The population of the community is approximately 275 and the main language spoken is Warlpiri. The school provides programs for students from Transition to Year 9.This includes a Two-Way Learning Program resourced with an ST1 that assists the teaching staff and community to develop and implement the Two-Way Learning Program in accordance with NT Curriculum and policies, school-based curriculum and school policy.

Key Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Undertake an appropriate teaching load.
2. Provide progressive leadership to ensure the delivery of educational programs, in accordance with the Southern Region, departmental policy and NT curriculum requirements to meet the educational needs of the community.
3. Develop and implement school policy, procedures, protocols, performance management and strategic plans in line with departmental and public sector requirements to achieve desirable educational outcomes.
4. Provide professional leadership to all teaching and support staff to ensure best practice standards are maintained in accordance with educational requirements and Human Resources policies and procedures.
5. In collaboration with the Remote Schools Support Unit, Alice Springs staff, oversee the acquisition and management of human, financial and physical resources in accordance with departmental policy to meet the needs of the school community.
6. Work in partnership with parents, community and staff to ensure the school council effectively represents the community and supports the delivery of appropriate programs.
7. Participate in the development of NT Department of Education strategic business and educational initiatives that will ensure the provision of a comprehensive range of programs aimed at enhancing educational opportunities and student learning outcomes.
8. Provide a safe environment that will ensure the welfare and security of students and staff.

Selection Criteria

Essential:

1. Registration with the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board and a Working with Children (Ochre) Card.
2. Demonstrated successful teaching experience, including working with students who speak English as an additional language.
3. Ability to establish and effectively lead and manage teams in the provision of educational programs to meet the needs of a range of students.
4. Ability to develop and implement strategic plans at the school level, to participate in systemic strategic planning and demonstrated effective project management skills.
5. Successful development of effective partnerships with parents and the community to establish and support the delivery of high quality and appropriate programs for all students.
6. Proven ability to work within a cross cultural/Aboriginal small remote school environment, interact effectively with people of diverse cultures and successfully develop effective partnerships with parents and the community.

Desirable:

1. Relevant qualifications in TESOL/ESL.
2. An understanding of working in a remote Aboriginal community.

Approved: September 2019

Trevor Read, Senior Director SIL, Alice Springs

www.nt.gov.au

Appendix L: Job description – Executive Contract Principal

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT

JOB DESCRIPTION

Agency	Department of Education			**Work Unit**	Numbulwar School
Job Title	Principal			**Designation**	Executive Contract Principal Level 2
Job Type	Full time			**Duration**	Fixed from 23/07/2019 to 12/12/2019
Salary	$192,399			**Location**	Numbulwar
Position Number	7008	**RTF**	165081	**Closing**	26/05/2019
Contact	Kerry Hudson, Senior Director School Improvement and Leadership Palmerston, Rural and Arnhem on 08 8944 9260 or kerry.hudson@nt.gov.au				
Agency Information	www.education.nt.gov.au				
Information for Applicants	**Applications must be limited to a one-page summary sheet and an attached resume/cv** For further information for applicants and example applications: click here				
Information about Selected Applicant's Merit	If you are selected and accept this position, a detailed summary of your merit (including work history, experience, qualifications, skills, information from referees, etc.) will be provided to other applicants, to ensure transparency and better understanding of the reasons for the decision. For further information: click here				
Inclusion & Diversity	The NTPS values diversity and aims for a workforce which is representative of the community we serve. We strongly welcome and encourage people from all diversity groups to apply and strive to accommodate people with disability by making reasonable workplace adjustments when required. If you require an adjustment for the recruitment process or job, please discuss this with the contact officer.				
Special Measures	Under an approved **Special Measures** recruitment plan, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants will be given priority consideration and preference in selection for this vacancy if they meet all essential selection criteria and are suitable at the position level.				
Apply Online Link	https://jobs.nt.gov.au/Home/JobDetails?rtfId=165081				

Primary Objective:
The Teaching Principal is responsible to the Senior Director School Improvement and Leadership for leading a team of staff in the planning, development and delivery of programs to ensure educational outcomes are achieved in a safe and supportive learning environment which reflects community values.

Context Statement:
Numbulwar is situated in East Arnhem land and has a population of approximately 1000. The community is administered by the Numbulwar Numburindi Government Council. Numbulwar School caters for students from Preschool to Year 12 ensuring young people have choices for employment and further training both locally and in the wider community. This involves a strong partnership with the community in supporting the learning of Indigenous languages and culture while at the same time prioritising the learning of English and numeracy skills.

Key Duties and Responsibilities:
1. Lead the development of the school's vision with a focus on a shared respectful culture that challenges and sets high expectations of both teachers and students to drive student outcomes, and effective teaching that promotes capable and independent learners.
2. Deliver strategic leadership and operational management with the school council and school community, to produce and implement clear evidence-based improvement plans and policies.
3. Establish the expectation for all staff to achieve high standards and builds the staff's capacity through professional development and performance management.
4. Develop relationships with families and community groups to enrich the school and its value to the wider community.
5. Work with other principals and the Department to drive the development of education services at a regional and system level.

Selection Criteria:
Essential:
1. Demonstrated leadership in the development of teaching and learning in a school environment.
2. Proven ability to build the capacity of self, others and high performing teams.
3. Demonstrated strategic leadership in partnership with the school council to drive innovation and change to achieve school improvement.
4. Demonstrated ability to lead the management of the school's physical, financial and human resources.
5. Demonstrated ability to build a shared culture of high expectations, while developing and maintaining effective interpersonal and cross cultural relationships within and beyond the school community.
6. Registration with the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory and a Working with Children Ochre Card or the ability to obtain.

Further Information:
Smoking is not permitted on any Department of Education premises including school grounds, except in exempted areas. The preferred or recommended applicant will be required to undergo a criminal history check. A criminal history check will not exclude an application from this position unless it is a relevant criminal history.