A study of home literacy practices in two Indigenous families and a comparison with school based literacy practices.

By Kathryn Mannion

February 2007
Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Teaching of the Charles Darwin University, is the result of my own investigations, and that all references to the ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in the thesis has not been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being currently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my most sincere appreciation to the participants involved in this study. The intrusion of having someone hardly known coming into the home with a video camera is undoubtedly enormous. However this was greeted with gracious acceptance and enthusiasm and we were able to enjoy many laughs as a result. The participants co-operative spirit and warmth enabled social relationships to develop beyond the research and I value the friendships that have resulted.

Most importantly I wish to thank the many Indigenous people I have had the privilege of working with who have afforded me opportunities to be part of their lives. To you I extend my most heartfelt thanks for making my teaching and learning experiences so memorable. The students I have taught have both inspired and challenged me to become a better teacher. I have loved your openness, creativity, energy and sense of fun.

I have been so fortunate to have met and lived with Gali and Garrutju and their family who took great pains to try and teach me some Yolngu ways. Your profound knowledge, limitless patience and genuine desire to share your lives gave me glimpses into a rich and dynamic culture.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Mike Grenfell who has guided me to achieve more than I thought I was capable of achieving. His expert knowledge and professionalism have provided invaluable support throughout my study period.

Mrs Beverly Henderson has also been a source of great inspiration. Thank you for reading my thesis and making enlightened suggestions. Thank you also for the long discussions we have had which have forced me to further reflect on and
investigate my teaching and learning practices.

Finally, I save my most profound appreciation and gratitude for my husband Les, our children James and Audrey and my mother Enid. I have spent countless hours in study as Les has taken over the duties of home and family with patience and understanding. He inspired and encouraged me to accept this challenge. James and Audrey were toddlers when I began this work and I have watched them grow, especially in their literacy skills with intrigue and delight. My mother is still teaching kindergarten at 73 years of age (in a relief capacity). Her passion has been both model and inspiration for my own work. She has been a guiding light in my love and feeling for teaching. Thank you for your model of dedication and drive to enhance the lives of the children you have taught, making their first year of school invaluable. I grew up listening to you speak out against inequality and I thank you for planting the seeds of inquiry and reflection that I have today.
Abstract

This thesis documents the home literacy practices of two Indigenous families and examines the attitudes of Indigenous students and teachers and non-Indigenous teachers with regard to literacy and learning. The paper reveals the rich and diverse literacy practices in the homes of Indigenous families and the situatedness of learning in an intercultural context. Persistent questions are raised about the compatibility of home literacy practices and those of schools. Despite a succession of educational programs and policies designed to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, the thesis demonstrates the continuing ignorance about what Indigenous children can achieve and reveals the racialised practices of Western schools who completely discount Indigenous ways of knowing. Consistent with an intercultural perspective, hybrid practices are evident as Indigenous students’ home and school worlds collide. Apprenticeship style learning is revealed as an enduring framework in which family is considered critical and home/school partnerships are therefore considered as vital to academic success for students. Identity is seen to be interwoven with literacy and with the engagement of media and popular culture. This thesis draws important implications for how teachers might engage students more effectively in classrooms in order to improve educational outcomes.
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Prologue

As a teacher for twenty three years I have always sought a variety of teaching and learning experiences through which I have attempted to challenge and reinvent myself. I have taught in inner city schools where student populations have consisted largely of migrant and refugee children. I have taught in extremely remote desert communities, where ‘criminals’ were sent to repent and alcoholics to dry out. Where the school day began at 7:00 am and by noon, temperatures in the bough shed that was my classroom had soared to beyond 50 degrees Celsius. I’ve taught at mission schools where the sparkling, turquoise waters of the Arafura sea were more of a draw card for students than the hot school buildings, where the air was thick like syrup, and concentrating on reading and writing (in a foreign language) was next to impossible. I’ve taught in mining schools where the land had been owned by Aboriginal people but non-Aboriginal people came and took what they could from it, leaving scars on both the people and their country. I have taught in rural farming schools and schools in tourist towns. I have taught in London, on the Isle of Dogs where the five year olds in my class called me darlin’. I have taught students with disabilities, ESL students and students who have spent their whole lives in refugee camps. I have taught students with terminal illnesses and wept at their funerals, and others who had been so abused and neglected they were removed from their families and put into care. I have taught a student who was born in a pub toilet and another in jail. At times my students have not come to school because they didn’t have clothes, or food, or had been up all night sitting on their front lawn because some adult had been angry with another adult and cursed their house. I have taught kindergarten children, through to secondary aged students and adults.

I have been chased with a spear by the enraged father of a student, and huddled under school desks with a group of frightened children with the classroom door locked, when Henry, who had had a fight with his wife that morning, came through the school smashing windows with his machete. I have seen the joy and gratified looks on children’s faces when the penny finally
drops and they can sound out and read a word. I have seen the pride of young academically challenged students who have danced traditional Indigenous dances in front of vast audiences who, like me, have been mesmerised by the passion and skill of these performers. I have tried to counsel Margaret whose difficult behaviours were reflective of sexual abuse by her family. I have listened to my students' 'show and tell' stories of substance abuse and domestic violence. I have ducked chairs when Kelly Marie called me a c*** because she didn't like the fact that I wouldn't let her answer the classroom phone. I have been decorated for traditional ceremonies that I have danced in and given assurance that the snake in my classroom was not a 'cheeky' one and that the mangrove worms I was about to eat were a prized delicacy even though they had the look and texture of warm snot. I have been told not to bother putting students' work up on the bough shed walls because the wild camels would just come in and eat it off. I have been threatened with a flick knife and had my name carved by an emotionally fragile student into his arm with a piece of broken glass. I have tried to talk an eight year old into taking off the soft drink can full of petrol that was strapped to his ears and come into the classroom and tried to sway students from mixing toilet cleaner and aspirin to get a buzz. I have seen students from remote Arnhem Land communities first touch snow and get on an inner city Melbourne tram. I've cleaned maggots from infected ears and belly buttons. I have dressed wounds and held kidney dishes up to burst boils that filled with blood and pus in seconds. I have changed soiled underwear and cleaned up vomit. I have flown to school, boated to school, driven, and caught buses, trains and taxis to my schools. I have had hepatitis, scabies, nits, 'bung eye' and more cases of diarrhoea than I care to remember. I know how to cook a stingray and pig’s blood stew. I have taught students who can speak more languages than I will ever know, and students who can find water in an arid and seemingly barren desert. I have had students in my class who can find bush medicine for sore throats, headaches, asthma, boils and burns. Others who can read the 'story waters' and others who know complex ceremonial rituals. I hate American gangster rap but like PNG Reggae, both of which have been introduced to me by students. I have loved my students and at times had to hold my hands
behind my back so I wouldn't put them around someone's neck! I have had the best and the worst days and I remain optimistic about the new generation of students I teach.

All teachers have stories to tell and volumes of experiences to reflect on. Hank Nelson in his book 'With its hat about its ears' (1989) documents the lives and experiences of many small bush schools. These recollections span more than a century of school life and yet on almost every page I find myself smiling, as I am able to remember a similar story. Stories abound of teachers trying their hands at whatever was going such as crutching sheep, shearing and baling hay. This has been the part of teaching that I have most enjoyed. A city girl does not get to dig a bogged car out of scalding red sand in the middle of the Great Sandy Desert, be painted and dance in a traditional ceremony or help feed a poddy calf on a dairy farm, every day. These are the times when you are really able to get to know the community in which you work. Having a bite from the communal leg of a charred emu, then playing target games with the slingshot you make with the leftover sinews are the most cherished times when I have seen my students without the confines of the four walls of a classroom. These are the times they are happy and comfortable in their environment, in control and empowered. Many of Nelson’s tellings are 'sink or swim' stories, which most teachers have experienced. The truths are veiled until you arrive at your appointment and are faced with the realities of the situation. I arrived from an inner city Melbourne school to a school in the Pilbara, Western Australia. On reaching the hub school some two hours east of Port Hedland, I remember thinking I might have well been on another planet. The houses were demountables, which were small caravan like constructions so named because they could be transported easily, set up quickly and moved when necessary. The dirt and mud was the deepest red soil colour I had ever seen and a thin coat of it blanketed everyone and everything. Rubbish from our great consumer Western world was swept up in the dust storms and dumped unceremoniously all over the community or caught in what remained of some old barbed wire fences. Other relics from the Western world including car bodies, broken stoves, fridges, air conditioners, washing machines, televisions and other electrical equipment lay scattered all around.
My position was in an outstation school called Mijijimaya, which was an eight hour drive inland from Port Hedland. Being January it was the rainy season and it took us nearly two weeks and at least three attempts to reach the school from the hub school. My vehicle was a poor match for the desert conditions. My father had made a roof rack for my four wheel drive, which collapsed in the heat on the fourth and finally successful attempt to cross the flooded De Grey River. I followed the Principal in his Hilux through the unspeakably hot expanses of spinifex grass. Loose tumble weeds and spinifex grass reminded me from a distance of the American prairie, which I have only seen in films. On reaching the deserted community we were ambushed by the starving and savage camp dogs. They leapt from their shady hiding places snapping relentlessly at the car tyres, growling and snarling ferociously. The community had been absent over the Christmas break and we were their first human sighting for weeks. The buildings were a combination of lean-tos, bough sheds, demountables and old water tanks cut in half and placed so as to make a semicircular dwelling.

The principal led the way to the teacher’s residence, two demountables joined together by a large veranda, which, considering the scorching temperatures, became the only possible living space. The heat was violently oppressive. You could feel the incinerating air burn all the way down your oesophagus. The thermometer exploded at 54 degrees celcius. The flies were relentless. A different breed perhaps that did not respond to conventional ways of keeping them out of one’s mouth and eyes. At this point the principal gave a brief lesson on how to work the ‘rad (radio) phone’, which became the only source of communication to the outside world, and another lesson on the batteries for the solar power. "There’s the gas fridge, but that doesn’t work when the outside temperature is more than 29 degrees, which is all the daylight hours and then some, and your water comes from that bore up there, but Kathryn don’t go up there because that’s secret men’s country. Okay that’s everything, the community should arrive back in the next few days, see you in a month." And he left. I read about Havelock Ellis in Nelson’s (1989) recollections of the bush school, who remembers of his
Sparkes Creek school appointment that 1878 was the "'loneliest, the most isolated' year of his life. It was also, he said, 'the most seminal and even the most ideal,' 'the most fateful, the most decisive,' 'the most eventful of my life' and 'that most wonderful year.'" (Nelson, 1989 p. 9) I'm with Havelock on this.

Despite all the things we know about our students and the communities we teach in, there are many things that we do not know. They are hidden, sometimes intentionally and sometimes because of our ignorance and inability to see beyond our own experiences, perceptions and stereotypes. My point is that because there are many things we do not know about the students we teach, we make assumptions and try to fill in the gaps based on what we know about our culture and our upbringing. These students have valid and rich literacy experiences and practices that we must acknowledge and align to our own teaching styles. They bring their 'virtual school bags' (Thompson 2002) to school in good faith expecting that we will acknowledge and support them. This is the very least we can do. I am not a brilliant teacher. I am a learner. I have learnt that all these children have stories, knowledge and skills that most teachers never uncover or tap into. This study has the potential for transformation of my longstanding ideologies, understandings and practices.
"Literacy is power, power to make a difference, power to be a person, power to be real. Literacy is the kind of strategic knowledge that puts one in command of the details of an art, craft, organisation, means of communication or form of behaviour."

McLaren 1999a.

Available at: http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/pages.mclaren
Chapter 1: Introduction

Title

A study of home literacy practices in two Indigenous families and a comparison with school based literacy teaching practices.

Overview of the research

A statement of the issues.

National literacy standards at the forefront of literacy discussions in Australian schools abound in which students from mainstream and non-mainstream communities, including Australian Indigenous populations, are ranked against nationally prescribed benchmarks. There is a plethora of statistics revealing difficulties by Indigenous students to reach these benchmarks.


The media is frequently reporting that standards of literacy are slipping, usually suggesting that schools and teachers are to blame. Indeed the Courier-Mail ran an article in September 2004 claiming that Education Queensland was not doing enough to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students whilst accepting the continued underachievement of these students. The article highlighted a report prepared by the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal. The report is quoted saying, "As a system, Education Queensland has
demonstrated a tendency to readily accept indigenous underachievement in schools. Disturbingly there has been little outrage from within the system about dramatic and continuing levels of underachievement. This phenomenon is underpinned at best by ignorance about what indigenous children can achieve, and at worst by racist beliefs that the learning capacity of Indigenous children is somehow inferior to that of other categories of students and therefore not worth the effort needed to improve performance. (Odgers, Courier-Mail Friday, September 3, 2004.)

Other media reports include the ABC's World Today. In November 2004 a story was presented that reported on a literacy study done in one Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. The study found that not one child reached the national literacy benchmarks for Year 3 or 5. It was further reported that the findings were mirrored in most Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and indeed coincide with statistics in North Queensland where this research was completed.

In 2000, Bourke completed a DETYA funded report titled Better practice in school attendance - Improving the school attendance of Indigenous Students. He comments that "despite initiatives which have been introduced by Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in the last 20 years to improve participation in, and outcomes from, education for Indigenous students, they continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia with consistently lower levels of academic achievement and higher rates of absenteeism than among non-Indigenous students." (Bourke, 2000 p.1)

The report presents statistics for national benchmarks in Year 3 and Year 5 reading and numeracy. National benchmarks in literacy and numeracy are part of an agreement adopted by all Australian Education Ministers in an effort to improve educational outcomes for Australian students. These indicators represent nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards in literacy and numeracy at a particular year level. The minimum acceptable standard refers to the critical level of literacy and numeracy, the absence of which will impede student progress at
school. The data from the 2000 *Better practice in school attendance - Improving the school attendance of Indigenous Students* report reveal that Indigenous students results were consistently lower than their non-indigenous peers. The *National School English Literacy Survey* (Department of Education, Science and Training, 1996) revealed approximately 70% of all students in Year 3 surveyed met the identified performance standards in reading and writing. Less than 20% of students in the Indigenous sample met the reading standards and less that 30% of students in the Indigenous sample met the writing standards. Additionally, the data suggested that the lowest achieving Year 3 Indigenous students were not likely to make any significant progress over the following two years. A similar trend was expected for Year 5 Indigenous students.

Bourke (2000) notes that there are Indigenous students achieving outcomes commensurate with their non-indigenous peers in education and training, however these students are a minority. Apart from some clearly distinguished individuals, it is difficult to find Indigenous students who have been provided with a truly equal footing in an education system that is failing certain communities of people. The *National Report on Schooling in Australia* (MCEETYA 2003) collated and analysed national benchmark data between 1999 and 2003. The performance levels of Indigenous students were found, in all these years, and all tested areas, that is, reading, writing and numeracy, to be achieving the benchmark levels at lower rates than the general population.

In 2004 National Benchmark Results in Reading, Writing and Numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7 showed there was some improvement in performance by Indigenous students. (MCEETYA, 2006. The 2004 National Report on Schooling in Australia.) The Hon. Rod Welford MP released the 2004 results on 10th March 2006. "While there has been an increase in Indigenous results, more effort needs to be directed towards maintaining this upward trend." (MCEETYA 2006) As Mr. Welford comments, the results reveal an increase in the number of Indigenous students achieving Benchmark but the report notes that students who were absent or withdrawn from testing are not classified as assessed students and are not included in the calculations. This
makes the results somewhat questionable. The fact remains that Indigenous students are not achieving school literacy and numeracy Benchmarks as comparable to their non-Indigenous peers. This situation remains relatively static.

Clearly initiatives have been implemented, reports have been written and many millions of dollars have been spent. Education departments and the general public are aware of the situation, and yet Western education systems are unable to make a difference. Are we operating in a system that has turned a blind eye to the causes of low educational outcomes for Indigenous students? The usual comments from non-Indigenous teachers I work with suggest that Indigenous students are either unable to learn because they come from economically or culturally impoverished backgrounds or their parents do not value education. So are we as teachers, who fail to educate Indigenous students to benchmark standards, not at fault because some students do not achieve these standards?


It may simply be the function of ignorance and be relatively benign in character, amenable to revision through contact and the acquisition of a better knowledge and appreciation of another culture. However it may be more rigidly entrenched, clothed in attitudes such as 'kids are just kids, I don't make any exceptions. I treat them all the same.' Thus when the 15 year old Aboriginal boy acts up for the third time in a month, the process of easing him out of school via suspension or exclusion may be gradual but
firm, and based on a set of unexamined and apparently unexaminable assumptions, shored up by prejudice and the commonplaces of community attitudes. (2000 p.146)

From where I stand I can only conclude that we have been and continue to operate in a system that disadvantages Indigenous students. Are those of us who engage in the rhetoric that demands social justice and equality for all students, merely sustaining our white imaginings that we have constructed in order to feel good about what we do? Or have we moved into a phase of apathy, or worse still, a blindly uninformed phase?

Curthoys (1997) suggests that many white Australians have difficulty coming to terms with their colonial past and the racially-based power relations of the present. She suggests they prefer to see themselves as battlers, victims and heroes of survival rather than the beneficiaries of an invasion. The pioneer narratives erased Aboriginal experiences from historical accounts. Profound antagonism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be felt in many of the schools in which I have taught. Many Australian teachers only know Indigenous students through stereotyped images of poverty, illiteracy and criminal activity. The racial thinking is sometimes insidiously covert and at other times clearly stated. I have also observed the intense commitment to Indigenous rights and welfare that is at times defined as missionary-like paternalism, interfering, culturally blinkered and even exploitive.

This notion is highlighted by Curthoys who suggests that our more recent yearning for Aboriginal culture often involves "extensive appropriation so that what matters is not Aboriginal people but the uses non-Aboriginal people can make of what they believe to be Aboriginal culture." (Curthoys 1997 p. 124) As I sit on my moral highground and reflect on my own practice, I have to admit, as difficult as it is, that I have been guilty of this. In trying to find my own pathway to understanding I have held fast to the romantic images of what I understand to be 'traditionally orientated' peoples in remote communities. Now having worked with Indigenous Australians in large urban settings, I realise how I have treated my students as collective
entities in a homogenous tradition. I continue to do so in parts of this thesis. It becomes messy. On the one hand I am trying to understand a phenomenon, that of low literacy rates in many Indigenous students, which I have observed over and over again in my years teaching and which is supported by statistics. On the other hand am I at times talking about 'sameness', which leads to a simplification of the complexities of issues raised? Our present social and political climate is racially complex. Entwined in this are schools and teaching. My goal is to explain from my perspective what is happening in our schools with regard to literacy and Indigenous students and give myself, as a teacher, a sense that my teaching can be remodelled to support the needs of all my students more effectively.

Social justice and equity issues are at the forefront of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. As was noted earlier in this chapter issues concerning human rights standards are reported in the media regularly and accordingly awareness is increasing among members of the community at large. Awareness alone does not ensure appropriate action and whilst human rights are protected in Australia by law, a complicated legal and political process means that they are not legally binding. This has meant that Indigenous Australians have in the past, and continue, to suffer the most extreme human rights violations. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2001) reported, "statistics clearly show that Indigenous people experience markedly inferior levels of health and health care, education, unemployment, ownership and access to clean water and other state provided essential services including housing." (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Website. Section 5: Human Rights Explained p.20) The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) revealed that Indigenous Australians are significantly over-represented in our criminal justice system. In addition to this the report published a devastating picture of the effects of colonisation, dispossession and continued institutional racism against Indigenous people. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report titled, Bringing Them Home (1997) investigated the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The report reveals serious human rights violations, the effects of which persist today. Entwined
throughout is the implicit role that literacy plays. Restricted literacy levels are insufficient to empower Indigenous people in negotiating the Western World. Access to higher incomes, economic and social power and improved life chances are largely dependent on students’ repertoire of literacy skills and competencies. It is incumbent on educational institutions to support Indigenous students in their attainment of these skills, as without this competence a cycle of disempowerment, marginalisation and associated political, economic and social disadvantage often ensues. One way schools can achieve this competence is through the implementation of teaching and learning programs that are culturally responsive. The next section considers this.

Culturally responsive pedagogies.

Culturally responsive pedagogies have been driven in part by the new literacy studies (Street 1995, Gee 1996, Barton and Hamilton 1998). Previous to this, Freire’s (1993) work was important in the 1970’s and 1980’s in producing ideological texts through which many educationalists transformed their practice. Freirean philosophy was instrumental in laying the foundations for culturally responsive pedagogies, which is why I have included discussions on Freire’s work in this thesis. More recently, the new literacy studies have provided new definitions and concepts of literacy, borne out of societal changes including technological advances. New knowledge and understanding of situated literacies and multiliteracies have informed the development of what have been termed culturally responsive pedagogies.

Indigenous students are frequently marginalised as a result of the cultural and linguistic resources, and the economic and social backgrounds they bring with them to schools. Diversity has become a frequently used term in education. This diversity extends to socioeconomic diversity, religious beliefs, gender, disability and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Stephen Harris’s landmark study Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in Northeast Arnhem Land (1984) highlighted more than two decades ago, the significant contrast between the formal school learning of Western school systems and the informal traditional learning of
Indigenous students in which the methodologies as opposed to content of teaching and learning are fundamentally different. It was clear to Harris that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to literacy teaching did not meet the needs of these students. The recurrent themes of lower educational outcomes for Indigenous students have meant schools are finally coming to realise that the pattern of attributing the causes of poor literacy achievement to students and their families is inappropriate and what is needed is the development of literacy teaching that reflects the student’s home and community practices. In response to many of the issues raised with regard to the difficulties Indigenous students face in the Western school system, many educationalists and researchers have attempted to articulate what culturally responsive pedagogies are. According to Education Queensland policies, "Teacher awareness to the connections that can be made between home and school literacies is the basis for this approach." (Curriculum Exchange. 2005.) To this end culturally responsive pedagogies use the students' culture to build a bridge to success in school achievement.

Programs and pedagogies that are culturally responsive address more than superficial culturally-based differences. They do more than the standard 'celebrations of diversity' that we see regularly in our primary school calendars. Culturally responsive pedagogies address the hidden racism that is embedded in our education systems throughout Australia. Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive pedagogies as those styles that use the "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them." (2000 p.29) Many teachers refer to this as inclusivity. In other words teaching that does not exclude any students but rather includes all students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs. Gay identifies six key features of culturally responsive teaching. These are; validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory. Validation occurs when cultural heritages are acknowledged as legitimate as are home and community teaching and learning styles and experiences. According to Gay (2000) culturally responsive teachers promoted a comprehensive program by valuing academic achievement as well as helping students maintain
identity and connection with their community. Multidimensional culturally responsive pedagogies consider all aspects of the school environment as important. This encompasses curriculum content, learning contexts, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques and performance assessment.

Culturally responsive pedagogies are empowering when students believe they can succeed in learning tasks and have the motivation to persevere. Gay (2000) proposes that empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage and the will to act. The concept of culturally responsive pedagogies as transformative refers to an appreciation of students' strengths, experiences and accomplishments, which are utilised as worthwhile resources for teaching and learning. Gay (2000) cites the example of verbal creativity and story telling that is unique among some African Americans and can be used to teach writing skills. Many Indigenous Australians possess these story telling skills and can be used in a similar way. Traditional knowledge of natural phenomenon and technology makes valuable contributions to other key learning areas such as science. Finally, according to Gay (2000) culturally responsive teaching is emancipatory. Students come to understand that no single version of 'truth' is total or permanent nor should it exist uncontested. Different knowledges are valued and mainstream ways of knowing are presented as only one way of viewing the world. Whilst the above six features are universal for culturally responsive pedagogies, the strategies to achieve them still require identification and school communities must work together to achieve their ends. These pedagogies can and should be informed by studies of home literacy practices in order that home and school literacies are connected, and all students have greater opportunities to access the dominant and influential literacies that exist in our schools and mainstream communities.

**Literacy as a social practice.**

Culturally responsive teaching embraces literacy as a social practice. Gee (1996) coined the phrase, 'the new literacy studies' where traditional notions of literacy have begun to be replaced with sociocultural approaches. The dated dichotomy of oral versus literate cultures
has been superseded and contemporary approaches to literacy see ‘it’ not as a fixed and singular phenomenon, but as a dynamic and diverse set of social practices, changing as our world changes. "Literacy as a social practice relates literacy learning to the cultural beliefs, values and social practices of the child’s family and community" (Hanlen, 2002a p.222). We learn about literacy as we learn how to behave in our families and communities. Situated literacy theorists focus on the links between literacies in specific contexts and broader social situations. Learning about literacy is acknowledged to occur in any social situation - home and community, school, playground. The interconnectedness of language, culture and learning is highlighted and diversity is considered a resource rather than a problem. Cairney and Ruge (1997) propose that literacy is a social practice with many related facets. There are many forms of literacy and each has a specific purpose and context in which it is used. "As such, literacy cannot be separated from the people who use it. Literacy is a process situated in sociocultural contexts defined by members of a group through their actions with, through and about language." (1997 p. 5)

Literacy practices within the family must be acknowledged and valued by schools to ensure that culturally responsive pedagogies are in place to counter the effects of race and gender discrimination which are in turn adding to the current achievement dilemma for Indigenous students. It is incumbent on all teachers to create learning environments that promote academic and individual success. It is the cultural conventions of our students that must inform our practice. Literacy, in this study is being viewed as culturally constructed within social activities and practices.

**Literacy as knowledge, power and identity**

There is no doubt that literacy is fundamental to many areas of our lives. This is true of all communities in our globalised world and is becoming more important with every new technological discovery that progresses our communication networks. In remote Indigenous
communities English is needed for doing business with the rest of Australia and the world. Martin (1990) writes,

Their [Indigenous] schools, community councils and health clinics have to liaise with the Northern Territory Government. Their store and arts collectives have to deal with business people from outside. More recently the development of Aboriginal media has become a reality.....In many communities few, if any of these institutions may actually be controlled by Aboriginal people. But to the extent that Aboriginal people want local people running the place, local people to be the bosses of their own tribal lands, then they will have to take responsibility for doing business; and this means learning to write for business purposes. (Martin, 1990 p. 15)

Whilst Martin published this article fifteen years ago and the situation in some communities has changed, there is still a long way to go where Indigenous people are truly in control of all aspects of their communities.

Christie (1990) in the same volume as Martin, poses a number of questions based around the following: 'Who holds the power in your school?' Offshoots of this concern power in the classroom, power in meetings, power in the curriculum, power in the timetable and power in the school structures. In 1990 Christie was clearly making the point that non-Indigenous people are generally in the power positions in Indigenous schools. In the schools where I have taught over the past 10 years, all of which have had significant populations of Indigenous students if not a total Indigenous enrolment, the answers to the above questions are almost always 'non-Indigenous staff.' (I realise of course, there are notable exceptions.) So perhaps, in the main, very little has changed since Christie and Martin wrote their articles.

In addition to the amount of literacy we use in our present day lives, there is also a phenomenal diversity of forms of literacy. It is in fact, difficult to think of an area of contemporary life in which literacy is not required in some way. There is power in literacy. Power is a central theme
in the New Literacy Studies discourse. As Ong (1982) notes, "There is hardly an oral culture, or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy." (Ong, 1982, p. 15) The following excerpt from Pilbara song poetry identifies this power as experienced through the eyes of an Aboriginal man.

You steer the plane with both arms,
Sending it straight through the air.
Inside, what a noise!
We are nobody with all our cleverness,
Against the whitefellow.
He can read, and write, and sure enough,
Drive those big things in the sky -
Magic? - He doesn’t need it.
Our medicine men, the whole lot
Are utterly useless. (Cited by Von Brandenstein, and Thomas, 1974, p.12)

The author of the above song poetry highlights the different knowledges of two cultures and feels ill-equipped for a world of rapid change. Foucault discusses the notion of diverse knowledges and the power these knowledges create.

Erickson (1998) provides a valuable overview of the work of Foucault whose theories were foregrounded in the 1970’s. Foucault argues that power is constituted by different knowledges, practices and technologies. Certain discourses affirm social relations and enhance the power of privileged groups. Individuals and their relationships are determined by discourses of power or powerful systems, which shape relations between people at all levels of society. In Foucault’s formulation, power is something inscribed in everyday life. In their everyday lives people play many different roles such as teacher or student, parent, employer, employees, men, women, doctor, patient. These roles sustain certain kinds of relations between people in which some
dominate and others are subjugated. Foucault argues that whoever dominates these relationships controls the economic and ideological conditions under which 'knowledge' and 'truth' are defined. (Erickson, 1998) I am hard-pressed to find an example where young people, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic minorities and Australian Indigenous people are in power positions, in which case, according to Foucaultian theory, their knowledge and truth are usually discounted and ignored. According to Foucault, power is more effective when it is hidden from view. It is preserved through mechanisms of control such as schools (and prisons) and non-Indigenous teachers inscribe this power through their strategies, beliefs and values instructing people to 'be' a certain way. When individuals and groups resist, the 'mainstreamers' lay blame and seek to further control.

Fairclough (1992) has been influential in discussions relating to power, language and social control. Fairclough suggests that this present period of intense social change has brought about a shift from more explicit to more implicit exercise of power through language use. Fairclough notes that "the common-sense routines of language practices (e.g. classroom language, or the language of medical consultations) become important in sustaining and reproducing power relations." (1992, p. 3) According to Fairclough, discourse is shaped by relations of power and is invested with ideologies. Particular languages and language varieties are valued and devalued in classroom discourse according to the power of their users. The notion of the 'standard' variety legitimises and naturalises particular valuations. A study titled "Improving the Educational Experiences of Aboriginal children and Young people" was completed in 2006 by the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research. This report documents data collected from 2500 Aboriginal students in West Australian schools. The report found Indigenous students begin their schooling at a clear disadvantage to their non-Indigenous peers with a difference in academic performance apparent from year one and the gap continuing to widen throughout school years. Most importantly the report identifies language as a major barrier to improving education, finding that students whose first language is Aboriginal English and who use this in
the classroom, were more than twice as likely to be rated low in academic performance as students who spoke Standard Australian English.

Many of the Indigenous students I have taught speak vernacular languages including Aboriginal English. Fairclough (2001) suggests that "Standard English is an asset because it is a passport to good jobs and positions of influence and power in national and local communities." (2001, p.48) There is no doubt that this form of English is dominant in our society but in schools and in the community it meets with stiff resistance. Speakers of Aboriginal English are still positioned in certain constrained ways. Students who infringe the powerful conventions of classroom/teacher discourse by speaking English dialects, often receive a negative feedback and inaccessibility to some socially valued 'goods' such as literacy (Fairclough 2001). This power penetrates a student’s consciousness (Corson, 2001) affecting their identity development.

Our perceptions of ourselves, or our identities, are an important factor in the way power works. Intersecting with identity development is literacy. McNaughton (1995) suggests that family literacy practices reflect and build social and cultural identities. Children have images of themselves and their roles as they engage in literacy events both at home and in the school. Corson (2001) asserts that teachers need to re-define their roles and the types of structures at work in schools in order that students from diverse cultures do not lose their identity. He cites the work of Cummins (1996) who sees schools as places where children who are educationally different are often unable to 'negotiate their own identities.' (Cummins 1996 cited by Corson 2001 p. 19) The coercive relations of power that operate in many schools and wider school systems suppress the identity development of culturally diverse students. In other instances these students develop oppositional identities to challenge the power structures and systems within which they feel disempowered. The theme of identity and literacy development permeates this study.
All who compete for a place in this globalised world need to have an equal footing; an idealistic thought in a social and political climate where Australia is seen by some of us to have turned its back on those in need - particularly the youth, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic minorities and Australian Indigenous people. This thesis attempts to give voice to Indigenous Australians, specifically in the field of literacy. To return to earlier comments regarding the education system’s ‘turning a blind eye’ to students who we continue to fail through our inability to cater for their needs. We have made progress from the first contact settlers who believed that the 'natives' were uneducable. And we have moved on from the 'limited cognitive abilities' belief of the mid twentieth century. But our more recent past suggests that progress has been minimal.

In discussing the history of Torres Strait Islander attitudes to, and achievement, in the imposed western education systems, Nakata (1997, 2003) notes that at the time of involvement of missionaries, the islanders were highly motivated having plenty of initiative and independence which they brought to their missionary English education. Living under 'The Aboriginal Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897', Islanders, until 1971 experienced complete control over their movements, over their finances, wages, employment, labour and communications. They were to be educated only for 'village life'. (Nakata 1997) Lasting until 1971 this Act has left scars on all facets of life, the after-effects of which many islanders still experience today. Despite the control, Islanders engaged in and even embraced change. According to Nakata, many people actively seek an English education in order to enable them to negotiate their position in relation to the emerging global agenda. (Nakata 1997) Since 1971 Nakata notes there is still government regulation. He advocates a focussed approach to the teaching of the English language to Indigenous students. It is these skills that will enable politically powerless communities to negotiate control over their lives.
The study.

This study observes the literacy practices of two Indigenous families. It is important to acknowledge the multiple nature of Indigenous cultures—stemming from diverse histories of contact, different language groups, and different life experiences. My teaching in schools with Indigenous students has spanned the Pilbara and Kimberley in Western Australia, across Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and into Far North Queensland. The people I have worked with have their own stories and different histories which impact on them today. I do not presume to put Indigenous people under one umbrella and link them based on their Indigenous heritage. The literacy behaviours and values I observe cannot be generalised to other people based only on their belonging to the same cultural background. Many Indigenous people I have spoken with, do however, feel a sense of ‘family’ can be extended within the cultural boundaries of Indigenous Australia given the manner in which European settlement and invasion occurred and the subsequent racial injustices that continue to prevail. There is a sense of unity felt resulting from this history and continued struggle, by some Indigenous Australians.

This text is naturalistic in the sense that I have used narrative in many sections to add personal experience to my data. In using narrative I seek to tell of experiences from where I stand and use these stories for my own personal and professional development.

Previous research

A profusion of research has been completed in the area of situated literacy in the past two decades. Heath (1983) is particularly noted as having led the ethnographic inquiries into the socialisation of language and literacy practices of communities in which detailed descriptions are provided of culturally disparate communities. Street (1984, 1995), Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Finnegan (1988 and 1998) have also provided rich descriptions of literacy practices highlighting the situated nature of these practices. Not only is there a large amount of data on situated literacies, but also new frameworks have been developed and expanded to provide a
'new look' (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000) to studies of literacy. Examinations of the links between literacies in specific contexts and broader social situations inform these new literacy studies. Literacy practices have an increasingly interdisciplinary nature, a phenomenon highlighted by the New London Group in their descriptions of Multiliteracies. (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000.) Much of the research on 'new literacies' has been influenced by Lave's (1988) theories on situated learning.

In Australia, Hanlen (2002c), Fleer and Williams-Kennedy (2002) Wilson (2000) Malin (1991, 1996, 1997) and Kale (1995) have provided rich descriptions of home and community practices in the field of situated literacy. It is fair to say that these studies have not attracted the attention of educators that they deserve. Whilst many other studies allude to the situatedness of literacy and the development of literacy skills, few researchers discuss this issue in detail or with reference to the effects home literacies have on school literacy. Prior to the 1990's research on family literacy was limited and particularly so within Indigenous contexts in Australia. We now know that the influence of family literacy practices begins as soon as children are born and the effects are lasting. This research attempts to add to the growing corpus of existing literature on literacy practices in Indigenous families.

**Description of participants**

This analysis of literacy practices is based on two individual Indigenous families living in far north Queensland. They live in a large urban town and both families still have strong ties with their Torres Strait and Aboriginal homelands. This town is a tourist centre and like many other Australian communities diverse cultures live and work in close proximity to each other. The far north is a colourful mosaic of cultures and attempts have been made to infuse a cosmopolitan spirit into the urban centres, which were once remote and slow to progress in terms of provision of services. There is a sharing of services and facilities as people go about their day to day lives and whilst many cultures intersect with each other, there remain different ways of
interacting with literacy that are specific to these families. There are communities within the broader community where socially and economically impoverished families reside together. As a person new to this part of Australia, this landscape appears to support the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. They exist as "communal places of domination and resistance." (Kostogritz, 2004, 8)

This urban landscape has reinforced the politics of difference of which the families in this study are part. It is in these communities that identity has a tendency to become consolidated and even habitual leaving people unable to move from this place.

Jeanie and Esther head each family respectively. Both are strong women and pivotal to the daily running of all aspects of family life. Jeanie’s household at the time of this study was made up of herself, her husband and three young children - all girls. Deeply religious, Jeanie and her family attended the "Power of the Spirit Fellowship" church for almost a full day on Sunday and sometimes on two or three evenings a week. Jeanie prepared detailed lesson plans for Sunday school, which she taught and at the same time worked hard to complete a course that would allow her to become a teacher aide. In addition to all of this, she ran the family household.

Jeanie’s husband Terry, is from Papua New Guinea. He was sent away as a young teenager to study in Townsville. After successful completion of high school, he became an accountant. Despite his success at school, it is Jeanie that usually manages the household literacy demands. There is a plethora of correspondence that she receives from her older daughter’s school - a local Christian college. Jasmine, Jeanie’s daughter who attends this college brings home reports, letters, surveys, information packs, newsletters, etc. many of which require a written response or some other action. Both Jeanie and Terry help Jasmine with her grade three homework and involve her in all extra curricular school events, such as the '40 hour famine', other fundraising events and sports events. Jasmine belongs to the local soccer club and plays every Saturday morning. Jeanie is from the Torres Strait and has Aboriginal as well as Torres Strait Islander family ties. She speaks Kriol with her family.
Esther's household at the time of the study consisted of her two younger brothers - one a teenager and the other a nine year old school boy, and her 5 year old son. At the time of this study, Esther was 26 years old. She took sole responsibility for handling all the literate demands of her family. This included paying bills, responding to school correspondence for her younger brother and her son and completing her own study. Esther was not a confident literacy user or learner. She was always worried about her study. She was being encouraged to continue further education at James Cook University to become a teacher but shuddered every time I mentioned it. "Don't know if I can do it," she would say. "It's gonna be much harder than this, what I do now." Despite this apparent tension between Esther's personal and public literate lives, she managed to negotiate the many discourses of a community that she is at times not completely comfortable in. Esther grew up in the Torres Strait and has a strong desire to return there as a fully trained teacher.

I have to say at this point how fortunate I have been to have met these two families. Both women are two of the most resilient people I know. Both are faced with extreme difficulties, raising their families around social and economic hardships. I was anxious about describing my research and in what capacity I wanted them to participate. The probing eye of a video camera in families I had, prior to this study, never met, was not something that many prospective participants would welcome. I also needed to put my explanations into the context of low literacy levels for Indigenous students, which had the potential to be a sensitive issue. My privileged position as the white researcher caused me much initial angst (see Chapter Four). I was surprised by both families immediate agreement, both of whom believed that any knowledge about their children’s learning would be beneficial for schools and teachers to know. When I say 'their' children, this view encompassed all Indigenous children and Jeanie and Esther made that clear. These women considered their agreement in the light of all Indigenous students. They acknowledged the present situation and wanted to participate in any way that might contribute knowledge to improve opportunities for Indigenous students.
As already noted, education outcomes for Indigenous students are consistently lower than their non-Indigenous peers. These students are identified as the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia. The 'Literate Futures' Report (Queensland Government 2000) suggests that socioeconomic status is the single strongest indicator of 'at-risk' groups. These factors combined put Jeanie and Esther's families in the 'at-risk' group - Indigenous families living with extreme economic hardship. These women, both consciously and unconsciously fight this label. They provide their families with a literate environment, accessing resources and negotiating the literacy demands of daily life. They both seek further education for themselves and have high aspirations for their children. Their lives are complicated and complex. They are both an inspiration.

Other participants included the student interviewees, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher interviewees. There were a total of ten students. All from a class that I taught and all were Indigenous. Without exception none had achieved National Benchmark standards. I have also related stories from other students I have taught as these narratives illustrate certain points critical to those made in this thesis. The Indigenous teachers, and Indigenous staff members totaled eleven. All of them had been involved with the school and community for a number of years and lived relatively close to the school. The non-indigenous teachers numbered ten with varying years of involvement with the school.

**Aims of the study.**

This study focuses on four aims.

1) To observe and record the literacy events and experiences occurring in the home and community setting.

2) To develop a better understanding of existing literacy patterns and practices that are occurring in Indigenous homes prior to and during formal education, that may assist teachers in developing programs that are more culturally congruent with these home literacy practices.
3) To help school communities see parents as vital in the learning process of their children.
4) To examine the deep-rooted nature of power and identity as related to literacy in our society.

Rationale

Most teachers acknowledge that all children possess intellectual potential. Why is it then that the learning outcomes for Indigenous students are so poor and have been for so long? Through my own teaching experiences I have observed that the values and knowledge base of a students family impacts significantly on the learning of language and literate behaviours. It is also clear that there are significant underlying differences in how these students learn and the functions of home literacy environment. What counts as literacy in these students' homes and what do they learn in the process of this literacy? Are there patterns of interaction unique to their learning? It is these questions that I hope to answer.

It is apparent from the literature, that initiatives by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments in the past three decades to improve Indigenous students participation in, and outcomes from, education, have produced gains in some areas. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not experiencing equality of outcomes and participation with other Australian students. Explanations of failure have typically been sought and framed according to the academic interests and ideological/political positions of the time. Theories of deficit followed by deprivation/compensation abounded in the 1960’s and 70’s. (Kale, 1995) Currently school failure is explained through theories of difference and diversity. There exists a mismatch between expectations and practices of homes and those of the classroom. In this model, the children of minorities are not deprived but different: there is a lack of a ‘good fit’ (Kale, 1995) between the culturally-learned behaviours of the home environment and those of the classrooms that contributed to educational failure. Minority children in this model possess a distinctive culture as valid in its own right.
Australia is a society whose sense of ‘community’ has been shaped by (neo) colonialism and (neo) racism. Difference is seen as a problem and in many cases a threat, which needs to be normalised and neutralised. (Kostogritz, 2002) The following quote from an American Indian writer typifies what many students from diverse backgrounds have felt in the past and continue to feel today in the foreign environment of culturally incongruent schools.

“School was a painful experience during those early years. The English language and the new set of values caused me much anxiety and embarrassment. I could not comprehend everything that was happening but yet I could understand very well when I messed up or was not doing well. The negative aspect was communicated too effectively and I became unsure of myself more and more. How I wished I could understand other things as well in school.” (Joseph Suina 1998, cited by Macedo 2000: 20)

Why is this research important at this time? Much of the research that has been done overseas with linguistically and culturally diverse students, situates them in the educationally lower achieving population. Diversity is omnipresent and yet the totalising power of the dominant culture is still the force that drives educational policy development. Teachers are being asked to address more fully cultural issues within the classroom, whilst striving to maintain a learning environment that is supportive and inclusive for all students. A goal of the current research is to make a contribution to a clearer understanding of the complex and interrelated factors underlying educational success and failure.

This research attempts to add to existing knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogies that seek to make instructional practices more congruent with children’s home practices as a way of bridging school and improving student outcomes. As teachers we need to understand the key factors that influence minority children’s literacy development and build on what families are already doing as opposed to imposing school literacy on them. Previous researchers have attempted to do this by identifying home/school mismatches but have not identified these in
terms of the major areas of contradiction, which relate to differentials in power and subordination along cultural diversity and class lines. In this study, these areas emerge as: Valuing parents as teachers versus domination of Western educative systems; The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage versus social justice; Acknowledging and valuing diversity versus cultural hegemony; inclusivity and the nature of learning versus exclusion and invisibility; and Understanding Indigenous youth versus oppression of youth.


Volumes of studies, research and reports dealing with Indigenous people in non-Indigenous education systems paint a familiar picture of failure and despair. When measured in non-Indigenous terms, the educational outcomes of Indigenous people are still far below that of non-Indigenous people. This fact exists not because Indigenous people are less intelligent, but because educational theories and practices have been developed and controlled by non-Indigenous people. This, in more recent times, due to the involvement of Indigenous people, research shows that failure is indeed present, but that this failure is that of the system, not of Indigenous people. (Coolangatta Task Force 1999, p.56)

From the Coolangatta document, educational policy documents and academic literature, it becomes apparent that there exists a duality of goals for Indigenous students. Nakata (2003) discusses this in terms of a tension that he believes exists in Indigenous education. This tension persists on a daily basis in classrooms between upholding and maintaining cultural difference and identity on the one hand and producing equal outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous on the other.
In light of this, the outcomes for this research will be to consider strategies that are most appropriate for the educational success of Indigenous students. English language and literacy learning are major stumbling blocks for this group of students, which highlights the need for the nature and cause/effect relationship between poor school achievement and differences in home literacy practices to be established. Whether we like it or not, literacy matters in our globalised world. There is power in literacy and without these skills, individuals and populations are disadvantaged.

Writers and researchers of the literature consistently use terms such as home and school incongruencies. However many do not articulate what these incongruencies are. This is crucial for non-Indigenous teachers many of whom have had little or no cross-cultural training and possess only limited understanding of Indigenous learning and teaching styles. As Heath (1983) notes, "schools must not legitimate and reproduce communities of people who control and limit the potential progress of other communities and who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life." (Heath, 1983. p. 369)

An outline of the thesis

Chapter One provides an introduction to the thesis. It illuminates the issues raised throughout the thesis and provides a brief description of the study group. The aims of this study are outlined and a rationale is discussed.

Chapter Two presents a literature review on situated literacy and family literacy. There is a flood of data and research that has contributed to our understandings about situated learning and literacy. This literature review, presents the most recent research together with some older landmark texts that have contributed so much knowledge to the field. Indigenous beliefs, values and social practices are also considered. The threads of a broader
definition of literacy interweave with the narrower concepts throughout this chapter.

Patterns in the research identified five key themes. These are described under a general heading, 'Predicates to school success or failure'. The key themes are; The importance of school and home partnerships in alleviating cultural discontinuity, The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage, Acknowledging and valuing diversity, Inclusive pedagogies and Understanding Indigenous youth

Chapter Three introduces the reader to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by tracing a brief history of government policies and practices. This then leads to a discussion on the theorising of educational failure. A theory of literacy is presented and a narrative account of my personal literacy stories is presented in an attempt to illustrate and explore the 'situatedness' of literacy. Definitions of literacy are discussed leading to the adoption of the definition that is used throughout the remainder of the thesis. The nature of inclusivity is also discussed in detail using the notion of culturally responsive pedagogies as a framework.

Chapter Four discusses methodologies used in this research. The science of interpretive research is a model that provides a depth of understanding most appropriate to this study with a focus on ethnography and narrative. Details of data collection are presented and issues of ethnocentricity are considered.

Chapter Five looks specifically at data collected during the study. Narratives of the literacy practices in the two family homes are detailed, followed by a discussion of the interviews I conducted with Indigenous students, Indigenous staff members at Westville School and non-Indigenous teachers. (Westville is the pseudonym used to protect the identity of the school.) This data uncovers the rich repertoire of social and cultural practices occurring in the homes and shows the participants engaged in multiple learning communities. In the final paragraphs of this chapter I present two vignettes that are brief moments in a teacher's day. Through these
stories I illuminate "the theorisation of the production of educational disadvantage" (Thompson 2002) for Indigenous students. Some of the major issues that impact on the lives of Indigenous students are highlighted. Literacy practices need to be understood locally with a focus on the particular. This chapter attempts to do that.

Chapter Six presents a visual expose or photo essay of some of the observed literacy practices in the participant families homes. I have found Yetta Goodman’s discussion in "Many roads to literacy" (1997) discussion a useful framework for discussing literate practices in the participant families. Visible and non-visible elements of these practices are discussed and we see Indigenous family members and students engaged in multiple literacy experiences that emerge from their home and community environments.

Chapter Seven begins with a brief and very general discussion about schools and their literacy teaching and learning programs which is intended to provide a general overview of the way literacy is taught in the school where much of the data for this study was collected. This data is from departmental documents and a good deal is from observations and experience and teacher interviews supplemented by observations of literacy practices in the home and community. This includes uncovering the situatedness of learning and literacy, multiliteracies, interculturality and hybridity. Indigenous literacies as observed in the homes of participants are also discussed. Integral to these notions is the relationship with identity and this theme permeates the chapter. Finally I utilise the key themes from Chapter Two under the banner, 'Predicates to school success or failure'. I discuss what I have observed happening in the home and community with regard to literacy practices. This includes uncovering the situatedness of learning and literacy, multiliteracies and hybridity. Indigenous literacies as observed in the homes of participants are discussed and their integral relationship with identity. Embedded in this discussion is a comparison with school literacy practices.
Chapter Eight is a photo essay that exemplifies my own literacy teaching pedagogy in the light of research presented in Chapter Two. Clearly my teaching practice and philosophies have been influenced by this study as I have explored, examined and reflected on home and community literacy practices in Indigenous families. The literacies utilized by families and the patterns that emerged have a distinct relationship to my practice.

Chapter Nine reflects on the findings of this study addressing the relationships between home and community literacies and the more formal learning of literacy in schools. Data from chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight is analysed in order to draw together and examine the implications through the key themes that were initially presented in Chapter Two and then again in Chapter Seven. These are: Promoting home/school partnerships, Implications for the subversion of privilege and disadvantage, Implications for the acknowledgement and valuing of diversity, Pedagogical implications, Implications for understanding Indigenous youth. I have connected this discussion with my own experiences and observations to draw conclusions and make recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I will look in detail at significant research that has contributed to our understandings about situated learning and literacy, home, family and community literacy, multiliteracies, and Indigenous beliefs, values and literacy practices. I will also discuss research that I have termed ‘Predicates to school failure or success’. Five major themes emerge under this heading, which are central to subsequent chapters, in particular Chapters Seven and Eight. These are: the importance of school and home partnerships in alleviating cultural discontinuity; the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage; acknowledging and valuing diversity; inclusivity and the nature of learning; and understanding Indigenous youth.

The term 'literacy' is used in schools and indeed in most other aspects of our lives as simply the skills of reading and writing. This is true of most of the research papers discussed in this chapter, however, literacy can be thought of in much broader terms such as "referring to all fields, genres, discourses and mediums within a culture and even across cultures". (Schirato and Yell 2000, p.36) This notion is considered in more detail in chapter three. It is significant to note here that threads of a broader definition of literacy interweave with the narrower concepts throughout this chapter.

Children grow and learn in a wide range of home and community contexts. Within these contexts are multiple ways of representing and interpreting the world. The interplay of schools with families and communities is crucial to educational outcomes of all students. Educators require an in-depth understanding of the issues discussed below in order to respond effectively to student needs.
Situated learning:

Learning is shaped by our environment. This means that the contexts and activities we engage in, interact with our culturally-endowed minds and through this dynamic encounter, we learn. This assumption, that is, that we acquire knowledge and skills as we ‘learn’ our environment reflects the fundamentally social nature of learning and cognition. Situated learning is at odds with the more traditional view of individualist psychology, which focuses on individual learners acquiring knowledge and skills as a gradual building up of layers, which is then added to what was learned previously. In this view knowledge is abstract and situation independent. There is also an underlying belief that knowledge gained in one context can be transferred to another context. Lave (1988) disputes this. In Lave’s view, learning takes form differently in different situations and is therefore not transferred. "Different situations, and indeed different occasions subjectively experienced as ‘the same,’ are instead viewed here as transformations of structuring resources given a realised form through their mutually constitutive articulation, weighted in different proportions from place to place and time to time." (Lave 1988, p. 122) Lave’s theory is that the same activity in different situations obtains structuring from, and provides structuring resources for, subsequent activities.

Situated cognitive theorists propose that "human minds develop in social situations, and that they use tools and representational media that culture provides to support, extend and reorganise mental functioning." (Lave and Wenger 1991, p. 11) Knowledge is not simply accumulated information that can be disconnected from lived experiences. Learning is a social practice whereby it becomes an aspect of all activity. Learning is the interaction between the persons acting and the settings in which their activity occurs. (Lave 1988) According to Lave and Wenger, (1991) learning is an ‘apprenticeship’ with a focus on authentic practice that occurs in a social context within a ‘Community of Practice’. "Apprenticeship forms of learning are likely to be based on assumptions that knowing, thinking and understanding are generated in practice, in situations whose specific characteristics are part of practice as it unfolds."
Thus, in addition to the social nature of learning, Lave proposes that learning is also embedded in temporal and spatial contexts. The local character of knowledge has historical components that individuals bring to a situation that have been learned from previous situations. The power of place is also a crucial factor. Physical setting is an important dimension of learning whereby it adds to the contextualisation of the learning. Time, setting and activity make up the 'situation' in which the learning takes place.

Lave uses descriptions of the apprenticeships of Vai and Gola tailors to explicate her theory of situated learning. The quote is long but I have included it in order that the richness of the description is fairly represented. This is Lave’s description.

"The learning of each operation is subdivided into phases that I have dubbed "way in" and "practice". "Way in" refers to the period of observation and attempts to construct a first approximation of the garment. An apprentice watched masters and advanced apprentices until he thinks he understands how to sew (or cut out) a garment, then waits until the shop is closed and the masters have gone home before trying to make it...........Apprentices reproduce a production segment from beginning to end (doing what masters do) although they might be more skilled at carrying out some steps in the process than others. Whole activity practice is viewed as more important in long-term mastery than is the consistent, correct execution of decomposed parts of the process. There are no formal tests in tailors' apprenticeship to screen out learners at any stage, and this reflects an assumption that equal accomplishment is possible and expected for all learners. .... A high percentage of apprentices become masters ... Those who quit do so, with rare exceptions, for reasons extraneous to the process of learning." (Lave 1997 p. 22)
It is worth noting that her description clearly paralleled a discussion on the learning of ceremonial songs and dance cycles I had with an Aboriginal elder in Arnhem Land in 1996. Aboriginal children learn the skills of ceremonial song and dance in an almost identical way according to the Aboriginal elder. The Aboriginal students who practice amongst themselves in play situations observe highly respected elders. They then come to know the songs and dances participating in the whole event rather than being taught in decontextualised stages. As Lave notes, "The curriculum of tailoring is more a set of landmarks for learners than specific procedure to be taught to learners." (Lave 1997 p23) The rewards in the Aboriginal learning style are intrinsic and no one is excluded. It is clear from Lave's description and supported by my own observations in a remote Indigenous community that this apprenticeship style of learning, situated learning, is highly successful. The connection between what is taught and everyday experience is strong. Of critical importance are the teacher/student relationships which translate to high expectations of achievement. These features add to the apprenticeship style learning just discussed. The implications for Indigenous learners and classroom teachers are considerable.

Situated learning draws on the work of Vygotsky. In Vygotsky's theory, the social origins and social nature of human mental functioning is foregrounded. "Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships." (Vygotsky 1981 p. 163) One cannot discuss Vygotsky without mentioning the Zone of Proximal Development. This is central to Vygotskian theory. Internal development processes become operational when a child is interacting with people in his or her environment. Once awakened, these processes become internalised and part of the child's independent developmental achievement. This is learning. This zone of proximal development refers to the extension of understanding, which can be attained with appropriate support from others. Lunt (1993) notes that the social relationship so important to Vygotsky's theory, is a specific and instructional relationship. This concept of mediated learning or collaborative activity implies a bridge across from teaching to learning or as Lunt notes using Vygotsky's words, "the gradual transfer of the
control of thought from the adult to the child in the zone of proximal development." (Lunt, 1993 p. 157) The zone of proximal development has, for some, made crucial pedagogical contributions to teaching. Lave and Wenger (1991) propose a concept of 'Legitimate peripheral participation'. This can be linked to Vygotsky’s 'Zone of Proximal Development in that a person begins to learn a skill by doing 'peripheral' simple activities and over time learns to take on more complicated and central aspects of a skill. Lave and Wenger hypothesise that learning is more than participation in an activity. Legitimate peripheral participation is not a simple participation structure in which an apprentice occupies a particular role at the edge of a larger process.

"It is an interactive process in which the apprentice engages by simultaneously performing in several roles - status subordinate, learning practitioner, sole responsible agent in minor parts of the performance, aspiring expert and so forth - each implying a different sort of responsibility, a different set of role relations, and a different interactive involvement." (Hanks 1991 p 23)

Vygotsky’s conceptualisations of factors and domains that affect learning have allowed researchers to move beyond individualist assumptions of learning which in the past dominated child psychology, thus allowing wider social issues to be addressed. (Pollard, 1993) Participation in specific forms of social practice furnishes a theoretical framework, which can account for the situated nature of learning. Apple argues, "We do not confront abstract 'learners' in schools. Instead we see specific classed, raced and gendered subjects, people whose biographies are intimately linked to the economic, political and ideological trajectories of their families and communities, to the political economies of their neighbourhoods." (Apple 1986, p.5)

Apple continues, suggesting that teachers have, in the past, not seen education relationally. The author is referring to his belief that education is created out of the economic, political and cultural conflicts that are part of our history. These are people's individual and collective histories that are brought to all learning situations. A major criticism of earlier approaches to
teaching and learning was that they operated in an isolated and disembodied vacuum. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) suggest that many methods of didactic education separate knowing and doing, and treat knowledge as a self-sufficient substance that is theoretically independent of the situations in which it is learned and used. Schools and teachers seem primarily concerned with the “transfer of this substance, which comprises abstract, decontextualised formal concepts.” (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989 p.32) Investigations of learning have come to challenge this notion.

The influence of Vygotsky can be seen and extended in the social constructivist models of learning, which in turn, reflect the situated nature of learning. The learning processes as conceived by social constructivist psychologists emphasises the importance of social context in the formation of meaning and self which in turn is crucial to learning and understanding. This theory highlights the interconnectedness of language, culture and learning and considers diversity a resource rather than a problem. Learning occurs in any social situation - home, school, and playground - and when coupled with an interplay of interests, power, negotiation and strategies, learning occurs. (Pollard, 1993) The teacher’s role is clear. Hill and Broadhurst (2002) discuss the notion of situated practice. They assert this "is where learning experiences relate to students’ lifeworlds, workspaces and public places. In other words, the curriculum is authentic learning and relates to children’s 'real-life' events". (Hill and Broadhurst 2002 p. 275)

According to Kirshner and Whitson (1997) this view provides opportunities to reorient formal education. "One source of inspiration for situated cognitionists is the robust expertise that ordinary folks regularly display in ordinary situations. Against the backdrop of an educational enterprise that too often fails to engage students and develop their competencies are the multifaceted ways in which people succeed and learn in all sorts of out-of-school settings." (Kirshner and Whitson, 1997, p. 4) This notion is critical to this thesis. It highlights the
immense capacity that people have for effective learning, which begins before, and goes beyond the boundaries of formal education.

Situated Literacy

"Literacies are situated. All uses of written language can be seen as being located in particular times and places. Equally, all literate activity is indicative of broader social practices."
(Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000, p.1)

These opening lines in Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic’s text 'Situated Literacies' highlight their ensuing examination of the links between literacies in specific contexts and broader social situations. In response to our rapidly changing global society, literacy practices have answered with a new image, which are increasingly interdisciplinary in nature. This is reflected in education, the workplace, the media and everyday life whereby people participate in literacy events within 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991.)

The notion of communities of practice, as discussed by Lave and Wenger (1991) is about "participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities." (Lave and Wenger 1991 p. 98) Wenger (2005) uses the term 'communities of practice' as an approach to knowing and learning. In his definition, 'communities of practice' are formed by people who participate in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour. He offers a number of examples to illustrate this point. One example is a clique of pupils defining their identity in a school. (Wenger 2005) These communities participate on multiple levels, sharing understandings of what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. Whilst Lave and Wenger discuss their belief that communities of practice overlap with one another, some researchers have shown distinct, well defined, socially visible boundaries. The work of Heath (1983) was a landmark study that identified these distinct boundaries. Other researchers who have reported on the visible boundaries within
communities using rich descriptions and narrative methodology have included Street (1984, 1995) and Finnegan (1998). It is important to note, however that Heath completed her data collection in the 1970’s. Few would argue that times have changed at a very rapid rate. Wason-Ellam and Ward (2004) describe community literacy as fast becoming a "complex commercial network that was situated both in the immediate spaces and within the virtual spaces of a global world. These electronic technologies allow individuals to access literacy communities across space and time rendering literacy within the community as in a constant state of "renewal and flux" (Wason-Ellam and Ward 2004, p.4), not seen in Heath’s Roadville and Trackton communities. Heath’s rich descriptions do however, clearly illustrate the notion of situated literacy.

In Heath’s ethnographic study the author examined three different but geographically close communities; a white working class community (Roadville) which had employed four generations of workers at the local textile mills; a black working class community (Trackton) whose older generation grew up farming the land but at the time the study was completed, employment was mostly gained at the mills; and mainstream black and white families of middle to high socio-economic status. Heath described the latter townspeople as school-orientated. They were clearly visible at the local schools where their presence was felt.

Heath was attempting to answer the following questions in her ten year long study: What language children have when they start school and what educators should know and do about oral and written language? In the 1960’s the US Government mandated desegregation laws. It was at this time that data for Heath’s study was collected. Significant to this study was the fact that communication had become a central issue for black and white teachers, parents, and mill personnel. All were attempting to discover why there were frequent miscommunications and the impact of styles of interaction on this.
Heath provides detailed descriptions of the oral and literate traditions evident in each community, reporting that both Roadville and Trackton communities spent a great deal of time telling stories. The form, functions, occasions and content of their stories however, differed greatly.

Heath concluded that ”both Trackton and Roadville are literate communities and each has its own traditions for structuring, using and assessing reading and writing.” (p. 230) She does not subscribe to the classification of either "oral" or "literate" community distinctions. In terms of teaching, Heath concluded that the teacher's role was primarily to understand the differences in language and culture that their students brought to class. Teachers needed to reflect on, and reassess past patterns of success and failure that existed in their classrooms and their own evaluations of students. Heath shows the reader how child-rearing practices as well as literacy behaviours impact on children when they come to school. Roadville children were routinised with bedtime patterns and mealtime schedules. Even games contained these foci. Trackton children ate when they were hungry, participated in church services that had no pre-established end and had no time limits to their games. In addition to non-verbal differences, there were also marked verbal differences between the communities of Trackton and Roadville. Some teachers had difficulty interpreting these dialectal differences. Children from both communities, when they came to school, met with very different notions of truth, style and language appropriate to a story, to those they had known at home. They had to learn new taxonomies and definitions to cope with the school's conventions and expectations.

Heath highlights the fact that oral and literacy traditions impact on, and are incongruent or otherwise with, school teaching paradigms. Heath asserts that teachers must dispel with stereotypes of students and understand that their own values as imposed on students, which in turn, limit their potential and reinforce the power plays that exist between the working class black and white communities and the mainstream, dominant community. Heath describes how successful and unsuccessful teachers dealt with student diversity. She considers
teachers to be 'learning researchers,' and believes that those who accepted the challenge of working with students whose preparation for schooling differed markedly to their own and their own children's, would develop the special potentials of all students. "Their central role was to pass on to all groups certain traditional tools and ways of using language. A critical component in the process was allowing children to articulate how what they knew related to what the school wanted them to know." (p.354-355) This quote from her final page is perhaps the most salient issue that resonates throughout the text: "...unless the boundaries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cultural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legitimate and reproduce communities of townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities and who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life." (p. 369) This is a current and pertinent issue in most Australian schools.

A more recent study that was completed in Australia is that of Fleer and Williams-Kennedy (2002). There is some parity between the studies, most significantly the 'situatedness' of different literacies, in this case Indigenous literacies. Fleer and Williams-Kennedy note that literacy activities are not only socially constructed but they are also culturally specific. This notion is echoed by Barratt-Pugh (2000.) The authors make a connection between that which Indigenous parents and communities see as important about what their young children know and are able to do, and the teaching and learning process in preschools. This relationship is explored by drawing on the intangible nature of cultural knowledge, which is intrinsic to the way Indigenous children grow up, and the nature of the school learning environment. We are shown how incongruent discourse patterns, cultural understandings of the learning process and what knowledge is, and literacy traditions are between many of our school styles of learning and Indigenous learning styles and how this can impact on young Indigenous children.

The Fleer and Williams-Kennedy study began with six extended Indigenous families from all over Australia. Their family filmed the preschool aged child over the course of one week. They
were filmed at home, in the community, and at preschool. This enabled Indigenous families to
select the valued cultural skills and knowledge exhibited by their children. Families had the
opportunity to discuss their videos’ in a workshop. Three key questions formed the focus for
the studies. They were: What can everyone see? What can only the family see? and What can
we no longer see because it is so much a part of our lives?

A vital understanding of Indigenous literacy is that reading for young children occurs when
they look at their environment and nature. Nature writes and the children read her symbols.
Fleer and Williams-Kennedy use Barratt-Pugh’s (2000) six elements of a socio-cultural view of
literacy.

- Children learn about literacies and how to ‘do’ literacy through participating in a range of
  activities in their family and community.
- Literacy practices are carried out in culturally specific ways and contribute to children’s
developing sense of identity
- Children have different understandings about what counts as literacy and how literacy is
done
- Literacy practices are carried out in specific ways for particular purposes
- The pattern of literacy learning differs between children, as they become relative experts
  within different literacy events
- Literacy practices are valued differently in different social and educational contexts
  (Barratt-Pugh 2000 p.5)

Karen, one of the participants in the project commented, “For Western people reading is
about books and libraries. For Aboriginal people it is in our head; you can’t see it, the library is
in our head.” Karen says, “The Western way is to judge children firstly by how they read and
how they write; rather than understanding the system of knowledge, which may have a
different sequence.” It is clear there are many different forms of literacy. Western school
literacy is important but only one way of communicating among many. Western schooling has
not evolved from an Indigenous view of the world. Indigenous people need to be able to use school as a tool for navigating Western society.

Through focus question discussions, Fleer and Williams-Kennedy identified important common themes. One of the most fundamental themes was that families and school educators need to work together to demystify what’s happening in homes and schools, regarding the development of literacy and literacy competence at school. Fleer and Williams-Kennedy discuss multiple literacies. What symbols do children read in the home, in the community, in nature, in vehicles, on clothing, in peoples’ faces and bodies? "Indigenous literacy [therefore] involves speaking, listening, reading natural and human-made symbols, recording language in lore, songs, dance, rituals and traditions and observing body and sign language - combined with intuitive and critical thinking. Religious and spiritual beliefs, values, customs and traditions are embedded within all of these elements of Indigenous literacy." (p. 98) (See also Hanlen, 2002a 2002b 2002c) It would be a mistake to suggest that these literacies are the only forms of literacy that Indigenous Australians use. For example, Nakata (2004) argues for academic literacies for Indigenous people. Western literacy cannot be avoided and most Indigenous Australians combine the social practices of both literacies.

Fleer and Williams-Kennedy provide an insight into what literacy means to Indigenous people. The most salient message is that Western educators need to consider the literacy forms that young Indigenous students bring with them to preschool and value these. Two-way listening is vital in the process of supporting parents in their own understandings of Western literacy. This text is an excellent companion to Heath’s (1983) "Ways with Words" text. Both are characterised by the incongruent literacy and oral language practices of the mainstream community with their own and how these impact on school achievement. Building bridges between the community and the school are the salient feature of both texts.
Home, Family and Community Literacy

Home literacy refers to the diverse literacy practices that go on in the home. (This term has been interchanged with 'family literacy' by some researchers.) There are many different literacies that are beyond book reading and occur as people go about their daily lives. Barton (1997) notes that home literacy practices combine a wide range of reading and writing activities drawing on spoken language, numeracy and much more. The author provides us with a list which is by no means exhaustive but which highlights the range of practices that children are exposed to and participate in. The list is worth reproducing here as it shows how different these practices are from the formal school life of the classroom.

"People deal with shopping lists, TV schedules and junk mail. They write and receive personal letters and cards; some keep diaries, some write poems; they deal with official letters, bills and forms; they have notice boards, calendars, scrap books, recipe books, address books; they read local newspapers, catalogues and advertisements; people keep records of their lives and read and write to make sense of this complex world; they belong to community organisations, and pursue leisure interests bound by a web of newsletters, magazines, notices, minutes and messages; there are instructions that accompany every consumer good and service, from a bicycle helmet to a gas bill; people are even told by written instructions how, when and where to put out the rubbish." (Barton, 1997 p.104)

It is important to note that Barton’s study of community literacy practices was completed in Lancaster England. Whilst each home is distinct in its literacy practices the neighborhood by the very nature of its location can be considered in some ways cohesive and a far cry from another community in another part of the world, say for example an
Indigenous community in a remote part of Australia. Similarly, much of the literature deals with print literacy. It is evident that in many Australian Indigenous homes multiliteracies and cultural semiotics are incorporated into everyday literacy practices. (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy 2002) Cultural semiotics refers to understanding culture as a system of signs and codes. I return to the notion of cultural semiotics in Chapter Seven. (See also Schirato and Yell (1996) and Barthes (1982) in Chapter Three of this thesis.) Wason-Ellam and Ward (2004) suggest that community literacy as explained by Barton (1997) should be defined not only in terms of conventional ways of using print but also in the intertextuality of imageries, texts and artifacts of electronic technologies that coexist with conventional print literacy. This is discussed in depth in subsequent chapters.

The Home Literacy Environment also requires a definition as it appears in subsequent discussions. A definition offered by Burgess, Hecht and Lonigan (2002) of the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) is the variety of resources and opportunities provided to children as well as the parental skills, abilities, dispositions and resources that determine the provision of these opportunities for children. Children’s literacy practices are shaped by those of their family through modeling and scaffolding. (Hanlen 2002b) The HLE also carries cultural values that are firmly embedded within the literacy events that occur. Sometimes these are subtle; sometimes they are explicit. In conjunction with learning what these values are, children are also developing a sense of identity. (Barratt-Pugh 2000) These practices lead to different understandings about what literacy is, and accompany children to the formal school environment.

Multiliteracies.

The New London Group (Cope and Kalantzis 2000) has been influential in discussions about multiliteracies. In the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and globalised societies, the interrelationships of cultures and the plurality of texts that are in continual
transit as we go about our daily lives, the notion of multiliteracies has evolved as a result of this multiplicity of discourses and practices. The New London Group argue that literacy pedagogy must account for the growing variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. Visual technologies and communication are part of the new technologies.

The issues of difference and diversity have become critically important to the educational success of individuals. This diversity refers to the nature of the student population and in turn student learning styles as well as the cultural, social and economic contexts from which students' life experiences are drawn and the subsequent resources they bring with them to school. The New London Group propose a four element pedagogy of multiliteracies. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) suggest most importantly that these elements are intended as a supplement to current teaching practices and are not a rigid learning sequence. Critical is the notion of situated practice, which, works from a base of students' own interests and lifeworld experiences. Also critical is overt instruction which explicitly decloaks and contrasts the hidden patterns, conventions and rules of meaning in various cultural contexts.

These pedagogies are orientations to learning, particularly literacy learning, that represent ways of knowing. When we talk about Western literacy with Indigenous people we need to consider the literacy skills and knowledge the children have already developed. We need to move away from the deficit model and make Western schooling explicit. If a child's educational environment builds on and reflects their ways of knowing and doing, then the role of the school and preschool is to build on this.

**Hybridity and hybrid texts.**

The hybrid theory framework can do much to advance our understandings of home literacy practices. As children from diverse backgrounds meet mainstream cultures at school, new literate practices emerge. (Luke 2000, Kostagritz 2002) This process can be likened to a
chemical reaction as two properties fuse or blend and a new property is formed. Semiotic hybridity occurs when newcomers to a community bring differing texts through new technologies and discourses. Literacy events are reproduced and also transformed which generate 'Borderland Discourse', a term employed by Gee (1996), and hence forms of semiotic hybridity. Kostogritz also refers to this phenomenon as 'Thirdspace' theory claiming this perspective originates from the view of literacy as literacies. Different literacies sit in different relations of power, ranging from complementation and adaptation to assimilation and opposition. (Gee 2000) Hybridity is inextricably interwoven with identity. Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan (2000) are concerned with supporting children's hybridity as a basis for literacy learning. Hybridities, according to the researchers, are constructions that "interweave cultural and linguistic practices from children's lifeworlds inside and outside the classroom." (2000 p.180) The focus is particularly on the texts and learning of children whose lifeworlds are not familiar to teachers from the dominant culture and may not be valued by school norms. These include narrative styles, conversational styles and code-switching and genres and ideologies from popular media. Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan emphasise the need for classroom spaces (referred to as Thirdspace by Kostogritz) "where children can appropriate the knowledge, texts and identities of the school curriculum through the strategy of textual hybridization, blending the new school practices with practices familiar from home, community and popular media." (2000 p.180)

Hybrid texts are not only part of the school environment. They occur at home and in the community. Luke (2000) discusses the hybrid nature of emailing, which she notes combine aspects of face-to-face and written communication producing a new form of conversational turn taking. (Luke 2000, p. 84) Computer technology has produced a discourse that combines print text, sound and graphic images. (Luke 2000) Gregory and Williams (2003) criticise the notion of 'literacy impoverishment' in the homes of families from diverse backgrounds suggesting there is considerable scope and variety of existing literacy practices. These authors talk of "syncretism" or 'blending of strategies' that takes place as older Bangladeshi children combine
mainstream school with community class teaching strategies. (In this case Qur’anic classes and Bengali classes) to teach their younger siblings at home. These family literacy patterns and histories shape children’s hybrid strategies when they come to school.

Kostagritz’s (2002) discussion centres on hybrid texts that are produced within the classroom, noting that the driving forces of mainstream research into language and literacy learning and education practices are still based on assumptions that culture is a common denominator for those who live within it and coherent experiences of a nationality define its boundaries. Kostogritz argues that a resurgence in Australian nationalism, in the sphere of education, can be equated with the notion of a ‘static’ culture. The ‘We’ collective is strengthened and narrow conceptions of cultural-semiotic spheres pervade. Kostogritz draws on Lotman’s (1990) description of the production of semiotic space suggesting it is extremely important in understanding how the Other is (mis)recognised in the education of minority students. According to Kostogritz, every culture constructs boundaries. The semiosphere of culture is a living space of dialogical events, in which the production of consciousness and meaning can only take place through contact with an Other. Nature provides modes of Otherness against which our humanness is defined. In a similar way, different cultures require the Other to understand their particular identities. “The dialogical interaction in the semiosphere of culture occurs on the boundaries between us and them, self and other, our culture and foreign culture.” (Kostogritz 2002 p. 4) Within these boundaries, semiotic activity is organised on different levels of sign systems. According to Lotman, (1990) the external boundary separates the ‘own’ safe space from ‘their’ space, which is hostile and chaotic. In conceptualising the notion of boundaries, it is possible then to think about what’s inside – collective identity, normativity, individuality, values, moral positions etc. – which is a stable and historically continuous phenomena. New texts, identities and meanings are created when the boundaries collide and the stability becomes lost.
The same boundary divisions occur within a culture. The centre contains the dominating sign systems that include elaborately organised sign users, texts and codes. The periphery is fragmented and characterised by heterogeneity. According to Lotman, in Kostogritz (2002), the semiosphere of culture is in a constant state of mutation, oscillating between centre and periphery, and native and foreign. The boundary becomes a site of tension between 'us' and 'them'. The texts and identities constructed between boundaries create the cultural-semiotic Thirdness, which are new texts, identities and meanings. Spatial-semiotic markers include 'inside' and 'outside', 'centre' and 'periphery', 'us' and 'them' etc. These help people make sense of themselves and construct communal spaces which protect them from their fears of the Other and their own isolation. This reinforces a politics of difference that favours 'us' whilst marginalising and excluding 'them'. Kostogritz cites Artiles (2000) who argues that discursive topologies come to “define a particular collective identity – homogenous, hard-working, speaking proper English. In contrast, 'them' are lazy, dirty, heterogeneous, misuse English and take advantage of the welfare system.” (P.6) The majoritarian 'inside' identifies the Other as a lower category that must be disciplined and assimilated or rejected and cast aside.

Understanding hybrid theory is important to understanding minority students as learners in formal school contexts. Students bring their diverse home literacies to formal education, which become entwined with school literacies to create new forms. Watson (1989) documented a Yolngu metaphor from a north east Arnhem Land community, which is useful in the context of hybridity. In this metaphor the Yolngu describe the meeting and mixing of two streams. One flows from the land - Yolngu knowledge, and the other from the sea - Western knowledge. Watson does not include literacy practices in her description but this notion could be extended to include these practices. The forces of the streams combine and lead to deeper understandings flowing into a common lagoon to become one. The new waters are a hybrid of the two existing waters and new practices and understandings are created.
Indigenous beliefs, values and Identity

"If the currency of non-Indigenous societies has been a pervasive disrespect for and abuse of Indigenous knowledge and culture, then the central bank and the mint have been educational and academic institutions. .... Our own unique ways of knowing, teaching and learning are firmly grounded in the context of our ways of being. And yet we are thrust into the clothes of another system designed for different bodies and we are fed ideologies which serve the interests of other people." (Mick Dodson, from his Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture at the University of New England, Armidale in 1994. Cited by the What Works? Report Commonwealth of Australia 2000 p.138)

It is important to note that Australia is home to two distinct groups of Indigenous people: the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. Beckett (1988) shows that the two distinct groups have been bracketed together in literature and policy documents almost without exception. Diverse cultural and language groups exist within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Indeed Bell (1988) warns against generalising from members of tradition-orientated communities to those living in other settings for example urban contexts. Watson (1989) comments that extrapolations from evidence with one community and applied to another community, should be treated with caution. The detail of the social practices may differ and as children develop, they are socialised into particular cultural ways of viewing the objects, persons and events in their world.

It is, however, accepted by many Indigenous people that the development of language and culture follows general patterns across cultures. Culturally distinctive ways of learning need to be part of the background knowledge of teachers working with Indigenous students and these descriptions are not intended to simplify or generalise practices but rather provide a context and a backdrop for understanding differences between cultures. What I wish to highlight here
is that the perspectives of Indigenous peoples are often the antithesis of those of Western culture, which is the dominant culture of Australian society today. Our government, legal and education systems are based on this enduring culture. (Hanlen 2002c) Also crucial here is the understanding that the central beliefs, values and relationships of Indigenous Australians today have, according to Hanlen (2002c) remained consistently the same from the times before European invasion, throughout the invasion period and to the present day. It is with these factors in mind that I present the following discussion.

Harris (1984) was instrumental in popularising the theory of Aboriginal learning styles in his thesis *Culture and Learning: Tradition and Education in Northeast Arnhem Land*. Harris proposes five major learning strategies he observed in Aboriginal students. These are learning by observation and imitation as opposed to verbal instruction; learning by personal trial and error; learning in real life rather than contrived settings; learning context-specific skills in contrast to abstract, generalisable principles; and person-orientated learning as opposed to information-orientated knowledge. Nicholls, Crowley and Watt (1998) suggest that what Harris has actually described are informal learning styles, which are in fact apt descriptors of behaviours of many non-Aboriginal working class pupils. It must also be noted that Aboriginal people do make use of formal learning techniques as can clearly be seen in 'rights of passage' and other ritual and ceremonial events. Criticism of Harris’s work rests in the dichotomous nature of his distinctions. (Nicholls, Crowley and Watt 1998.) However many influential Indigenous scholars (see Hanlen 2000a 2002b and 2002c, Nakata 1997 and 2003) have also made use of these distinctions and embed them in broader socio-political contexts. Pedagogical practices can and should make use of these understandings.

The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education (1999) notes that some pedagogical principles are shared by all Indigenous people. There are also those that are characteristic to specific cultures, languages, environments and circumstances of Indigenous people across the world as noted earlier in this section. The Coolangatta Statement
acknowledges that Indigenous cultures are not homogenous but the members identify four fundamental pedagogical principles, which it believes to be universal. These are:

- Indigenous pedagogical principles are holistic, connected, valid, culturally and value-based, thematic and experiential. They promote and reward cooperative learning and the unified co-operation of learner and teacher in a single educational enterprise. They describe who teaches, as well as, how and when teaching occurs. Indigenous pedagogical principles, unlike western paradigms, recognise the important role of non-verbal communication in the teaching-learning process.
- Indigenous learning is clothed in the medium of spirituality. Notions of wellbeing/wellness and ethos therefore are important in the process of learning.
- The teacher is a facilitator of learning, one who promotes achievement and success. In this context culturally appropriate environments are employed to reinforce knowledge being imparted to the learner, which then reaffirms the learner’s significant place in the world.
- The involvement of community in all pedagogical processes is valued.

(Coolangatta Statement 1999, pp 62-63)

The Coolangatta Statement’s central focus is that Indigenous people worldwide must be in control of their education. The Statement emphasises that Indigenous languages and knowledge should be recognised and encouraged in pedagogical programs. This dedication to the maintenance of the cultural capital of Indigenous people is also critical to the statement. ‘Cultural capital’ is a notion framed by Bourdieu (1984) whereby ‘culture’ is presented metaphorically as an ‘economic system’. (Corson 2001 p.21) It refers to the knowledge and abilities that people acquire from their families, life experiences and peers. Bourdieu also talks of ‘educational capital’ noting that some cultural capital does not receive academic sanction thus, in this market, the owner of the knowledge does not receive much profit from their knowledge. The knowledge one attains throughout their life is specific to each individual and cultural group, however, as is noted in the Coolangatta Statement, some of the principles guiding
Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing are shared by different communities of Indigenous people.

In a discussion on ethnic epistemologies, Ladson-Billings (2000) opens with Rene Descartes 1637 now famous proclamation, *I think, therefore I am*. The author notes that this is a central premise on which European worldviews and epistemologies rest. The individual mind is the all encompassing origin and source of our knowledge and existence. Ladson-Billings (2000) contrasts this with an African saying, *Ubuntu*, when translated enunciates an antithetical notion, *I am because we are*. The individual’s existence and knowledge is dependent upon relationships with others. Hanlen, (2002a) an Indigenous scholar and educator, contrasts Descartes egocentricity with an Indigenous notion of *I am because others know that I exist*. The author uses the term 'community-centric'. According to Hanlen, knowledge of one’s own existence comes through interaction with others. The two divergent perspectives are fundamental to the world views of the communities of people they represent. Naturally there are individuals who do not aspire to these epistemological stances, however, their meeting (Western and Indigenous) is often fraught with conflict and miscommunication. The two are incompatible as they do not operate as options, alternatives or preferences. They are firmly and deeply fixed. They provide a driving force and an impetus. They are taught, encouraged and rewarded. Learning and teaching styles are based on these epistemologies. (Hanlen 2002a)

Hanlen (2002a) reports that Indigenous cultures are holistic in nature. "Beliefs, values, social practices and relationships are all-encompassing, not compartmentalised. Rather than separate traditional and contemporary perspectives and social practices, we should recognise the changes that have occurred from 1788 until the present time. Traditionally, the relationships of Indigenous peoples with the land and with each other, language, law, religion, society, hunting, gathering, caring for and raising children, education, ceremonies and literacies were and are dynamic practices, with none in isolation from the others." (Hanlen, 2002a p. 217) Harris (1990) discusses this in terms of relatedness versus compartmentalisation. This relatedness occurs
between place, people and kinship and spiritual and ceremonial beliefs. Hanlen continues, noting that Indigenous cultures are circular in form citing the example of land use. The land provides for the communities' needs and they in turn have an obligation to care for and maintain it. Also circular are relationships. Each member has mutual obligations with the whole community.

Western social practices and learning styles are compartmentalised. "Education is usually located in a school context, strictly regulated and structured, and centred on the individual, with thinking seen as linear and lateral." (Meyer 1998 cited by Hanlen 2002a p.217). Indigenous children often learn a whole event as opposed to a series of sequenced parts. Observation is crucial to this process. There is trial and error in this contextualised learning, the process being an event in itself. Western education sets learning goals. Every activity must have a conscious goal most of which are set up in contrived and artificial settings and end when the bell rings at 3:00pm.

In an Indigenous context "education is about 'knowing', rather than acquiring knowledge; about being independent and equal, while knowing respect and place; engaging in personal relationships within the family and group structure; learning about the centredness of life; and preparing to be a useful and responsible member of the family group. Caring for others is modelled and valued, so the learning process transcends chronological boundaries of age and is deemed an individual experience." (MCEETYA 2001 p. 39) The links are clear between culture and learning styles. Harris's work in the 1980's suggests that Aboriginal children who learn skills or concepts in specific contexts will be more effective with contextual learning. In the same way non-Indigenous children from cultural groups where spoken and written language is used a great deal in the learning process will be more likely to respond to and develop a verbal learning style. (Hughes and More 1997)

Other studies have foregrounded the incompatibility of Indigenous learning styles with those of western schooling. (Malin 1991 and 1997 and Kale 1995). Malin further suggested that many of
the skills taught within the framework of these learning styles are valued by Aboriginal families and promoted at home but became irrelevant for Indigenous students when they came to school. This meant that student/teacher communication was at the forefront of culturally incongruent education programs. Christie and Harris (1993) also assert that communication styles are an area of difference that may impact on school learning. Phenomenological and language differences are a site of miscommunication between teachers and students. Other writers have emphasised sociolinguistic mismatches as explanations of home/school communication problems for Aboriginal students. (See Eades 1995 and Malcolm 1995) Some researchers have stressed the cultural importance of cooperative rather than competitive behaviour. (Hughes and More 1993) It is not hard to see that these incompatibilities could result in constraints to academic achievement.

Indigenous parenting styles and western teaching styles are a source of incongruity that interact to create difficulties for students. Hanlen (2002a) notes that Indigenous parents generally want their children to be happy. This priority may differ greatly to those of teachers in a formal educational setting. In addition to this, Hanlen notes that there is usually "more value placed on the family’s needs of today than there is on literacy outcomes of tomorrow." (Hanlen, 2002a p.219) If a family member is in need of help then the child’s first priority is to provide that help even if it means that school will be missed for a time. Western society places a great deal of importance on outer success and considers regular attendance at school to be critical to this. Hanlen (2002b) also notes that in Indigenous cultures child rearing practices "Locate the child as central to the family and community’s world." (Hanlen 2002b p. 16) This is contrasted to the Western cultural approach to work and leisure, where families often leave children in the care of others, unlike many Indigenous families who take their children with them where possible. Trouw (1999) reports that Indigenous parents confirm the notions of difference recognising "that their children have different ways - they have different communication styles, different motivations, different attitudes to authority and have
differing views on social relationships from those of the larger society." (1999: 12) These family pedagogical principles have implications particularly for early childhood education programs.

**Literacy practices in Indigenous families.**

"As a full blooded member of my race I think I may claim to be the first - but I hope not the last - to produce an enduring record of our customs, beliefs and imaginings."

David Unaipon  Australian fifty-dollar note.

David Unaipon was born at the Point McLeay Mission, in South Australia, in 1872. In wanting his Aboriginal culture to be understood by western society, he wrote stories and poetry and also recorded many of his peoples' customs, beliefs and imaginings in volumes that remain valued records today. (From http://www.awm.gov.au/forging/australians/unaipon.htm)

However it is inappropriate to consider Unaipon as the first Aboriginal person to produce a literary record of Aboriginal customs, beliefs and stories. Oral traditions, art and ceremonial records are lasting portrayals of Aboriginal life, history and beliefs completed by many who came before Unaipon. Unaipon's beliefs that he was the first to record customs, as indicated in the above quote, have undoubtedly been influenced by his contact with western scholars of the time, most of whom would have measured Indigenous literacies against Western literacy practices and standards. The recurring activity of measuring Indigenous Australians continues today as Indigenous students are measured against Western Benchmark standards. These standards are set by Western education systems and Western government policies. Benchmarks impose a difficult hurdle for many Indigenous Australian students.
The MCEETYA discussion paper (2001) titled "Effective learning issues for Indigenous Children aged 0-8 years" draws on statistics revealing the poor performance of Indigenous students in achieving national benchmarks. The authors note the fact that Indigenous students are much less likely to participate in formal early childhood education. The paper focuses on the transition to school for Indigenous children noting the importance of early identification of Indigenous students with learning difficulties. The authors highlight previous research completed on the impact of cultural differences of going to school and achieving success. Three main types of minority groups are identified: autonomous groups who are culturally or linguistically distinct but are not subordinated by any other group, voluntary groups who are culturally and linguistically distinct and have immigrated in search of a better life, and involuntary groups who are culturally or linguistically distinct but whose subordinated position in society is a result of slavery, conquest or colonisation. (MCEETYA, 2001, p. 35) The MCEETYA paper suggests that whilst voluntary groups may interpret cultural and linguistic differences as obstacles to be overcome, involuntary groups may interpret these as differences to be maintained as an expression of identity.

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) acknowledges the different cultures within Australia and also notes that this cultural difference has been affected by histories of contact. As such, many immigrants to this country come embracing a new life. "For Aboriginal people it is different. They did not go through the process of leaving the old to embrace the new. They never voluntarily surrendered their culture and, indeed, fought tooth and nail to preserve it, through dispossession, protection, assimilation, integration". (1991, Vol 1. The Policy of Self-Determination) Hanlen (2000c) has noted that whilst the culture of Indigenous Australians has changed and continues to change, many people still hold to many and varied contemporary beliefs, values and forms of kin relationships and cultural practices.
Hanlen (2000c) completed a study to explore Indigenous literacy in the contexts of the family and community. She found that there were numerous historic, social and cultural factors presented by families that were counterproductive to successful literacy outcomes at school. Many important issues were raised about education and literacy practices as related to social practices and equity. Many of these set Indigenous students up for failure. Hanlen found that assessment methods at school do not empower Indigenous Australians but perpetuate low literacy outcomes. The participants in this study felt uninformed about assessment and reporting procedures and believed this to be a source of shame for the children and family members as comparisons between non-Indigenous children are made. Hanlen’s participants also discuss what they believe to be essential qualities for teachers of Indigenous students. These included a sense of humour, fairness and taking time to listen to students. (See Trouw 1999 and Malin 1991) They also discuss the importance of teachers providing information to parents and families about their children in terms of curriculum content and children's progress. This supports the notion of family and school connections as important to improved educational performance.

Hanlen observed that positive and negative social factors affected literacy competency accordingly. Good socio-economic conditions contributed to establishing literacy, social and cultural connections at school. Some families in the study discussed substance abuse and domestic violence. These issues place a great deal of pressure on families who provide support for all family members. This reinforces the notion of the family as critical in the lives of Indigenous people.

Hanlen (2000c) reported on the Indigenous literacies that were practiced in the homes of participant families. These included paintings of the families dreaming, Indigenous oratory style story telling and frightening stories. Participants engaged in written literacies that included notes to school, shopping lists, reading magazines, TV. guides and newspapers etc. All participants had books, toys and other reading materials in their homes.
Participants in Hanlen’s study believed that the school provided limited support for their children’s literacy development often putting them in remedial classes or inappropriately labeling them ‘lazy’ or ‘dyslexic’. As a result of this, many Indigenous participants felt that the school failed them and their children. Hanlen’s participants left school without literacy competence. In order to survive in, and work in the mainstream community they had to develop strategies that worked for them. This alludes to notions of hybrid practices. Hanlen calls for Indigenous people to be familiar with everyday Western discourses to empower them to participate fully and equitably in all aspects of mainstream society. (p. 275) Without this Indigenous students will continue to be marginalised and a cycle of disadvantage will ensue. Hanlen’s study highlighted the disconnections that Indigenous students face when they come to school. Discourse patterns have been a focus for a number of other studies completed with Indigenous participants motivated by low educational outcomes.

Wilson (2000) completed research with an Indigenous family in a large metropolitan town in North Queensland. The researcher investigated the language, socialisation and literacy practices that occurred within the family home. Wilson noted that while the range of literacy practices were experienced by the young child in the study, these practices did not occur with the frequency required to give the student an advantage in the classroom for the development of literacy skills. Wilson draws heavily on the work of Heath (1983). She draws out the necessary pre-requisite skills for achieving academic success in mainstream schools as identified by Heath, noting that these are evident in the participant home however "differences are seen, in the manner and frequency with which these features occur." (Wilson, 2000 p. 171) Adult literacy events observed by the researcher in the home, included reading and discussions about letters from health authorities and the school, writing lists, talking about bills, ordering items from catalogues, studying the bible and attending regular bible study meetings, reading novels and discussions on authors who had written historically and culturally significant texts about Aboriginal culture and experience in north Queensland.
Literacy events involving the child-participant included discussions about responses to books and book reading at home, showing favourite books, viewing books introduced by the researcher, and the use of paper and pencils for practice of early writing skills. The researcher noted that the child-participant experienced question-answer sequences for the naming of items and attributes in books but the frequency of this book reading behaviour was minimal. Heath (1983) noted that the repetitious dialogue that surrounds book reading behaviour in many mainstream homes, helped children 'act' as though they were literate before they could read. This helped them relate their real life experiences to the decontextualised stories as told in the book.

Wilson (2000) suggests that whilst the Aboriginal caregiver in her study values literacy and schooling and teaches cultural attitudes and values at home, "day-to-day concerns centre on the practical demands of family life, and maintaining family and kinship ties and knowledge through oral story telling." (Wilson, 2000 p. 189)

Wilson also reveals in her study that Aboriginal home discourses and schools discourses are incompatible in many respects. The implication of this has far reaching effects for the young child’s participation in the classroom including exclusion and poor outcomes for members of non-mainstream communities. Cairney and Ruge (1997) theorise this as 'cultural discontinuity' and suggest teachers need to examine the nature of communication between themselves and their students in order that the implicit and constructed nature of classroom discourse is accessible to all students.

Wilson notes that the home-school mismatch results from a clash between the two cultures, the contrasting world views of each and the complex beliefs, language, socialisation and literacy practices of each culture. Cairney and Ruge (1997) considered discourse practices and the opportunity to learn. These researchers identified five interactional structures or scripts, which referred to the patterned ways of participating in literacy-related events in homes or classrooms. The scripts were, exposition, recitation, elicitation, responsive and collaborative.
Findings revealed that home discourse practices exhibited collaboration and negotiation patterns while school discourse patterns emphasised authoritarian interactional patterns. Literacy at home was negotiated whilst at school it was imposed. In the sample from the Cairney and Ruge study, the most academically successful students were those whose home literacy practices reproduced school literacy practices. Wilson (2000) concludes her study suggesting that teachers need to be aware of the differences in language and social practices of their Aboriginal students, understand and know their students’ backgrounds and adjust their teaching practices to fit the children they are teaching. The notion of schools ‘fitting students’ rather than students ‘fitting schools’ is extended in the discussion paper produced by The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA 2001).

Kale (1995) completed an ethnographic study of a young Torres Strait Islander girl (Elsey) living in suburban Townsville. Kale tracked her literacy development for a number of years noting the home literacy practices that impact on this learning. The author noted that a variety of texts and types of literacy formed the basis of Elsey’s earliest reading in her out of school experiences. These texts, Kale argued, taught Elsey about the processes of becoming a reader, and developing her identity as a reader. Kale continued suggesting that few, if any, of these text types with which Elsey was familiar, figured prominently in classrooms. Kale suggests that "storybook reading, its practices and artifacts, has become symbolic of and central to what counts as literacy in the language arts curriculum." (Kale, 1995, p. 299-300) Kale demonstrates that what is read, what is important to Elsey and her primary caregiver (her grandmother) and how the specific interactional patterns and practices between them, differ from those enacted in highly literate, school-orientated homes.

Kale (1995) discusses Elsey’s language learning process and its relationship to culture and identity. She highlights the oral stories that are told by Elsey’s grandmother to her grandchild and how these cultural narratives are conceptually complex in nature and have specific ‘learning’ roles. Kale reports that in some Torres Strait Islander communities these stories act
as scare tactics for young children or a means of social control that teach appropriate socio-cultural behaviours. These stories can also sanction certain behaviours of women. The cultural narrative, as highlighted by Kale illustrates how Elsey is learning values, feelings, ways of thinking, saying and doing as a member of one of the social worlds she inhabits.

Kale suggests that the stories Elsey is told by her grandmother link ancestors with present day people and embedded within these are cultural belief systems that incorporate age and gender related knowledge and roles. The author contests that in contrast, stories told merely for entertainment value, as is often the case during shared book reading episodes both in the home and in the school, must seem 'banal' by comparison. She further suggests that this could cause some confusion for the young child with a culturally diverse background when compared with the multiple layers of the tradition oral stories of her grandmother. Kale asserts that young Elsey aspires to be part of the literate society of school and this conflicts with the traditional narratives that impose some negative evaluations of her primary culture.

During some visits with Elsey, Kale read a range of children’s literature to the young participant. Kale reports that Elsey experienced some difficulty adapting to the behavioural, language and social expectations of an interactional situation that was unfamiliar to her. Children who are read fictive narratives are able to build up a "mental template available for taking meaning from new stories they hear, and for use as a guide when scripting their own stories in classrooms." (Kale 1995, p.308) With the knowledge of the story structure, typical characteristics of characters, events and actions, and prediction of possible sequences of events, children are well prepared for writing their own stories of this kind later. Without the first hand experience with this kind of fiction, they do not have the conceptual and structural understandings of this genre to know how to go about writing such a story. This points to the importance of explicit teaching and the deconstruction of school genres.
Kale noted that her young participant Elsey, was not comfortable with story book reading strategies, such as attention to, and discussion about, illustrations and frequent interruptions to talk about the story line and check comprehension. She asserts that this was because Elsey was introduced to fictive narratives through the medium of children’s programs over the radio. Kale suggests these are key strategies employed by teachers in early childhood classes. A student such as Elsey would experience difficulty engaging in such an activity and in effect be silenced or a reluctant participant. Further to picture books, Nickolajeva (2003) cites the work of Nodelman (1991) who was among the first to note that pictures in picture books rarely convey first-person point of view, yet first person narration in the verbal text of picture books is common, thereby creating a source of confusion for the child reader, that is the use of two different points of view. With the identification of 'I' common to these texts, we should in fact never see the narrator. In addition to visual literacy other elements of literacy were addressed by Kale.

Attempts by Kale to teach Elsey rhyme were only partly successful. This is another common strategy for learning to read, employed by early childhood teachers. In addition to this, Kale notes that another factor that compounds problems of comprehension in reading for Elsey is the idea that readers bring knowledge from past experiences to new texts. The problem for Elsey was, according to Kale, that her world has not included princes and princesses, castles, knights and jewels.

The recurring theme for Kale is that Elsey’s past experiences have not included many opportunities "to build up possibilities of the content of fictive narrative genre from which to extrapolate text schemata and structure to create possible worlds in her own reading and early writing." (Kale 1995, p.315) Having said that, Kale reminds the reader that Elsey is an active participant and interpreter of social worlds where texts are written and read for a variety of purposes, and a range of audiences. These activities occur in the course of everyday living and as such Elsey is developing her own identity through knowledge about texts and print.
A common thread has emerged which permeates the subsequent sections of this chapter. That is the notion of literacy development and identity. Dyson (1993) completed studies with low-income, urban African-American children. She found that as children operate in their classrooms and more specifically their literacy learning sessions, they do so with strategy, intention and logic. Through this process they create texts which work for them. Dyson’s work reveals that children selectively appropriate material from the popular culture of television and other media, which they assemble anew with home language traditions and school genres. "As young children compose texts they simultaneously compose spaces for themselves in the world." (Comber, 2003, p.359) This method of contesting dominant discourses formulates identities through a process of hybridity. I have already discussed this notion earlier in this chapter noting that hybrid constructions of literate texts are borne out of the interweaving of cultural and linguistic practices within the world of the child. (Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan 2000) What is clear is that children make rich use of their out of school language and literacy lives. The construction of their identities impacts on the performance of their literate behaviour, which is often interpreted by teachers in a negative light. As young children negotiate and construct literacies at school, some begin to be marginalised and a pattern is set for their subsequent formal literate lives. In the next section I look at what theories have emerged to explain this school success or failure for children from minority backgrounds.

**Predicates to failure or success at school.**

This section examines the research into success or otherwise at school for minority students. This encompasses students from marginalised communities and students from diverse backgrounds both within Australia and internationally. Whilst some of the backgrounds of these students are different to Indigenous Australian students, they have been included as they provide a valuable backdrop for my study. The common threads that emerged, resulted in the ensuing five sections that I put forward as predicates of success or failure. I return to these
in chapters seven and eight. Throughout my readings in this field two major theories became visible as explanations of the failure of schools to ensure academic success for students from minority backgrounds. The first of these is the theory of cultural discontinuity and the second is the theory of structural inequality. These terms have been used by Cairney and Ruge (1997) and are appropriate terminology here in that the first results from difficulties in communication and interaction between students and teachers. The second theory looks beyond home/school mismatches suggesting that the lack of educational success of minority students reflects inequalities in the broader social, political and economic arenas. Power and opportunity are in the hands of the dominant group and certain groups of students are disadvantaged. (Cairney and Ruge 1997). Studies of cultural difference support the notion that the educational success or failure of minority students is “a function of the extent to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society” (Cummins, 1986:32 cited by Cairney and Ruge, 1997 p.7) From these theories, the five identified themes were clearly exposed, each interweaving with the others. These themes are: the importance of home/school partnerships in alleviating cultural discontinuity; the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage; acknowledging and valuing diversity, inclusivity and the nature of learning and understanding Indigenous youth.

The importance of school and home partnerships in alleviating cultural discontinuity

Current trends in educational institutions suggest that parent-teacher partnerships are crucial for successful student learning. (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy 2002) In addition, Hill et. al (1998) suggest that language and literacy learning is facilitated when change in the hierarchical power relations at school, and between the school and community are on the critical agenda. The authors note that parent participation in school is a relatively new development for many Indigenous parents, many of whom have had negative experiences with their own Western schooling. This section looks at the relationship between parental and community partnerships
and school success. It is a well established fact that literacy development begins before the formal education of school. A critical factor within this issue is the fact that the types and forms of literacy practiced in the homes are frequently incongruent with what children encounter at school. Families can become confused with the school environment and the literacy events practiced there. Their sociocultural patterns of literacy are often undervalued by teachers and even ignored, which creates a distance when, in fact, a partnership between the home and school is what is essential for school and academic success.

The 'What Works? Explorations in Improving outcomes for Indigenous students' Report (2000) suggests that programs successful in improving outcomes are derived from genuine partnerships between the educational setting and the parents and caregivers. Comber and Barnett (2003) echo this sentiment. In a learning community, teachers, administrators and parents are envisaged as equal participants in the dialogue where the boundaries between learning in and out of school are increasingly blurred.

Barbour (1998) suggests that families are unwilling or unable to participate in school-based programs, either because they are physically or culturally isolated or because they are consumed by providing basic needs for their families. (See also Wilson 2000) In this light, Barbour reports on a project that introduced home literacy bags that empowered parents to become teachers of their own children and provided home environments that supported children's learning. Nistler and Maiers (2000) report on a program involving families from grade one students. An extremely transient population, the demographics are reported as predominantly low socioeconomic. Knowledge about literacy activities in the home was limited however it was known that the children entering this grade one class lacked the early literacy experiences requisite for future success in the school setting. The authors recognised that the value placed on literacy and not on social status, race or economics are what make for a home rich in literacy.
In the study, Maiers invited parents of her students to join their child for directed and informal literacy and related social activities in the classroom. During these times, adult-student pairs were guided through early literacy instructional activities. Literacy behaviours that could be extended at home were consistently modeled incorporating music, art, maths and science through cooking activities and other interactive literacy activities. As the program proceeded parents began to contribute ideas and materials to the work stations.

Nistler and Maier’s (2000) program and Barbour’s (1998) literacy bags may be criticised for the strategies they appear to impose on parents. In my experience such programs, when established in consultation with community members, are exactly what is required if we are to forge authentic partnerships between families and the school.

As mentioned earlier in this section, 'What Works' highlights successful IESIP projects. Those achieving best outcomes were localised to suit the needs of the community within which the project is established and most importantly Indigenous parents and community members are actively involved in the decisions about what sort of education is right for their children. This partnership proved to be a major factor in the success or otherwise of the projects. The next section considers students who are considered to be 'at risk' of academic failure.

The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage

Many studies have been completed that report on minority children and children who come from low-income households showing consistent increased risk of academic failure. Once again I must stress that descriptions of difference are not meant to impose stereotypes on minority cultures. Historically, categorisations of race, class and gender ensured people remained segregated and excluded. However, the studies reported below share a commonality in the marginalisation of the community of which they are part and which many minority
cultures experience. In light of this I use the information gleaned to understand the many complex factors that influence a student’s learning outcomes.

Washington (2001) asserts that the poor reading achievement of African-American children has been well documented and is reportedly a result of the differences or deficits in preschool literacy experiences and language use or exposure prior to commencing school. The author explores several key variables which she suggests influence young children’s academic performance. These include poverty, general oral language skills, dialectal variations, home literacy practices, standardised testing bias and teacher expectations. These variables often translate to issues of racism. "Overt, covert or by way of omission or exclusion, racism is a primary factor in children’s lack of self-esteem, confidence and inclusiveness." (Hanlen 2002c p. 249) Hanlen further reports that many Indigenous Australian parents in a study she completed did not feel able to support their children’s school learning. They did not have the confidence in their own Western literacy skills. It is these skills that parents, in the first years of a child’s life use to socialise their children into the world of literacy.

In a newspaper article titled ‘With literacy, the early bird catches the word’ (Courier Mail. August 31st 2005), writer Cameron Atfield opens with the statement "Parents should be reading to children as young as four months." Atfield documents the launch of a national campaign to raise literacy levels by highlighting the importance of reading to children before they start primary school. The Let’s Read campaign chairman Professor Oberklaid is quoted as saying the future was far brighter for children who were read to at a young age. Professor Oberklaid cites statistics revealing that almost half of all Australians aged 15 to 74 which translates to 6.2 million people" had either very poor or poor literacy skills that put their children at a distinct disadvantage." Further Professor Oberklaid comments that "Children who had not developed emergent literacy skills by school age were unlikely to catch up with their peers." The Let’s Read campaign acknowledges that for parents with low literacy skills,
reading to their children can be very intimidating, which is why the program has an accompanying DVD to support parents.

Washington (2001) is convincing in her argument that poverty is a critical factor for school failure noting a high incidence of African-American children living below the poverty line compared to white children. Many children who are poor, regardless of race, come from homes that lack stability, continuity of care, adequate nutrition and medical care that can affect young children's functioning. According to Washington, African-American children who are poor, face the additional barrier that cultural differences may represent. However, Washington’s research has shown that African-American students from middle-income families experience reading difficulties like their low-income counterparts. This indicates that reading difficulties transcend socioeconomic boundaries. According to Washington, it is extremely important to consider socioeconomic status separately from race and/or culture in investigating African-American children. Poverty is an issue recognised by a number of researchers in Australian contexts amongst Indigenous communities. (See What Works? Explorations for improving outcomes for Indigenous students DETYA 2000 and Literate Futures Queensland Government 2000).

Home literacy experiences are discussed by Washington (2001) in the light of their impact on reading development. Washington draws on data from the Forum on Child and Family Statistics (1999) to highlight that children are more likely to be read to if their mothers have higher levels of education and they come from a two-parent household. Also white children are more likely to be read to everyday than Latino or African-American children. The exposure to print that joint reading provides make it an essential ingredient for successful reading development. This needs to occur prior to entry to school, which Washington asserts does not occur frequently in African-American homes.
These differences in exposure to print extend from the amount to the type of exposure. Particularly true of low-income families, African-American families reportedly primarily use environmental print which is valid, however it is quite different from the form that literacy takes in school. This highlights the importance of connections between the school and the home being bidirectional in order that the school is influenced by home practice as well as the home being influenced by school-based practice. Washington employs the use of Scott and Marcus's (2001) term "cultural synchronisation" between the young child's home environment and the school. Without this two-way collaboration, home school variance creates a 'gap' that can adversely affect student performance. Teachers can provide Indigenous students' with access to school literacy experiences when they understand their students home literacy environments and home literacy practices. Shared book reading is one such practice, the features of which may differ between home and school.

Cairney (2003) cites a study by Williams (1990) who compared shared book reading practices of two groups of mothers. One group identified as low socio-economic and the other were economically stable. Differences in home reading practices were identified between the two groups. The mothers from the economically disadvantaged sites, read long sections of texts with infrequent linguistic interaction compared to the other group of mothers. Also the conversations of the children from the economically disadvantaged sites were closely tied to the fictional world of the book whereas the non-economically disadvantaged children linked their own world more regularly to the text and finally children from the economically stable environments were given more opportunities to choose texts than children from economically disadvantaged sites. We know that reading interactions vary between families and shared reading is an important family literacy practice in many households. We cannot however, assume that the amount of reading is critical or that picture books are the essential beginning text type for all children. Within these studies, I am acutely aware of the notion of 'deficit'. Whilst more recent studies do not use this term, the framework on which conclusions are drawn is cited as 'difference', underlying themes still point to the notion of deficit. A study
completed by Hill, Comber, Louden, Rivalland, and Reid (1998) drew more positive conclusions finding that some low income families made significant contributions to their children’s literacy learning with non-print related activities that included effective language interactions including the exchange of information. Also the showing of affection and support and enforced discipline to keep children task orientated were reported as effective strategies by Hill et al. (1998) The researchers in this study concluded that such interactions help children’s early literacy acquisition irrespective of income status.

McNaughton (1995) considered literacy practices within different social and cultural groups in New Zealand. He describes the literacy practices of Maori, Samoan and European families all of whom were non-professional income earners. His depiction is that of resourceful families who support their children’s early literacy learning in the following ways: joint activities whereby family members offer guidance and support, personal activities in which the children have opportunities to practice a specific form of literacy on their own, and ambient activities in which the child is immersed in literacy practices as part of daily life. McNaughton’s work show us that literacy events are situated in everyday life. We know that literacy is not culturally neutral and families have varied resources including time and space and many use these effectively to support their children’s learning. In the next section I consider research that highlights the importance of valuing cultural diversity in the students we teach.

**Acknowledging and valuing diversity**

Comber and Barnett (2003) discuss the key factors that enhance children’s literacy learning. Most important was the ‘recognition’ factor. (2003 p.15) Teachers who recognize the diverse skills and knowledge that children bring to school increases productive learning opportunities. Hanlen (2002a) asserts that teachers of Indigenous students need to be sensitive to the social and historical issues of students when children "commence early childhood education by
enabling them to link into cultural connections that reflect their own experiences, perspectives and social practices from the first moment, and encouraging their literacy practices and the learning of written literacy to reflect their own culture and society." (Hanlen, 2002a p. 223) This sentiment is echoed by Luke (1994).

The Cairney and Ruge (1997) study mentioned earlier, examined matches and mismatches between the discourse practices of home and school and the impact that any differences have on students and school success." (p. 1) Cairney and Ruge suggest that the failure of schools to support students in their attainment of appropriate literacy outcomes could be alleviated if teachers ask "what does this [mismatch, disempowerment and difference] mean for the way literacy is defined and used in school, the programs we initiate with and for families, and the relationships that exist between schools and communities? Identifying mismatches and developing understandings is a vital beginning for this.

Mismatches found in the Cairney and Ruge study between home and school literacies were not in terms of literacy practices but of authority and concepts of knowledge. Indigenous communities view knowledge in a different way to the way most Western peoples conceptualise this phenomenon. The content and status of knowledge varies between these cultures. "Knowledge in the traditional Aboriginal conception, the powerful and deep-rooted knowledge that defines how things came to be and relationships between them, is fixed and belongs to guardians of that knowledge. Its transmission is rule bounded and not subject to general processes of speculation or trial and error." (What Works? report 2001 p.143) Authority in an Indigenous community is also viewed differently to Western processes. In traditional Aboriginal societies religious, ritual and kinship obligations are the organising forces. (Harris 1990) Children are able to make decisions about their everyday needs and desires and are free to experiment with developing skills. This is done without obvious verbal or physical restraint from adults. (Kearins 1993)
In line with Cairney and Ruge (1997), Penetito (2001), a Maori educator, suggests that non-Maori teachers do not really 'know' the Maori children they teach and hence neither value or acknowledge diversity. Penetito asserts that New Zealand teachers across all sectors are notoriously ill-informed about local Maori knowledge. This occurs despite the fact that research suggests it is vital to begin where children are, and with what they are already familiar with, so that prior knowledge can be built upon. Penetito's main contention is that knowledge, in general, should be derived from local sources.

Issues highlighted by Penetito that affect Maori children’s academic progress include high numbers of Maori pre-schoolers not enrolled in early childhood education programs, high levels of non-attendance, similarly high levels of students leaving schools without any formal qualifications. These issues are echoed in reports with regard to Australian Indigenous education. (See Learning Lessons 1999, What Works? 2000 and "Effective learning issues for Indigenous Children aged 0-8 years" 2001.)

Penetito (2001) suggests that poor attendance and academic underachievement are the most pressing problems facing Maori education. Maori students are alienated by a curriculum that all too frequently amounts to a denial of who they are. They become intolerant of the rules over which they have no say and perceive these as rules for the sake of having rules. Teachers are narrowly focussed on subject expertise and biased in favour of ethnocentric and middle class values. Most importantly, according to Penetito, they experience teachers on a daily basis who make it clear by their (in)actions that they have only minimal tolerance for anything Maori. Maori families are led to believe that in a high tech, fast moving, globalised world, what belongs to Maori and Maori culture is of little use to them or anybody else.

Maori knowledge is, according to Penetito (2001), particularistic as opposed to school knowledge, which is seen, as universalistic. Harris (1990) also makes this point with regard to Indigenous knowledge. This poses a dilemma for education, that is, which knowledge should be
made available for teaching and evaluating in the classroom? What knowledge should teachers have to help them operate more effectively? Penetito suggests that Maori knowledge that is used in education systems should be selected by local Maori sources. Not all local knowledge is appropriate in institutionalised settings and local sources would not want all their knowledge to be made public. This is also in line with Giroux who denotes the importance of acknowledging and respecting the knowledge and identity of marginalised groups. These notions Giroux extracted from Freire’s critical pedagogy. (Gur-Ze’ev 1998) Like Australian Indigenous knowledge, Maori knowledge has a spiritual dimension which is passed through generations. It is seen in relational terms rather than as fixed in time and space. It is specific to a place and tied to one’s identity through language. “It is contemporary as well as being traditional; it is secular as well as being sacred; it is theoretical as well as being practical; it is both idealist and materialist...” (Penetito 2001 p.20) Penetito’s solutions for the ‘problems’ of Maori education are essentially to empower Maori to have control over the knowledge they want schools to employ in their pedagogical practices. Critical to this notion is the family/school partnerships discussed in the previous section.

Despite the differences in Australian Aboriginal histories and Maori history, the contemporary issues that have evolved with Indigenous Australians are extremely similar. In both countries, the teaching force neither reflects the student population nor understands the particular sociocultural practices of their schools’ surrounding community. Gutierrez (2000) suggests that in these conditions, teachers inevitably make assumptions and construct folk theories about students’ potential, identifying who can learn and what will be learned without themselves learning about the everyday practices of their students and the local community. Low teacher expectations have been discussed for many years as impacting on student performance. (Malin 1991) These low expectations are influenced by teacher and student-centered variables including cultural bias by the teacher, cultural dialect used by the child and the low socio-economic status of the child. (Washington 2001) Malin (1991) noted that teachers’ unconscious
In their study, Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan (2000) attempted to address the questions of what cultural and linguistic practices the latino student was drawing on in her hybrid texts and how they were responded to within the classroom. Intertextuality is central to the notion of hybrid texts. This refers to the concept of language as inherently dialogic that always
involves intertextual links, which are socially constructed and negotiated by participants in the events. With hybridity, texts always refer and respond to, and incorporate and intermingle with multiple other texts. Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan cite Bhabha (1990, 1996) who argues that hybridity opens up a third space for negotiating cultural differences, where alternative and competing discourses may be given voice and new positions may emerge that challenge relations of dominance.

Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan show how one student integrated multiple cultural and linguistic practices in literacy related events, and was supported and constrained in her literacy development, and how a democratic pedagogy was constructed. Microanalysis of the student’s oral texts revealed intertextual links to a culturally salient Puerto Rican genre that is cuento, or morality and cautionary tale. According to Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan, this genre appears to parallel the form of teaching of Mexican-American mothers, which repeatedly advise about behaviour and morality by embedding them in stories for younger children. Also evident was the apparent bridging of the ideological divide between children’s and adults’ perspectives. The student under study demonstrated in her writing, an interweaving of family, peer and school language practices, as well as her identity as a writer. Intertextual links between the genre of scientific logic and domestic narratives were apparent, the latter being consistent with a cultural ideology that places high value on family interdependence in the Puerto Rican community. This shows the challenge the student faced in attempting to integrate the new identity she was constructing in school with the identity that sustained her at home. This mixing of genres makes a place for home identity at school.

Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan envision a language arts pedagogy where speakers and writers make generic forms of text out of available resources including the resources of currently marginalised communities and at the same time identify barriers to this. Stable forms and pre-existing schemata for texts that serve particular functions are seen by teachers as rule based and static. These are enforced by high and low stakes testing standards and
programs that use conventional definitions of genres as a framework for students reading and writing. The norms of rigid boundaries interfere with teachers’ recognition of hybrid texts. Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan suggest teachers can support minority students by reconceptualising genre and other language practices as generative, and monitor student interpretations of texts in order to realise the transformative potential of hybridity. Differences with regard to specific cultural and linguistic practices must be recognised also and understood without stereotyping individuals within a specific cultural group. Teachers can construct opportunities for exploring with children (and their families), the cultural and linguistic practices of their communities and the hybridity in their texts.

The authors do not seek the ideal curriculum or pedagogy but rather the construction of spaces “where the unexpected can happen, where we reflect with children and families on what happens in those spaces and the other spaces we inhabit and where we use those reflections to inform our future practices as designers and interpreters of texts and as teachers.” (p. 208) The next section continues with the notion of acknowledging and valuing diversity by providing an inclusive curriculum that all students can access equally.

**Inclusivity and the nature of learning**

The importance of providing an inclusive curriculum for all students cannot be over emphasised. In the last section I considered research that discusses the importance of valuing and acknowledging diversity. In doing this we need to have deep understandings of the home culture of our students. Despite Nurcombe and Moffitt’s (1973) now dated notions of cultural deprivation, they still understood the importance of acknowledging cultural differences. They write, "Only a concerted but comprehensive remedial program is likely to succeed and that not until the culture of the people involved is emphatically understood. This is the major gap in our knowledge." (1973 p. 135) Without these understandings we run the risk of reproducing the situation so eloquently described by African author Semali.
“Then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture. I first went to Iwa Primary school. Our language was not Kiswahili. My struggle began at a very early age constantly trying to find parallels in my culture with what was being taught in the classroom. In school we followed the British colonial syllabus. The books we read in class had been written by Mrs. Bryce, mostly adapted and translated into Kiswahili from British curricula. We read stories and sung songs about having tea in an English garden, taking a ride on a train, sailing in the open seas, and walking the streets of town. These were unfortunately stories far removed from our life experiences. As expected, we memorised them even though they were meaningless.” (Semali 1999, cited by Macedo, 2000:20)

Buckskin (2000) asserts that evidence collected from more than 80 Strategic Results Projects (SRP’s) over two years operating in Northern Territory schools, has demonstrated that learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be significantly improved through goals of cultural inclusivity. How this is achieved has been researched by Ladson-Billings in response to poor education statistics for African-American students.

Ladson-Billings (1994) identified six overarching platforms, of which culturally responsive teaching pedagogies are considered to be crucial to student success. Most pertinent to my study are Ladson-Billings’ suggestions that successful students from minority cultures are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an unrelated and isolated way. The teaching of skills is contextualised. Also students’ real life experiences are legitimised as they become part of the "official" curriculum. Teachers depend heavily on the experiences of their students to make literature exciting and alive. And finally teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory. There is a
broad definition of what counts as literarily worthy. Students question and search for their own answers. Multiple teaching strategies are employed. These notions of a culturally responsive pedagogy can be aligned with Gay (2000 see chapter 1)

In addition to the Ladson-Billing’s notions of cultural responsiveness, Marsh and Thompson (2001) note that there is a pervasiveness of the media and popular cultural texts in the home literacy practices of many pre-school children that should be incorporated into teaching. Further much of the print found in homes related to everyday life and included junk mail, newspapers and magazines. Cairney et.al. (1996) also found literacy events in the Australian study were rooted in everyday materials such as TV guides, TV subtitles, newspapers, magazines, comics and playing computer games. Marsh and Thompson suggest that popular culture is connected by common themes. They cite the example of the Pokemon phenomenon reporting that through this intertextual world children can engage in the narrative for example through stickers, cards, T shirts. Televisual literacy provides children with opportunities to enhance their understanding of narrative structure.

Hanlen (2000c) also reports on the role of television in Indigenous children’s literacy learning. In Marsh and Thompson’s study television programs scored the highest consumption rates for reading texts. The books read by the children included those traditionally disapproved of by teachers such as those based on children’s popular television and media characters. These texts are a very real part of student culture and should not be ignored or trivialised. Thirty per cent of the titles related to television and films and 40% included fairy stories, nursery rhymes, counting and alphabet books and non-fiction texts on animals, transport etc. Only 28% of the books shared with children were picture story books and they were unconventional titles generally found in supermarkets. Evidence suggests that computer games may be an important factor in orientating children toward printed texts since the diaries indicated that the children were avid consumers of computer games.
Marsh and Thompson conclude that it is time to firmly embed popular cultural and media texts encountered in the home and family into schooled literacy practices. This notion is also considered in the next section, which leads me to the final theme of predicates to school success or failure. 'Understanding Indigenous youth' provides a brief overview of the notion of the 'Y generation' and how vastly different this generation is to the generations that have preceded it.

Understanding Indigenous youth

The scope of a section that deals with Indigenous youth far exceeds the scope of my research, however working with Indigenous students clearly makes this notion critical. This section is critical to the notion of identity. I have attempted to remind the reader that identity development permeates this discussion and opens spaces for consideration. I would not presume to demystify the complexities of youth sub-culture, if indeed such a construct exists, but I do believe this notion is important to our work as educators. Foucault makes the point that while we think we know what a child or an adolescent is, in fact these categories are always in the process of being transformed.

"Because children and youth are increasingly being targeted as markets in advertising texts, and because advertising largely functions in terms of desirable lifestyles, activities and fashions, a connection is established between what was, to some extent, an inalienable part of society and culture and the 'irrepressible drive' of capitalism. This means that popular culture and youth/child culture have become saturated with a new set of categories and subjectivities which run straight into more traditional and unalienable categories and discourses about childhood and youth. The result is a cultural crisis, played out in the media, government, bureaucracies and the public sphere, about the threat to children and childhood."

(Danaher, Schirato and Webb. 2000, p. 78-79)
McCrindle (2004) and Dawes (1998) have also noted the uncertainty that young people face in many aspects of their lives today. Indeed McCrindle has attempted to demystify the current student generation whom he dubs 'generation Y'. He asserts that understanding this student population, irrespective of racial and ethnic background is crucial to our teaching. Diversity is omnipresent and the process of globalisation has meant our universe is anything but static. However this dynamic nature, brought on in part by technological advances, has ensured many students and youths tune in to popular markets dictating music, fashion, food, recreation, in fact, many aspects of their daily lives. They are part of a global community and within this framework are other 'communities' that generation Y identify with.

Cowlishaw (1993) suggests that in many parts of Australia local Aboriginal communities develop an oppositional culture, which is grounded in knowledge of a different history to that of mainstream Australia. The messages are intentionally defiant and refer to the existence of a world other than that which dominates wider society. Perhaps this is not exclusive to Indigenous Australian youths. Kale (1995) makes reference in her study to many Indigenous students identification with African Americans and the undertones of resistance to white culture. Penetito (2001) also notes that Maori students actively oppose a curriculum that frequently ignores their identity as Maori students. Jackie Huggins (1998) writes, "White norms and values are enshrined in our institution and white knowledge and ways of valuing are taught and recorded in our schools." (Huggins, 1998: 47 cited by Scott, 2002: 87.) Brady (1997) notes that after more than 200 years of programs of colonisation in education, Aboriginal people are still involved in a tremendous struggle to legitimise Indigenous ways of knowing which has led to barriers and restrictions for Aboriginal people in education systems. This perpetuates a system where Indigenous communities and students in particular perceive they have little control over their destinies within schools. (Folds 1987) The response is a form of cultural resistance.
Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the MYCEETYA discussion paper (2001). In this paper it is suggested that involuntary minority groups actively seek to maintain differences of the home culture as an expression of identity and in opposition to assimilation. What non-Indigenous teachers perceive as student opposition may also be the result of intercultural experience. Interactions between people with a multiplicity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds may result in what Lotman refers to as contraries and hybrids or 'creolisation'. (Eco 1994, cited by Torop 1999) In this way the conduct of students may be perceived as a hybrid behaviour that has evolved as a result of the interaction of different cultural codes. It is important in discussion such as this that we remain acutely aware that any group or sub-group is made up of a huge variety of individuals.

Indigenous youth are not a homogenous group. Dawes (1998) asserts that 'generation' is a social construction. McCrindle (2004) makes use of this social construct dividing the population into generational divisions. Anyone born since 1982, he suggests is 'generation Y' and attributes them the following characteristics; they are post modern, post literate and post partitioned. Dawes is critical of such categories suggesting they obscure the importance of class ethnicity, gender and locality. As a teacher I found McCrindle's delineations useful. Far from being a one-dimensional theory I believe it enhances our understanding of students' behaviour and effective teaching strategies.

As already stated, McCrindle suggests that 'generation Y' are postmodern. Characteristic of the postmodern times we live in, is the instability and dislocation of our communities. Increasing economic and cultural globalisation have brought fracture and chaos. (Hollinsworth 1998) The onset of the postmodern era is an academic debate, but what is clear is that resulting from this movement there emerged noticeable cultural, social and economic transformations, which have undoubtedly impacted on generation 'Y'. Both Foucault and Bourdieu, have encouraged readers to see that no 'truth' should be taken for granted and no perspective left unchallenged. Thus postmodernists reject the notion that
there is only one way in which knowledge can be constituted. In theory postmodernism rejects the universality of 'difference', 'otherness' and 'plurality', which in the past subverted minority voices. (Erickson 1998) The impact of these theories has prompted some education systems to target 'lessons for life.' The Canberra Times ran a story in May 2004 titled, "Schools Target Lessons for Life". This article reports on a school that has decided that the focus on the academic requirements of the curriculum is not appropriate. Instead students should learn about: Problem solving, values training, character development, leadership training, social skills, conflict resolution, team building and team skills, collaboration, communication skills, personal development, optimism, and understanding the new world. McCrindle asserts that these skills must be taught in schools now. Students do not develop these skills naturally and the role of the teacher is to facilitate their acquisition.

Post literate suggests that the way students are influenced and won over with information is no longer through traditional literacy teaching or listening to what their teachers have to say. They are bombarded with multimedia and multi-sensory experiences in their lives. The majority of their time is spent in screen time using the X Box, computers, DVD’s T.V. and mobile phones. Mass media plays a huge role in their lives. The focus of mass media is not only on words but on the visual, symbolic and experiential. Mass media advertises products relying on colour and symbols with minimal text. Kundanis (2003) suggests that children’s self identity is affected by their observations of mass media images. These experiences accumulate to contribute to the cultivation of a child’s values, beliefs, dreams, and expectations which shape the adult identity.

McCrindle describes post partitioned in terms of the way people today make decisions. He asserts that in the past people completed their education moving into the workplace where they remained in the one job until they retired. Indigenous participants in a study completed by Hanlen (2000c) believed that it was much more difficult for young people to get jobs

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today. A cycle of welfare dependence often results. (See Noel Pearson Chapter Seven)

Today students are not partitioning life in a linear way but rather seeing life as a mosaic of different goals, lives and experiences. They want education not only to meet their academic needs but their social needs, self-esteem needs, connection and resilience needs. McCrindle refers to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. In the past, the more basic needs were met within the family unit and social organisations, such as youth groups. This disconnected generation (Y) have different backgrounds and therefore different needs. They carry a great deal of baggage and many feel hurt and let down by systems which they see as victimising them and portraying them as problematic. Hanlen (2000c) discusses ‘children under pressure’ noting that such children cannot achieve their potential. Families in Hanlen’s study believe that if their children are part of the decision making process in schools and about their own education, as they are in their homes and communities, they will have a better chance of achieving academic success. Hanlen relates this to child rearing practices noting that Indigenous children are given independence at an early age, which is not apparent at school. A role in making decisions is a way of replicating some of this home independence within the classroom.

McCrindle asserts that generation Y are multichanneled when they learn. When they’re on a computer they can type, listen to a C.D., be on the web, SMS a friend and eat their dinner! But most importantly for them, they are participants in the information and technological revolution. This Information Revolution is as irreversible as the Industrial Revolution. (Oseas, 2001)

McCrindle’s research into the learning channels of students revealed that in the 1970’s, 80% of students were auditory learners. In the 1990’s 80% of students were visual and kinesthetic learners. As teachers we have to change to meet students needs even if we do not understand the change ourselves. Flexibility is a key to connecting with students today.
I have presented a general overview in this section of youth with Indigenous youth part of that culture. This is not to suggest 'youth' is a homogeneous social category but rather to alert the reader to the notion that the general population of young people today are facing a dynamic and changing world. These global changes have brought changes in the way people think and do things. When we are devising our policies and teaching programs it is imperative that we consider the changes that affect this young population. Whilst we must recognise our students as individuals striving for acknowledgement, many of whom are disempowered and disengaged, we must see that there is a collective population within the Indigenous community, of students who are struggling to achieve comparable outcomes with their non-Indigenous peers.

Conclusion

This literature review has attempted to lay the foundations upon which the remaining chapters are built. Recurrent themes emerged which form the framework for analysis in the following chapters. I have drawn on international research and research completed in Australia. There are threads of commonality that have emerged, despite differences in the participant groups, government policies and historical and contemporary social issues at the forefront of peoples lives. We have seen that the importance of making teaching practices congruent with home practices and encouraging and nurturing home school partnerships is a vital ingredient for students from diverse backgrounds and their academic success at school. The recognition of difference is another necessary component that must be present in our school programs. Teachers need to see education as a process that takes place both inside and outside schools, that is within the family and the community as well as in formal education. As educators we should be aware of and sensitive to the differing social contexts of our families and build on what families are already doing at home. These partnerships and the importance of shared understandings about literacy between the school community and families, is critical.
In Chapter Three I will look briefly at the history of Western education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The discussion then moves to the recognition that schools have failed to meet the needs of many Indigenous students. I then move to a discussion that attempts to theorise literacy. The nature of literacy is a term that means different things to different people. In this section, definitions of literacy are explored and I narrate my own stories and experiences of literacies in working with Indigenous families trying to extrapolate from them a working definition of literacy for subsequent chapters. These stories are critical as they provide the reader with insights as to how literacy is a complex tapestry of skills "woven together by threads of different dimensions. The intricate patterns that emerge are a function of the interactions between the dimensions." (Britto and Brooks-Gunn 2001 p. 86). I have borrowed Thompson's (2002) design of the 'virtual schoolbag' to further illustrate this notion of the multiple forms of literacy that individual students bring to school. The final section of this chapter considers the work of Freire on culturally responsive pedagogies. Freire was a leader in this field and his work and ideology continue to provide inspiration.
Chapter 3: Theorising Literacy

In the opening paragraph of this thesis (Chapter One) I noted that questions are continually raised about what literacy is, why it is important, why we should value it, and why there seem to be increasing numbers of people who are illiterate. There are questions about national literacy standards and the subsequent ranking of Indigenous students. We are inundated with statistics revealing difficulties encountered by Indigenous students to reach benchmarks. As stated earlier, initiatives have been implemented, reports have been written and many millions of dollars have been spent. The public is aware of the situation, and yet Western education systems are unable to make a difference.

It is with these questions in mind that this chapter discusses briefly the history of Western education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. I then move to a discussion on the demonstrated failure of schools to meet the needs of Australian Indigenous students, and the theories that informed policy and practice.

The next section theorises literacy. In this section, definitions of literacy are explored and I narrate my own stories and experiences of literacies to highlight the diversity of the many knowledges and skills that are brought to school by students from widely varying backgrounds. I incorporate Thompson’s (2002) use of the ‘virtual schoolbag’ to further illustrate this notion.

The final section of this chapter deals with culturally responsive pedagogies and inclusivity. Fundamental to this, is the work of Freire, which is discussed in this chapter. Although the work of Freire is considered by some to be outdated, the central issues concerning oppression are still relevant. This chapter has been included because the learning and literacy theories that underpin the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have clearly failed these students. It exemplifies the diverse nature of literacy and its ‘situatedness’. As educators we must incorporate this knowledge into our pedagogies.
Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: a brief history of education and literacy learning

Like all societies, Indigenous Australians have always had both formal and informal systems of education. Indigenous children are immersed in a close social life of family groups where informal instruction by parents and opportunities to imitate them are provided. Everyday skills and social codes are learned. In the past and still today, formal instruction is required for ceremonial and Law systems and skills such as hunting, the making of weapons, food preparation and the learning of kinship systems with the associated obligations are learnt. (McConnochie 1973) On mainland Australia following European arrival the education of Aboriginal children became an objective of the nation's colonisers. Lachlan Macquarie, an early governor of the new colony, established the first 'Native Institution' in 1814. He employed a Superintendent for Educating, whom he charged with teaching 'habits of industry and decency.' In the following two decades, similar institutions were established elsewhere, all preparing Aboriginal children for servant roles. (McConnochie 1973)

Also at this time, in more remote parts of Australia, the lifestyles of the Indigenous people were to change forever for "Wherever there are men, missionaries are bound to go" (Peel, 1947 p. 70) and go they did! This line was exclaimed by one of the first missionary teachers of the Torres Strait in 1871. He was part of the London Missionary Society whose main aim was to convert the 'heathen' and 'unenlightened' nations to Christianity. Church missions worked amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the early nineteenth century. Teasedale and Whitelaw (1981) report that "With few exceptions the missionaries were convinced that the Aborigines could progress only if given an education based on the Christian
religion." (1981, p. 12-13) The missionaries rapidly modified the social life of the people, finding many of their traditional practices 'wicked'. (Peel, 1947) After some thirty years in the Torres Strait, the Anglican church took over continuing the work done by their London predecessors. According to Teasedale and Whitelaw (1981) the first white settlers were completely unsuccessful in their attempts to educate Aboriginal people. The reason for this failure lay in their totally ethnocentric attitudes and presupposition of white superiority. "The white settlers had no real appreciation of the complex social, religious and cultural life of the Aborigines, and it was inconceivable to them that any Aborigine could belong other than in the servant class." (Teasedale and Whitelaw 1981, p.13)

Despite this failure, attempts to educate Aboriginal children continued. Teasedale and Whitelaw (1981) note the endeavours of white missionaries, administrators and some prominent citizens in their education programs, brought frustration and disappointment. With existing statistics that reveal academic underachievement by Indigenous students, it is clear that as educators we haven’t got it right yet! What is clear is that we are failing Indigenous students. The same issues continue to be tabled, policies written and programs implemented. Why have we failed to make a positive difference to the educational outcomes for Indigenous students?

Theorising the failure of schools.

When I began researching and writing this section, the title was 'theorising educational failure.' This seemed inappropriate. More apt was the title 'theorising the failure of schools.' As I read through texts designed to inform about the recurrent disadvantage of Indigenous students in school systems I could see how many of the teachers I work with, and indeed myself, continue to perpetuate the historical myths surrounding intelligence and cognitive functioning. Just recently a colleague talked with me on the phone asking if I knew the rules of soccer. Unfortunately I could not help her, but she had been charged with umpiring soccer matches during the weekly Friday afternoon inter-school sports. Her class, a Year 6/7 was predominantly
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In one incident a group of visiting Indigenous students were being reprimanded by a teacher from a school with mostly Anglo students and families. They gave him a mouthful of their thoughts on the matter to which he responded by challenging them to a spelling test to prove his prowess and superiority over them and their subordination and lack of assumed skill and knowledge. He regarded himself and his non-Indigenous students as superior in intelligence, and at the same time subverted the Indigenous students sense of self-worth. It is one incident in a sea of many.

This section traces the history of policies and theories about Indigenous student failure at school. We do not have to go very far back to see that blame is a recurrent theme. 'It's their fault. They are not as clever as us'. The 'us' and 'them' dichotomy prevails and serves to explain away issues surrounding school failure and subsequently very little is achieved at the policy and practice levels.

**Deficit explanations for educational failure**

The first theories to consider educational failure in Indigenous children used 'deficit' as their central premise. The following is an excerpt written in 1944 by the Reverend J. H. Sexton who was President of the Aborigines Friends Association in South Australia.

"The best minds agree that in teaching the native, attention must be given to the fact that book learning is to a great extent unnecessary, as the aboriginal is still in the crude picture-writing stage." (Sexton, 1944 p.66)

The society claimed it was 'working for the good of the Aboriginals.' Twenty five years later, DeLemos (1969) studied intellectual development in the light of Piaget's well known theories of development. In her report she writes, "These findings clearly indicate that the concept of conservation develops much later in Aboriginal children than in European and in some cases
appears not to develop at all. According to Piaget's theory this concept is basic to all logical thinking, and this retardation would therefore indicate that intellectual development proceeds much more slowly in the Aboriginal culture, and that in general Aborigines would achieve a lower level of intellectual functioning than is normally achieved in the European culture."

(1969, p. 255) Deficit explanations continued with many researchers even into the 1980's. (Teasedale and Whitelaw 1981)

Based on theories of social Darwinism, genetic differences were claimed to be the cause of school failure. These theories were subsequently discredited and replaced with cultural deficit theories. (Teasedale and Katz 1968) According to these theories children were deficient in experiences, language and values that were required for school success. Trouw (1999) examined the earlier deficit theories of minority student failure, which the author suggests, were characterised by ignorance and intolerance of language variation. McElwain and Kearney (1973) report on the intelligence testing of Aboriginal children. "Certain characteristic weaknesses.....have been found." (1973, p. 43) The authors go on to suggest that these weaknesses "may arise from linguistic and experiential factors applying in infancy." (1973, p. 43) Nurcombe and Moffitt, (1973) in attempting to identify the cause of low academic achievement in Indigenous students write, "The fringe-dweller's home contains no books, magazines or pictures. There are few of those toys and objects that provide the child with the early sensori-motor experiences underlying concepts of number... Adults speak or read to him infrequently. If he is distressed he is comforted by body contact or feeding, not by words. If he annoys he is curbed with a phrase, not offered an explanation. His parents, moreover are poor language models." (1973, p. 130-131) So it was the homes and communities of Indigenous children that became the site of blame for cultural deficit theorists. (Kale 1995)

Trouw (1999) suggests that many teachers are still operating on deficit models of education for minority students. (See also Washington, 2001) The author reports that assumptions of deficiency, fail to consider the strengths of the culture from which the students come.
Aboriginal children are still considered to be uneducable because they came from homes lacking in intellectual stimulation. They are also considered deficient in language as their Standard Australian English skills are lacking.

Deprivation and Compensation explanations for educational failure

Theories of deficit were followed with those of deprivation and compensation. Teasedale and Whitelaw (1981) describe six, nation wide, early childhood programs for Aboriginal students. The theoretical underpinnings for each of these projects is based largely on studies that reached Australia at this time, that were referred to as the North American Compensatory Education Approach. Underlying this approach are concepts of cumulative deficit stemming from a cycle of economic disadvantage. Environmental explanations of child growth and development led to the solution of the 'deprived' or 'disadvantaged' child. Policies and programs were implemented to intervene in the cycle of poverty by providing compensatory experiences during the preschool years.

Twenty years earlier, Lewis (1965) had theorised a culture of poverty and consequent deprivation. In his once famous text, La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty he wrote:

"The culture of poverty is both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified, highly individuated capitalistic society. It represents an effort to cope with feelings of hopelessness and despair which develop from the realisation of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society........ Once it (culture of poverty) comes into existence it tends to perpetuate itself from generation to generation because of its effect on the children........Most frequently the culture of poverty develops when a stratified social and economic system is
breaking down or is being replaced by another during periods of rapid technological change. Often it results from imperial conquest in which the native social and economic structure is smashed and the natives are maintained in a servile, colonial status, sometimes for many generations. The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty are the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and are already partially alienated from it.” (Lewis 1965 p. xlviii-xlix)

Lewis’s terminology is dated, as is the compensatory approach. The most fundamental criticism leveled against the above theories is that they measure social characteristics of a population against those of the idealised norm of majority culture, which becomes the benchmark against which the subordinate ‘others’ are considered. This ethnocentric notion was based on our often indiscreet and unremitting surveillance of families whom we judge: a punishment, as it were, for not fitting the ideal mould. However, if we could, in an ideal world, lose the labels, and consider the situation in the light of a pluralistic approach, then is there some application for Lewis’s comments. Indigenous people have been marginalised. According to statistics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain the most economically disadvantaged people in Australia. "By almost all socioeconomic indicators, Indigenous persons are the most disadvantaged group in Australia. Indigenous persons experience much higher unemployment rates, lower average incomes, lower participation and achievement in the education system, much higher rates of incarceration, higher infant mortality rates and poorer health and housing situations that non-Indigenous persons." (Australian Bureau of Statistics.) Taylor (1997) writes that socioeconomic status should not be taken as a description of people and their characteristics but rather a description of the structural opportunities afforded to family members as they seek employment and take care of their children. Social and economic participation disadvantages and suppresses some families while advantaging others.
Rather than pursuing compensatory approaches, there is greater value in understanding the nature of difference to promote a horizontal orientation whereby all cultures are considered equal and valued, as opposed to the vertical orientation in which mainstream culture is the norm and all other cultures are substandard. We should not tacitly accept this difference but work it into our teaching and learning systems to celebrate the differences.

Deprivation and compensation explanations of academic failure aimed to 'normalise'. The normative model led to policies whereby assimilation was the goal. In some cases workers were recruited whose implicit goal was to 'sanitize' (Kale 1995) the homes and families of members of minority groups by encouraging them to emulate the behaviours of white middle class people. In Australia, in December 2004, John Howard introduced a face washing for fuel program. Under this scheme Indigenous families would force their children to wash their faces in return for community petrol bowsers. The government calls such initiatives 'mutual responsibility' programs. Critics suggest they are racially oppressive and paternalistic. The suggestion that under this scheme bureaucrats would conduct intrusive checks is reminiscent of the 'sanitization' programs mentioned above. (Karvelas and Banks for The Australian, Friday 10 December 2004.)

As already stated, many intervention programs for Aboriginal students were established based on deficit and deprivation theories. Remediation programs were designed to fill cognitive and linguistic deficiencies. From this it was expected that minority children's failure in school could be counteracted if, in the months immediately preceding school entry, the remediation programs began. As Kale (1995) points out, intervention programs engaged researchers and trained workers to go into the homes of 'indigent' (Gordon 1969, p57) families from minority cultures. Here they set about showing unskilled mothers how to advance and better their infant and preschool children's linguistic and cognitive abilities so that they would not fail in school.
There has been much written about the American project, Head Start, which was an attempt by President Johnson in 1965 to achieve equal opportunity for all members of society. Social competence for disadvantaged children was the main aim of Head Start. (See Zigler and Valentine 1979) The foundations lay in the belief that pre-school education, coupled with health and nutrition programs would improve a child’s long-term social and intellectual performance. Whilst Project Head Start was a major federal effort and the largest nationwide program of its kind it was reported that over time, gains were statistically insignificant. (Bronfenbrenner 1979 and Nielson 1989) The project did, however, act as a catalyst for many American communities to improve their educational, health and social services to the poor. It also influenced the implementation of similar programs in Australia.

In Brisbane, in the 1970’s, Margaret Henry helped institute a program called The Inala program for Aboriginal parents and infants. This was designed to help Aboriginal mothers support their babies intellectual growth in the home environment. Henry writes a great deal about ‘cultural deprivation’ and the need to provide the mothers with support to help them achieve school success for their children with the early intervention program. This may have been an attempt to disguise deficit theory but there were some important contributions made by the report.

"While many middle class parents take it confidently for granted that they have an important part to play in their children’s development and education, this has often not been so for non middle-class parents, including those from ethnic minority groups. Feelings of powerlessness engendered by long exclusion from the power bases of majority culture and by the frustrations and unpredictability of their lives, have caused many parents in minority groups to feel that they have little role to play in the education of their children, that this is an area to be left to the experts in schools. As we have noted, this is a feeling that education systems have done little to dispel. At the same time, parental attitudes of powerlessness are likely to be reflected in child-rearing practices that do
not promote optimal development but perpetuate themselves in further
defeatism and powerlessness" (Henry 1980 p.4-5)

This sentiment is still relevant today. Deficit models and the cultural deprivation model
discussed thus far, were often the result of work by psychologists (Kale 1995). Framed within
narrow prescriptive practices, many failed to improve outcomes for Indigenous children. The
next section considers models of ‘difference’ that aimed to generate strategies based on
understandings and acknowledgement of difference in student populations.

The Difference explanation for educational failure

The third model for failure theorised a mismatch between expectations and practices of homes
and those of the classroom. (Kale 1995) This was the difference model. The theories
surrounding this model purport that children from minority cultures are not deprived but
different. Kale (1995) writes that it was the lack of a ’good fit’ between the culturally learned
behaviours of the home environment and those of the classrooms that were considered to be
the source of educational failure. Baratz and Baratz (1970) note that in this model minority
children possessed a distinctive culture as valid in its own right as mainstream culture, and
failure to recognise and utilise existing cultural forms constitutes a form of institutional
racism.

Erickson (1987) supported the ‘theory of difference’ model suggesting cultural and linguistic
differences between family discourse and practices and those of schools, were a source of
interactional difficulties and miscommunications for minority students. Other researchers
echoing Erickson’s assertions include Cazden (1988) Corson (1992) and Malcolm (1982). These
writers maintain that students approach and complete classroom activities in ways that are
consistent with their own cultural norms and values but which differ from classroom
expectations. For example, Michaels (1981) notes that variations of narrative styles in ethnically mixed classes during 'sharing time' can be at variance with teacher expectations and may affect school performance. Studies of interactions and communicative styles of homes and classroom environments include those of Heath (1983), Au and Jordan (1981) and Malin (1991). These researchers suggested that culturally different home interactions and communicative patterns had the potential to lead to low educational outcomes.

Space does not permit an extended discussion of bilingual programs but no discussion of Indigenous students and literacy can afford to ignore them completely. In the 1970’s bilingual programs were introduced in some schools with predominantly Indigenous student populations. The 1980’s saw significant development in language policy and education in Australia. Indigenous languages in schools were used to promote language maintenance and recognised that bilingual education has a significant and positive impact on the academic and cognitive development of Aboriginal children. Nicholls (1994), Labov (1972) and Baratz and Baratz (1970) moved the notion that language/dialect should be seen as a resource rather than a barrier and as such a child’s first language should be valued. More recently education policies have moved away from bilingual education programs. In 1998 the Northern Territory government decided to phase out long established bilingual programs for Indigenous students in many remote communities. This decision may have had economic advantages for the government, but the suggestion that replacing these programs with ESL programs would benefit students and communities, is discriminatory. The bilingual programs operated on theories of understanding cultural and linguistic ‘difference’ and are driven by principles of social justice.

The three theories, deprivation, compensation and difference, are not clear cut and appear to borrow and intersect with each other. Deficit and deprivation explanations of failure operate within an 'us and them' framework. Both consider the child to be lacking and blame families and caregivers for the deficits. They operate on the notion that mainstream culture is the norm against which all other cultures are judged - almost always as subordinate. Both seek to
‘normalise’ children through a process of assimilation. Deficit and deprivation models imply notions of imperfection, inferiority, shortcomings, defectiveness and incompleteness and both fail to acknowledge the structural causes of widespread socio-economic problems. Models of difference theorise a mismatch between home and classroom practices. The intention is not to ‘blame’ or criticise, but rather understand the differences and operate within a framework that bridges these differences in an attempt to make home and school learning more compatible, and improve student outcomes.

In the next section I look at literature which has attempted to define literacy, from the early traditional notions, through to our present day understandings. This definition is in a continual state of flux as our world changes at a pace many find hard to keep up with. Despite this there are some common threads, which permeate the definitions, and these are identified in the following section.

Theorising Literacy.

This section is dedicated to trying to establish an understanding of the nature of literacy. What is it exactly? What does it involve? The notion of what literacy is, is critical to this thesis as it lays foundations upon which my own observations of literacy events in Indigenous families are recorded and analysed in the remaining chapters. If we are to believe early theorists we would be right in concluding that literacy is solely about reading and writing. In 1898, Tylor, (cited by Collins and Blot 2003 p.9) noted that,

"The invention of writing was the greatest movement by which mankind rose from barbarism to civilization. How vast its effect was, may be measured by looking at the low tribes still living without it, dependent on memory for their traditions and rules of life, and unable to amass knowledge as we do by keeping records of events, and storing up new observations for the use of future generations. Thus it is no doubt right to draw a line between barbarian and civilized where the art of writing
comes in, for this gives permanence to history, law, and science. Such knowledge so
goes with writing, that when a man is spoken of as learned, we at once take it to
mean that he has read many books, which are the main source men learn from."

Low tribes, primitive savages are contrasted here with modern, urban, civilised societies where
widespread literacy and technology abound. (Gee 1996) And yet as Muecke (1992) notes, whilst
colonisers in Australia assumed Indigenous cultures had no writing systems, pictographic
representations were prolific, the difference being that this system did not record the sounds
of language. The early colonisers believed that alphabetic scripts were the only real form of
writing and therefore Aboriginal people were illiterate. Muecke suggests the French term
‘analphabete’ (meaning not having an alphabet) is more appropriate.

Gee (1996) notes that earlier anthropological research which drew a dichotomy between modern
man and the inferior, unsophisticated, non-literate cultures, has been put to rest by the
Strauss presented his work as a dichotomy between cultures, he introduced this dichotomy in
terms of ways of knowing or what he called ‘two distinct modes of scientific thought.’ (Gee
1996 p. 48) The physical and natural world is approached from two completely antithetical ends.
One is concrete and the other is abstract. Further to this, Jack Goody in his ‘Domestication of
the savage mind’ (1977) explains how changes in modes of thought and cultural organisation are
the result of the development and spread of literacy. Essentially Goody suggests the acquisition
of writing transforms the nature of cognitive and social processes and marks a distinction
between primitive and advanced cultures. Goody’s work can be translated into what has become
known in academic circles with regard to orality and literacy being ‘the great divide’ (Gee 1996
p.51) in human culture. This phrase finds virtue in Walter Ong’s work on orality versus literacy
in different cultures. This was an influential text in the 1980’s. Ong writes.

Oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful performances of high
artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken
possession of the psyche. Nevertheless, without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials, cannot produce other beautiful and powerful creations. In this sense, orality needs to produce, and is destined to produce writing. Literacy, as will be seen, is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language (including oral speech) itself. (Ong 1982 p. 15)

A cursory glance at Ong’s work reveal it to be an outdated framework. In our new globalised world this is an historical notion, as it is becoming increasingly less possible to distinguish between two major cultural forms, that is, oral and literate.

It could be suggested that some educators today and those who write and implement policy are living in an anthropological vacuum, the roots of which are found in Tylor’s (1898) explication, (cited in Collins and Blot 2002), on writing and primitive cultures cited at the beginning of this chapter. In the next section I look at the definitions of literacy as proposed by a number of influential researchers and sources both international and local. I will then present a definition that I believe suits the purposes of this thesis and encompasses the nature of literacy today.

**Definitions of literacy**

How do researchers define literacy? Historical notions of literacy would have us believe that it is about reading and writing. A literate person is therefore someone who can do just that. However, in the past three decades some researchers have challenged ideas of the restricted notions of literacy. A number of researchers have been prominent including Heath (1983), Street (1995) and Finnegan (1988) and Barton and Hamilton (1998). As teachers, we know that literacy practices are changing rapidly in our globalised world. These are largely in response to the broad social, economic and technological changes. This can be seen not only in education, but
in the workplace, the media and in everyday life. This rapid world change is a fact that most would not debate. The change is not the usual intergenerational change that we expect from past experience, but a change which has created new values, new ways of relating to other human beings and new organisational procedures. (Stromquist, 2002; vii)

Gee (1992), Street (1984) Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic (2000) and Lonsdale and McCurry (2004) consider literacy to be a social practice, conceptualising a link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which these are embedded. Street (1995) discusses literacy as a social practice, a sentiment echoed by Gee (1996). Coupled with this is the cross-cultural perspective afforded by the 'New Literacy Studies' (Street, 1995)

"...an important shift has been the rejection by many writers of the dominant view of literacy as a 'neutral', technical skill, and the conceptualisation of literacy instead as an ideological practice, implicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practices - ......From this perspective the relationship between written and oral language differs according to context - there is no one universal account of 'the oral' and 'the written'." (Street 1995 p.1)

Barton and Hamilton (2000) assert that a basic unit of a social theory of literacy is that of literacy practices. These literacy practices are what people do with literacy. Barton and Hamilton suggest that embedded within these literacy practices are values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. The underlying theme of Barton and Hamilton's notions about the nature of literacy practices, is that they are mediated by written texts.

The National Literacy Plan as presented by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs defines literacy as "the ability to read and use written information and write appropriately in a range of contexts. It also involves the integration of speaking,
listening,........what is involved in each of these language modes varies according to context, purpose and audience." (Early Childhood Association, 2004)

The Queensland Studies Authority (2003) asserts that literacy is the "particular social practices that use language for thinking and making meaning in cultures. It includes speaking and listening, reading and viewing, writing and shaping, often in combination in multimodal texts within a range of contexts. Critical thinking is also involved in these practices." (English Year 1-10 syllabus page 4, 2003). McLaren (1999a) whose definition I quoted in the opening page of chapter one talks of literacy as knowledge. Like the Queensland Studies Authority McLaren refers to the notion of the multimodality of different knowledges, the command of which amounts to literacy and a literate individual. His definition embroils notions of human expression and communication.

Fleer and Williams-Kennedy (2002) consider literacy to be about human expression, communication and interaction. Their research into literacy development in young Indigenous children highlights the enormous diversity in home literacy practices among and within cultural groups. One parent and teacher participant from an Arnhem Land community in the Northern Territory sums up Indigenous literacy when she comments:

"Literacy is language.
Literacy is how we communicate.
Literacy is in dancing, singing....culture.
Literacy is how to pass on a message to younger children and to everyone else.
Literacy is how we communicate, not just reading and writing.
Literacy is everything else....." (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy 2002, p. 100)

Hanlen (2002a) notes that since European invasion, many traditional literacies are no longer practiced or have been modified as a result of government policies and practices. Hanlen identifies two broad sets of literacy practices that were utilised by communities prior to
invasion and continue today. These were 'inspirational' and 'environmental'. "Inspirational literacies involve the transference of the meaning of thoughts regarding practices, ideas, records of events, messages, warnings, educational information and directions into tangible, decontextualised forms. ....They do not constitute written language or text using phonemic- or syllabic-graphemic relationships, but they do convey meaning." (Hanlen, 2002a p. 219-220) This includes, rock art, body art, bark and tree paintings and carvings, oral literature and songs. Environmental literacies are the knowledge and understandings that people use to read and interpret the natural world. This includes reading the seasons, astral phenomenon, landmarks, tracks, recognition and use of flora and fauna for daily needs. (Hanlen 2002a)

In line with Hanlen are Hohepa and McNaughton (2002) who discuss Maori literacy. They adopt the view that literacy involves not only knowledge and understanding, the oral and written language, but 'reading' the natural and spiritual world. They assert this includes a knowledge of history and understanding and addresses the effects of colonisation. This notion of literacy encompasses an ability to use language to control definitions of culture, knowledge and identity.

Schirato and Yell (2000) discuss the notion of cultural literacy referring to "the rules, both official and unofficial, by which various cultural fields operate; the genres and discourses that characterise different cultural fields and the relationship within a culture between economic and cultural capital." (p. 35-36) The terms cultural field and cultural capital are not new. Schirato and Yell suggest the former consists of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices. The latter, which Schirato and Yell draw from Bourdieu's work, refer to both material things and culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority. Bourdieu (1984 and 1991) uses the concept of cultural capital to describe the relationship between literacy and social disadvantage. The amount of power a person has within a field is dependent on that person's position within the field. This position is, in turn, based a great deal on the amount of capital the person possesses. (Schirato and Yell 2000) Schirato and Yell suggest their theory complements the work of Bourdieu, who asserts that cultural capital is
closely affiliated with status, class and mobility. Schools are instrumental in transmitting, maintaining and distributing cultural capital through the "selection and valorising of particular literacy practices." (Bull and Anstey, 1997 p. 12)

The omnipresent communicative aspect of cultural activities is tied up with notions of cultural literacy. Communication must be considered one of the core signifiers of literacy. A person must understand meaning systems, signs and signifiers, and be able to negotiate those systems within a variety of cultural contexts. (Schirato and Yell 1996.) Barthes (1982) in his essay 'Empire of Signs' illustrates that in Japanese culture there is a fundamental use of signifers and signs, which he refers at times as 'writings'. These must be understood and read in order for us to arrive at meaning. He illustrates to the reader how a performance of the theatrical Bunraku dolls must be read as a series of codes. The dolls are operated like puppets, their moveable hands, feet and mouths are accompanied by musicians and vocalists producing a script that portrays a 'whole cuisine of emotion' (p.49) The emotion is externalised and becomes 'a reading'. To Barthes the movements of the puppets, the vocalisations and the music are the silent writings.

After reading Barthes I turned again to my experiences with the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land. The turtle hunt is one literacy event with a multiplicity of codes and writings. We could explain it thus.... The turtle glides with a fluid grace until the spear, whose journey is in harmony with the whole superbly composed scene, reaches its destination. Participants are seated in prescribed positions in the boat and the meat each receives is dependant on seating arrangements in the boat at the time of capture. The turtle is killed with respect and even tenderness. There is no disregard. It is cut with care following a defined sequence that has been handed down by the ancestors. Many other protocols are observed including the belief that the first turtle a man/boy catches, must be eaten by his grandparents.1 So the systems of

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1 This information about the turtle hunt was conveyed to me by the Yolngu people of Elcho Island. Permission has been granted to use it here.
behaviour, or the culture is made up of thousands of details which must be 'read' by participants in that culture. These are codes and fragments of codes that are decoded - literacies. Some are transmitted explicitly and others are acquired through engagement. Elaborate messages are conveyed, couched in a variety of forms. In this sense literacy is communication.

The parallels I found in Barthes descriptions of the rich Japanese cultural signs, symbols and codes, and those of the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land are communicated and read amongst the community, many of which form the core of Yolngu identity. LoBianco (2001) describes the dimensions of literacy but focusses on the notion of literacy as a written phenomenon. The Oxford English Dictionary (2002) also adopts a similar definition but goes on to define literate as "1. Able to read and write" and "2. Knowledgeable in a particular field; computer literate."

The fields of literacy is a useful notion in the definition of literacy. We can reel off the many and varied literacy forms that exist in our society such as computer literacy, film literacy, moral literacy, social literacy, political literacy and technical literacy, to name but a few. Most of the teachers I work with acknowledge the validity of these forms of literacy and yet we still continue to reduce literacy in schools to the skills of reading and writing. I can make mechanical utterings of many languages that I read. But I cannot interpret most of these texts at any level. I can neatly scribe and spell accurately (with spell check) but I cannot write as a creative author. Which of the meanings should we embrace?

Wilmot (1981 cited by Purdon 2001), in attempting to explain the failure of many Aboriginal students to become literate, suggested that two forms of literacy exist. Technical literacy is very formal. It refers to the words that are written and reflects the discourse of the content. Cultural literacy is understanding the culture within the context of the text. So it is possible to become technically literate as in the example in the previous paragraph, but difficult to understand a text if one is not culturally literate.
Myers (1992) asserts that "literacy is not about jargon or about ideologies or about obscurities. It is about honesty and about curiosity and about trying to express yourself in as lucid a way as possible." (1992, p. 7) He uses the term 'creative literacy' which he suggests is not about mechanics of writing, or the kind of computer literacy that is devoid of enthusiasm, poetry, love or religion. True literacy, Myers argues, is about "finding something which is worth saying, and saying it eloquently and strikingly." (1992, p. 9)

Price (1990) described literacy as a common form of art and ideas. In her discussion on 'traditional' Aboriginal literacy, she perceives this phenomenon as the enshrining of history, heritage and cultures in paintings on bark, on bodies, on cave walls, and in sand as well as in dance and song: a literacy that was privileged information depending on one's wisdom and maturity. This point is echoed in the words of Jimmy Jampijimpa Robertson (1990) an Indigenous Australian.

"When some other yapa community come and have a look at your paintings there, they just talk that one, and read that one. They know which way it started and where it finished and which one is sacred site. Same as paper again. Kardiya (European, non-Aboriginal) can't read it. No. [Laughing] They got to look that paper. They got to read from a book, not from a painting. Kardiya are just looking at patterns, [patting] you know. He doesn't know about all that one, what's in there."
(Jimmy Robertson Jampijimpa interviewed by Christine Nicholls at Lajamanu April 1990 in Ryan 1990 p. 25)

The above definitions reveal that early conceptualisations of literacy were limiting and ethnocentric. It is becoming clear that literacy is not a uni-dimensional event, nor is it static or uniform. I will leave the definition briefly here to engage in some narrative reflections of my own understandings about what literacy is. These stories are intended to illustrate the multi-dimensional nature of literacy and how literacy practices are embedded within culture making
these practices situationally and culturally idiosyncratic. I will then merge theory and practice in an attempt to construct a working definition of literacy that can be used in the following chapters.

My Literacy stories

My experiences with, and understanding of, literacy has been a personal journey whereby I have come to understand the concept of literacy as a great deal more than simply reading and writing. I appreciate the diversity of this social phenomenon which inspires Ohmann to write,

"Literacy is an activity of social groups, and a necessary feature of some kinds of social organisation. Like every other human activity or product, it embeds social relations within it. And these relations always include conflict as well as cooperation. Like language itself literacy is an exchange between classes, races, the sexes and so on."

(cited by Collins and Blot 2003 p.34)

My own stories have been included to reaffirm what I have come to believe about what literacy is and to challenge further the traditional notions and definitions. I have also chosen to include them as they have informed my practice as a teacher and subsequently informed the way I have observed the subjects of this study in later chapters.

As a young and inexperienced teacher I saw literacy as simple. It was reading and writing. You either could read and write, or you couldn’t. Most of the students I taught (or so I thought) couldn’t, and I despaired. I first taught deaf students. Their literacy was limited. I moved to ESL migrant teaching. These students I also perceived to have limited literacy skills.

I had always had a yearning to work in remote Aboriginal communities. My grandfather had been a missionary at Hermannsberg. In fact my grandfather had written a series of small
booklets in the 1960’s for the Australian Board of Missions. They were in the bookshelf at home and I often thumbed through them, intrigued by a couple of the sepia toned photos. There was one of an Aboriginal family dressed in their Sunday best obviously ready to go to church and another of two men painted and decorated engaged in a tribal dance. Grandpa had been inspired by Pastor Doug Nichols whom he had met when he filled the role of minister at St Saviours Church in Collingwood Melbourne. Doug Nichols was an Aboriginal athlete who became pastor of the First Aboriginal Church of Christ in Australia. He became a personal friend of my grandfather. Through Doug Nichols grandpa became very active in the ABM, CMS and the Aboriginal Advancement League.

So in 1991 I found myself heading for a remote West Australian community in the Pilbara, a country that to an inner city Melbourne girl was a pitiless desert upon which nature had endowed scant tenderness. I expected that I would take my white middle class ideas of teaching literacy and transform the lives of these young desert Aboriginal children. I worked with missionary zeal! I taught my students about the solar system and weather. I taught them about plants and animals. Perhaps using the word ‘taught’ is inappropriate here. I never asked them about the stories they may have listened to around the fire at night or when they went bush. I was glad we had moved on from the sentiments of the Rev. J.H. Sexton, who noted that "the best minds agree that in teaching the native, attention must be given to the fact that book learning is to a great extent unnecessary as the aboriginal is still in the crude picture-writing stage." (Sexton. 1944, p.66) I was smug. My grandfather’s work at Hermannsberg occurred around the time Sexton published his views. Imagine thinking that! How archaic! How abhorrent! And yet, nearly 50 years later, upon reflection, I can see that I was in fact perpetuating a similar view.

I stood on the verandah and looked out across the vast and endless desert. The unforgiving heat haze that blurred the whole scene, the brilliant red earth, the shimmering expanses of spinifex and the majestic trees that were dotted in the distance, seemed to my Western
eyes, all that were out here. To me the surrounds were a hostile opponent that I would often curse. To the desert people it was their home and their provider, the source of their Law and ceremony. Their literacies were firmly embedded in this land. One of the first literacies I encountered, and sadly it is only now that I can recognise it as a literacy, were the deed boards belonging to the Pilbara community in which I worked. A series of boards piled high under a tree with carvings and etchings scratched carefully into each one. The markings represented sacred sites and showed significant landmarks such as rocks, waterholes even certain trees. All of these natural phenomenon were the work of the spirit ancestors who came from behind the sun in the Dreamtime, a visual interpretation of the 'songlines' so eloquently recorded by Bruce Chatwin (1987) where the people's knowledge of the land allows them to read it like a 'musical score'. (Chatwin 1987) According to his sources, the songlines are both maps and direction finders and "a way of communication between the most far flung tribes." (1987: 15)

Many of the deed boards had been stolen from the people by early European explorers and were now, hundreds of years later, being returned to their owners. I was told that when a board arrives, clan leaders are brought together to discuss the ownership. These boards can be hundreds of years old. One observer told me that there is never any dissension as to where the board belongs. The graphically represented land forms and features are instantly recognisable by the people who know the land as an artist knows his paint and a poet his words. Superbly carved and perfectly expressed. As intricate as the novelist weaves a story.

This is literacy. Interestingly, Levi-Strauss (1966) talks of the churinga of central Australian Aranda people, which aligns with the notion of deed boards. He describes the churinga boards as "documentary archives" (1966 p.238) and includes in his text a detailed explication by Gillen from The Native Tribes of Central Australia, 1938. Levi-Strauss reprints Gillen's drawings of the Churinga of an Aranda man of the Frog totem (1966 p. 240) revealing descriptions and accompanying meanings of the engravings that include concentric circles, straight and curved lines and dotted lines. The complicated networks of lines and symbolic
signs that represent ancestors, are guarded generation after generation as the living people read and perform sacred rituals associated with these churinga. Levi-Strauss is not using the churinga to illustrate literacy. This is my interpretation.

During frequent trips on the back of the community vehicle, I can now reflect on and see the kids knowledge of the country. Another literacy. So literate in fact, but the most intrepid European explorers could not master this literacy. I could point to any feature of the landscape and even the youngest members of my class could tell me a story about it.

My literacy journey continued along its narrow path for many years. I went from the desert to a coastal Arnhem Land community. It was there that I encountered other literacies and in my closed Western way of thinking once again dismissed anything that didn’t fit my definition. One young boy I taught in this remote Aboriginal community had many things to teach me. I was organising a trip for my class of students aged between 11 and 14 years. I wanted to take them south and show them snow. We talked about it and prepared for a long time. I had a sizable enrollment but regular attendance was a problem with some students. I talked with the Indigenous principal and said that I would use the trip as an incentive and only take regular attenders. This would be the all important ‘carrot’ to entice unwilling students to school. Not sure what I think of these ‘incentive’ schemes anymore but that’s another issue. Anyway I called a parent and community members meeting to discuss some of my ideas and talk about other organisational issues. The mother of this student, whom I had judged to have extremely poor literacy, came up to me after the meeting. She asked if her son could be considered for the trip. He was a very, very irregular attender! I tried to explain that I only had 26 places and already at least some 30 regular attenders. I tried, as politely as I could to say that he would not be considered.

The next day the mother brought me $200 as a deposit for the trip. I fumbled clumsily and took the money. I had not made myself very clear and I presume the mother had interpreted
what I said as 'he can come if he starts to attend more regularly.' As it turned out I was able to take this student.

This young boy turned out to be the most wonderful cultural attaché of our expedition. He freely played the didgeridoo, danced and sang to large crowds of people, including the media. His spirited, powerful performances glowed in a recital that inspired and mesmerised. His perfectly expressed literacy in singing, music and dance culminated in some of the highlights of the trip.

I spoke to one of the Indigenous teachers that accompanied us. She said that this student was often taken to outstations and taught Law business. He had been recognised as someone who could learn and perform important ceremonial duties. I felt very ashamed of my narrow conceptions of what literacy was. So many times I had fallen into the trap of regarding as insignificant the literacies that are not mainstream, denying their validity and power. I spent many hours with the saltwater people of Arnhem land who laughed openly about my balanda ignorance. The students and Indigenous teachers brought their literacies into the classroom. I was very fortunate in my first year at Shepherdson College on Elcho Island. I team taught with an Indigenous teacher whose husband was an artist and important Mala Leader. He would sit in our classroom all day and paint, draw and tell stories. The students loved it. He started a mural on the back wall of the room and took some months to complete it. It was a painting of his mother country - Naypinya. He loved this country and told me many stories about it. One day another teacher came into the class. She looked at the mural and within seconds said, "That's Naypinya." "Yes," I answered, "Is it as beautiful as Gali says?" "I don't know," she said. "I've never been there." I asked her how she knew it was Naypinya if she had never been there. "By the songs" she replied. "I know the songs of this country and they tell about all the features that Gali has painted. They're just that way in the song. The two large rocks jutting out of the water are that shape and the bay is this shape." I couldn't believe that so much knowledge could be transmitted through song. I couldn't imagine how articulate the words of
The song must have been for people to connect a two-dimensional visual image with the descriptions in the song.

The young children I taught would often ask "What I call you Miss?" I found out after a series of the same questions that they meant, 'what was my relationship to them - based on the family that I had been adopted into. I would very ashamedly say, "I don't know", to which they responded, "well, who you call mummy?" I would answer, "Gurrutju." They would say "Gurrutju?" and the complex process of relating themselves back to the person I called mummy via this complicated mathematical system would begin. Moments later they would say, "You call me 'mukul" (aunty). I couldn't believe how they had grasped these formal complex connections and yet despite many 'lessons' on the kinship system, I was so challenged by the concept. Levi-Strauss (1966) makes mention of this concept in "societies, whose social organisation and marriage rules require the efforts of mathematicians for their interpretation..." (1966 p.243) Watson (1989) notes that young Yolngu children are instructed in the details of these relations from a very early age. She likens this to the way European children frequently rehearse number patterns and manipulations.

The people took the time to teach us Balanda people things about their culture. I hoped that my teaching was as passionate and thorough as I was being taught. The women would draw diagrams in the sand to help explain the complexities of the kinship system. "Wait, let me copy that down onto some paper," an artifact of my upbringing that I carried with me religiously. Before I could get a chance to unceremoniously etch it onto my paper and into my scrambled head, it would have been wiped away with the palm of a hand and more stories would be being told. The elaborate body art painted so meticulously for ceremonies was another system of complicated semiotics and story telling. I was painted for ceremony once. The stripes across my chest and the feather work were all indicative of the clan into which I was adopted. I participated in the Dhuwa ceremony for many hours. There were many people from neighbouring communities who
ushered me this way and that. They knew where I was supposed to be, based on the body painted patterns and colours and the feather work.

The visual and verbal art forms I watched like a stage performance. The man who adopted me into his family was one such storytelling artist. His name is Gali. With my limited Djamarrpuyngu and his limited English, we would 'talk' for hours as he recounted usually funny incidents that he always managed to find himself in. His delivery was brought to life. Far from conveying only one level of meaning, his oral stories could demonstrate a literacy complexity sometimes only associated with written forms. He would be one character involved in the action at the time it occurred and then switch and become another. Sometimes he would be the narrator. He was never wedded to one viewpoint. One story I remember so clearly, was performed in front of my visiting parents. He had made an elaborate stone axe as a gift for my father. He called him 'wawa' or brother. The axe was decorated with ochres and feathers but it was the feathers that were the source of the story. He had jumped the fence of some balanda people who were keeping chooks. The story of him getting caught on the fence, chasing the terrified birds and somehow capturing one was hysterical. In this story he was narrator, human character and chook. The sqwarking of the tormented chooks recreated the moment of the original event as though we were there. We were all captivated. The same way, hundreds of children at school would watch him perform a dance. "Morkoy" was the favourite. Still chained to my western need for artifacts I wish I had captured the events on video. The point is that the stories are told in a multimodal form. They are visual, oral and physical. They are an eloquent form of literacy and a source of deep and enduring knowledge. In a book titled 'Aboriginal Elders Voices: Stories of the tide of history' Uncle Les Stewart comments, "My Grandmother lived with us and she taught us all the old Koorie stories. They’d always tell us kids when we was goin’ to sleep....I got no education but I done plenty of learnin’. I got plenty of knowledge." (Les Stewart, cited by Margaret Tucker 2003 p.59) Gali’s identity is interwoven with this form of literacy and knowledge and he sees himself as having an important role to teach this skill to his children.
Gali was also a visual artist. His paintings were well-known for their uniqueness. He utilised the codified and symbolic patterns of traditional art work with its established rules, and figurative line drawings that depicted humans, animals and plants. He would then add his unique sense of humour to his art and put a big smiley face on one of the animals in his work. I presume the meaning of his art was 'read' differently by different people. Those who knew a great deal about Yolngu culture would undoubtedly bring different understandings to it and take away different meanings to someone such as myself. (See Jimmy Jampijimpa Robertson's comments earlier in this chapter regarding differences in Indigenous and non-Indigenous readings of art work). Yet Gali’s art work had the capacity to somehow transform the viewer/reader. I was drawn into the patterns, almost mesmerised by the line work as I listened to the story that was being depicted. These texts carry with them a great deal of importance. There were some that I was told could only be viewed by men who had reached a certain stage in the Law. Visual art has been modified with the interaction of Western culture but this literacy practice remains a source of knowledge and identity for the Yolngu.

The continuing thread of my narrative is simply to challenge the traditional definitions of what it means to be literate and what literacy is. I have begun to see that it is a complex human activity that cannot be separated from either people or place. I seek to be free of the restrictive notions of literacy, however I often revert to conventional and traditional concepts of this phenomenon. But some literacies are not meant to be recorded on paper. Some cannot be translated into Western concepts. Many learning styles are not bound by physical artifacts. Literacy should not be about archaic abstract theories. Mainstream literacies should not be imposed as the only way or the most desirable goal. To return to Myers (1992) "True literacy is not restricted to the soulless mechanics of grammar and pedantry. True literacy is finding something that is worth saying and saying it eloquently and strikingly." (Myers, 1992 p. 9) I would only add to Myers comment that literacy can be achieved through a variety of forms and without words.
The forms of literacy and pathways to literacy are many and varied. As a response to my own literacy stories I have employed a strategy used by Thompson (2002) to illustrate the different literacies and literacy artifacts individual students bring to school. The 'virtual schoolbag' exemplifies the classroom landscape in which many teachers today find themselves.

The Virtual schoolbag

Today many Australians like to see themselves as part of a pluralist society. Culture and diversity are valued and assimilation policies are considered a racist relic of a time now passed. In this climate cultural and religious groups practice and celebrate their own beliefs and values. With their 'virtual school bags' (Thompson, 2002), children come to formal education with a whole range of knowledges and skills, beliefs, experiences and values. The following stories illustrate this point. I have drawn a picture of two students I have taught. (Names have been changed.) Both are in the same class and are the same age. They are about to start their first day of school, 'virtual school bag' in hand. Inside it is full of things they have learnt at home, with their friends and in the community in which they live.

The first is a girl called Audrey. Her home language is English. She lives with her parents and younger brother in a large three bedroom house built by a mining company. The house is air conditioned throughout. Audrey’s school is within walking distance from her home. Her father is an engineer in a mining company and her mother is a trained nurse working at the local health clinic. Her mother is currently upgrading her qualifications through a university external course. Audrey has attended childcare and preschool. She loves using the computer at home and with the teacher's advice, her parents brought her some pre-reading computer games.
which she plays a lot at home. She has begun to recognise letters and some simple
words. She can read along with her favourite computer game and can write her own
name. She loves watching television but her parents only allow her to watch
programs from ABC Kids. She sings along with Playschool songs and knows many of
the cartoon introductory songs. She has favourite books and part of her nightly
ritual is to listen to three stories read by her father before she goes to sleep. She
answers all the 'book related’ questions and knows she must listen when she is
being read to.

Audrey also loves drawing and has talked to the preschool teacher about being an
architect when she grows up like her favourite uncle whom she has visited in New
Zealand. Audrey does the weekly grocery shopping with her mother who allows her
to choose some of the items whilst talking with her about healthy food, cost etc.

Audrey’s schoolbag consists of spoken and written English. She has well-practiced
reading behaviours and knowledge about computers, the adult work environment,
popular culture, travel, health issues, and some economic understanding.

Preston lives with his mother and father, two of his uncles, his grandmother and
grandfather, his two older brothers and younger sister and a number of cousin
brothers and sisters. Other family members frequently reside with the family. His
home language is the local Aboriginal language but he understands his grandmother’s
and grandfather’s languages which are different to his. He lives in a two bedroom
house about a fifteen minute drive from the small town where the school he
attends is. All the teachers at the school are white. It is too far to walk and he can
only attend when someone drives him in. His uncle has a car but is frequently not
there or he has no petrol for the vehicle. The house is on a beach and Preston’s father, uncles and older brothers and sister often go fishing in a little tinny (when there is fuel) for turtle, Queenfish, Red Emperor, or anything else that catches their bait. Preston fossicks on the beach with family members, playing with the spear he made with his father. He has long absences from school when he flies out to attend funeral ceremonies in other communities.

The adult members of Preston’s family have had different jobs working in the community shop and on CDEP projects. Preston loves staying up late and watching videos. He really likes ‘Chuckie’ and finds ‘Shaun of the Dead’ really funny. He likes action movies which are also frequently violent. His older brothers listen to popular music especially American gangster rap and the sound thumps on through the night while the adults play cards. Preston’s favourite time is going bush where he hunts and learns about his country. The preschool teacher thinks Preston should do another year at preschool before he starts school as she says he "doesn’t know anything. He never brings lunch and says he hasn’t had breakfast."

Preston comes to school with at least three languages in his virtual schoolbag. He loves being in his country and can read the environmental signs that tell him what bush food is ready. He looks after his younger siblings and has a sophisticated sense of responsibility with regard to their safety and well-being. He knows ceremonial songs and customs and has enough English to buy things at the town shop.

The children’s schoolbags contain equal but vastly different knowledges, interests, beliefs, values and understandings. The majority of children come to school with extensive knowledge
and competence in their home language. Some have understandings about 'school' literacy as well. As Kale (1995) points out they are able to 'read' social situations and come up with appropriate responses. They are often able to shift between styles and types of language and from one language to another to meet the demands of differing social situations. (Kale 1995, p. 84)

Kale continues suggesting that children who are not born into a Western culture, which is the culture of school, must learn the rules for teacher/child child/child interactions about when to speak, who has the right to speak, when it is appropriate to speak and about what topics. They must learn how to recognise the offer of a turn to speak and how to nominate for a turn to speak. All this is done with the teacher as the authority. So children who start school from another culture to the culture of the school have a great deal to learn. Many learn quickly that their culture and language are not valued. The culture of the school oppresses and fails them.

From these stories I can bring theory and practice together to confirm what I believe to be a working definition of literacy. In my final analysis, I find a number of crucial links between many of the definitions and the stories I have related. These are context, purpose and communication. The notion of literacy and its relationship with identity also emerges as an important feature although this is often not explicitly stated. I will not presume to be able to produce a comprehensive definition of what literacy is. I do know that it is an inescapably complex phenomenon. To try to encapsulate it is to simplify it and yet I need a working definition. For my purposes I return to the Oxford English Dictionary (2002) which defines literate as 'knowledgeable in a particular field.' A literate person can communicate this knowledge to an audience. This encompasses and validates all peoples knowledge and interweaves time and place. The knowledge is sculpted from experience, reading and reflection.

**Literacy then, is knowledge in a particular field and the ability to read that knowledge. A literate person can communicate this knowledge to others and interpret or read**
responses. This knowledge could be the protocols of bowing in Japanese culture, or of the practices associated with a turtle hunt in Yolngu culture. In this way individuals will have multiple literacies and functional use of these literacies. These continually evolving multiple literacies cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts in which they exist which makes literacy inherently political and, therefore, empowering for some and limiting for others. Literacy plays a role in creating just and democratic societies.

To have this knowledge is, in essence, to be able to decode a text. What then, is a text? The Oxford English Dictionary (2002) fails me in this instance with its focus on written form. It does however, allude to the importance of content as opposed to form but this is limited to writing. Barton (1994) is similarly narrow. The author does however, include spoken language as a text but this is because it can be written down. Wersch and Bustamante Smolka (1993) provide us with a detailed discussion on the work of Lotman, whose description on the function of texts adds to this discussion. According to Wersch and Bustamante Smolka (1993), Lotman sees virtually all texts as fulfilling two basic functions. These are "to convey meanings adequately and to generate new meanings" (cited by Wersch and Bustamante Smolka 1993, p. 78) According to Lotman, both functions are characteristic of almost all texts. In a review of Halliday’s Text as Semantic Choice in Social Contexts (1977) Eiler (undated) notes that this seminal work highlights Halliday’s treatment of text as based on the premise that members of a community exchange meaning in the form of a text. In Halliday’s view, text is a product of its environment. "In its most general significance a text is a sociological event, a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged." (1977 p. 197 cited by Eiler)

Halliday’s vision of a text is perhaps best understood in the following explication. "The essential feature of text, therefore, is that it is interaction. The exchange of meanings is an interactive
process, and text is the means of exchange: in order for the meanings which constitute the
social system to be exchanged between members, they must first be represented in some
exchangeable symbolic form and the most accessible of the available forms is language. So the
meanings are encoded in (and through) the semantic system, and given the form of text." (1977
p. 198 cited by Eiler). So for Halliday, "text is an instance of social meaning in a particular
context of situation," the boundaries of which are blurred. Kress and van Leeuwin (1990)
support this contention, acknowledging that texts can be composed of different media, verbal
and/or visual and start from a social base. Rassool (1999) provides a detailed discussion on the
changing notions of texts. In fact what has changed is the view that texts encompass far more
than the written or printed word. Watson (1989) illustrates the notion of a text using the
Yolngu 'bungul' which translated, means 'ceremony'. Watson identifies the texts produced in
bungul; "material texts such as the making of ngathu (bread), graphic texts such as painting on
rock faces or bark or wood, narrative texts such as song, dance and story" (1989 p. 53).

If we acknowledge that a text has social meaning and is something that can be 'read' or
exchanged in symbolic form, are not then theatre performances and aspects of a season that
allude to times for hunting, texts as well? Are animal tracks a text? Signs, symbols, the spoken
and written word all have meaning embedded within. Semiotics is a means by which various
forms of information are received and conveyed. Painting, dance, music are all semiotic systems
borne out of various social and cultural contexts - texts.

I will not labour these points further. These are the definitions I assume from this point on.
When I refer to literacy and being literate, I refer to the knowledge a person has of a
particular field and their ability to communicate that knowledge. A text is an interactive
process that can be 'read' or interpreted for meaning. Both conceptually and operationally
these definitions must lead to the design of culturally responsive pedagogies or culturally
compatible instruction that provides opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. The
next section considers such pedagogies.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogies and Inclusivity.

If we are to accept the notions of the diverse nature of literacy and its 'situatedness', then as educators we must incorporate this knowledge into our pedagogy. In this section I will consider the development of curriculum and pedagogical strategies for culturally diverse societies. Australia is a society whose sense of 'community' can be seen to intersect with (neo) colonialism and (neo) racism. Difference is often seen as a problem and even a threat, which needs to be normalised and neutralised. (Kostogritz, 2002)

We already know that much of the research that has been done with linguistically and culturally diverse students situates them in the educationally lower achieving population. Deficit theories, cultural difference theories and social, economic and political factors that impinge on educational achievement pervade. Diversity is omnipresent and yet it is the complete power of the dominant culture that remains the force driving cultural politics within education. Teachers are being asked to address more fully cultural issues within the classroom, and maintain a learning environment that is supportive and inclusive for all students. According to Trouw (1999) cultural inclusivity refers to "programs or strategies which provide learning environments that are compatible with a variety of cultures, and curriculum which is reflective of and responsive to the needs, rights and contributions of all students. (Trouw, 1999:52)

So what are the crucial aspects of pedagogy that researchers highlight as being inclusive of all indigenous students? There has been a great deal written about this subject and it is difficult to condense. However in answering this question I suggest that the work of Freire in his book A Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1993, originally published in 1972) is critical. Many educationalists in the field of minority education consider this to be a landmark text. I have heard many Australian Indigenous educators cite it as powerful writing from a man who has been instrumental in raising awareness of the issues of power and oppression. Freire presents a pedagogy which he claims must be forged with, not for, the oppressed. "This pedagogy makes
oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in the struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade." (p. 30) Formal education in this text is used as a metaphor for transforming the lives of those who suffer from the effects of oppression. The oppressors are afforded considerable attention by Freire who suggests that it is only when the oppressor "stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons who have been unjustly dealt with, deprived of their voice, cheated in the sale of their labor- when he stops making pious, sentimental and individualistic gestures and risks an act of love." (p.32)

Freire discusses the teacher-student relationship. This he parallels with the revolutionary leader as a teacher, and the students being the oppressed. He considers the nature of teaching and the notion of 'banking' where the teacher 'fills' the students with contents which are detached from reality and disconnected from any context. The student records, memorises, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what is really meant. The teacher makes deposits and the students receive. This is Freire's notion of the 'banking' concept of education. In this misguided system, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. This negates education and knowledge as a process of inquiry. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, methods for evaluating knowledge, the distance between the teachers and the taught and the criteria for promotion are all part of this ready-to-wear approach to education. Libertarian education must reconcile the teacher-student relationship so that both are learners and both become teachers simultaneously.

Freire suggests that in order to maintain domination, oppressors engage the banking concept of education in conjunction with paternalistic social systems and the oppressed become welfare recipients. He asserts that deposit making education must be replaced with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. Problem-posing education embodies communication. It consists of acts of cognition as opposed to transferrals of information.
Through dialogue teachers and students become jointly responsible for the learning process in which all grow. All are critical co-investigators. “The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own.” (p. 62) In problem-posing education people come to see the world not as a static reality but as reality in process, in transformation. Banking education resists dialogue whilst problem-posing education regards dialogue as vital.

Freire explicates the importance of dialogue. The author asserts that dialogue is founded upon love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking. Education as the practice of freedom, begins when the teacher asks him or herself what she or he will talk with the students about. Program content is organised and systemised then re-presented to individuals about things which they want to know more. The starting point for organising the program content of education must be the present, existential, concrete situation that reflects the aspirations of the people. It is not our role as teachers to speak to people about our view of the world or impose that view on them. Rather we should dialogue with the people about their view and ours. Teachers are often not understood when they speak because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Their talk becomes alienating rhetoric.

Freire analyses the theories of cultural action which develop from antidialogical and dialogical practices. Manipulation, sloganizing, depositing, regimentation and prescription cannot be components of revolutionary practice. It is essential that people experiencing oppression participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation. To carry out a revolution for the people is equivalent to carrying out a revolution without the people. Freire returns again to the importance of dialogue as necessary to every authentic revolution. The fundamental characteristic of antidialogical action is cultural invasion whereby the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, impose their own view of the world and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression.
In contrast to this antidualogical action, dialogical action seeks to meet Subjects in cooperation in order to transform the world. Leaders dedicate themselves to the continued effort for unity among the oppressed - the unity of the leaders with the oppressed - in order to achieve liberation. The organisation of the people is cooperative in a shared effort. Critics of Freire argue that his notion that the educational leader is responsible for the success of the project are precarious. But it is within the ideology of dialogical action cultural synthesis occurs. The social structure is challenged and transformed and the culture of the dominant is confronted.

Freire’s account is echoed decades later in hybrid theory (see chapter two) where new forms of literate practice emerge and different ways with texts complement, adapt, assimilate with or oppose existing ones. (Luke 2000, Kostagritz 2002)

Extremely salient in Freire’s text are the paternalistic efforts that as teachers we are sometimes guilty of engaging in when working with Indigenous people. Also important are Freire’s emancipatory elements. Freire is able to pinpoint dominating acts that hinge mainly on acting and speaking ‘for’ dominated people as opposed to working ‘with’ them. Of paramount importance is the dialogue between groups and the need for those seeking liberating education to be ‘reborn’ and thus letting go of their dominating roots. Like many of the other authors I have read, he contends that it is vital to understand the culture of the dominated in order to work effectively alongside them. In recent years many researchers within the field of cultural studies have turned away from Freire. One of the fundamental reasons for this is the fact that consciousness-raising approaches to education are dependent on facilitators who assume they know more about oppression that those who experience it. (McConaghy and Snider 2000)

Also the simplistic notion that structural inequality and the associated problems would dissipate when the oppressed started to take action for themselves. (McConaghy and Snider 2000)
Gur-Ze’ev (1998) suggests Freire’s assumptions that the interests of all oppressed people are the same and that one general theory exists for deciphering repressive reality are non-functional. In Freire’s pedagogy, the oppressed must recognise their oppression and commit themselves to transformation. Gur-Ze’ev terms this "vulgar collectivism", claiming Freire’s uncritical understanding of power and knowledge relations is naïve and brings together anticritical traditions such as dogmatic revolutionary Christianity and some voluntaristic revolutionary models. Despite Gur-Ze’ev’s critical analysis, I remain convinced that Freire’s theories of co-operation and shared effort, dialogue with, and a pedagogy for, all people are constructs worth striving for.

Trouw (1999) echoes the sentiments of Freire in her thesis on inclusive pedagogies for Aboriginal students, emphasising the notion of empowerment. Trouw suggests that the empowerment of minority students and status relations between minority and majority groups exert a major influence on school performance. The liberal position that values difference often leaves people as they are. In this way, culturally different groups are left without expanded options. With schools as sites of social reproduction, Trouw quotes Freire in his plea for teachers to begin “taking seriously the cultural capital of the oppressed, developing critical and analytical tools to interrogate it and staying in touch with dominant definitions of knowledge so we can analyse them for their usefulness and for the ways in which they bear the logic of domination.” (Freire, 1985;xxii cited by Trouw 1999 p.17)

Empowerment and educational success for minority students rests on the development of culturally congruent ways of working with students. This involves the adoption of culturally compatible curriculum and teaching styles. The use of the students’ culture, including their peer culture, inform the development of educational practice. Aspects of the home culture may be emphasised whilst others are avoided. The school culture is devised in light of these understandings. (Trouw 1999) Scaffolding is a central notion of culturally congruent pedagogy. Trouw identified successful scaffolding techniques by teachers. These included providing
emotional support within the classroom, emphasising the students as individuals and getting to know them on this basis. These strategies were presented as tools for learning by Malin (1991) almost a decade earlier when she suggested that teacher personableness and gestures of affection and appreciation were some of the 'services' that could enhance Aboriginal students academic and social progress in the class. Fanshawe (1989) also found that Aboriginal students were responsive to teachers who presented as warm and personable in conjunction with having high expectations of students. Trouw identified these same characteristics proposing they are conducive to optimal student learning. Gay (2000) suggests that the caring attitudes of teachers align with high expectations. Teachers who are non-caring, according to Gay, create distance and disaffiliation with students. For Gay, this ethic of caring constitutes the ideological grounding for culturally responsive teaching. The actual praxis of culturally responsive teaching is instruction. This includes "the engagement, the interaction, and the dialect discourse of students and teachers in the processes of teaching and learning." (2000 p. 148) Establishing congruity is essential to improving academic achievement and requires teachers to contextualise or scaffold. (Gay 2000)

Scaffolding requires teachers to start with students existing knowledge and connect this with new knowledge. (Gay 2000) In addition to this Trouw (1999) has suggested that the successful teachers believed in a 'visible pedagogy'. These included clear distinctions between teacher and student roles and responsibilities. Explicit teaching provided clear student expectations and teachers also believed that rules could be broken in certain instances. Shared experiences were imperative to achievement as were appropriate questioning techniques that elicited children's opinions and experiences.

Trouw outlined other salient features of scaffolding. These included shared understandings by teacher and students, joint construction/negotiation of all classroom activities, application of routines and patterned interactions, providing students with more responsibility for their
learning, the identification of a facilitatory role of the teacher, and explicit instruction. Trouw also highlighted speech in the classroom as vital to the process of scaffolding. The dialogical nature of utterances is foregrounded as is their multivoicedness, and semiotic nature. This led Trouw to conclude that attention to discourse is of primary importance for teachers.

The notion of teacher expectations is important in Trouw’s work. Trouw suggests that ‘upping the ante’ to challenge students is crucial to culturally responsive pedagogy. The issue of teacher expectations was also studied by Malin (1991). Lower academic outcomes and high drop out rates were the impetus for Malin who concluded that this could be avoided with more responsive teacher behaviour towards Indigenous students. Malin’s extensive research in a classroom with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students recognised the importance of cultural differences for Aboriginal children’s success or otherwise at school. She suggested that cultural differences interacted with the teacher’s low expectations of culturally different children. This resulted in an inequitable distribution of the teacher’s time and attention within the classroom. Malin asserts that the teacher’s often unconscious low expectations about the students academic and social potential created a serious lack of rapport, which resulted in the marginalisation of Aboriginal students. Teacher’s attitudes to Aboriginal students were instilled in the non-Indigenous students attitudes and beliefs about their classmates. Indigenous students also come to see the patterns of achievement and believe they cannot be successful at school.

Low teacher expectations have been discussed for many years as critical to the performance of African-American students. These low expectations are influenced by teacher and student-centered variables including cultural bias by the teacher, cultural dialect used by the child and low socio-economic status of the child. Washington (2001) cites Hist (1970/2000) whose epic study detailed teacher responses to low-income African-American students. Low expectations of teachers translated into a “self-fulfilling prophesy” for these students. Ladson-Billings’ (1994) sentiments correlate with Malin and Washington. The author suggests that one
overarching platform crucial to student success is that teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo. Students are helped to understand that societies' expectations of them are generally low. Teachers however demonstrate that their own expectations of their students are extremely high.

Malin's focus was on the clash of teacher values and communication styles between Aboriginal students and Western teachers. More recently, researchers have come to include an understanding of the changing dimensions of literacy as a vehicle for improved academic outcomes for Indigenous students. Those who challenge traditional views have created a response to our rich and diverse student population that builds on children's existing sociocultural knowledges and experiences. When teaching and learning for Indigenous students emanates from their own cultural experiences and frames of reference, improved academic achievement is possible. Culturally responsive pedagogies should underlie our work as teachers, the key components of which include empowerment, dialogue, scaffolding, teacher caring, attitudes and expectations, and a visible and explicit curriculum.

Conclusion

In this wide-ranging chapter I have attempted to provide a historical overview of programs and policies that have driven models of 'support' and how the imposition of these on Indigenous people have subsequently contributed to the failure of schools to cater appropriately for all student needs.

The substantial shifts in our thinking about how literacy is defined and how children can best be supported in their literacy development come from a number of disciplines including child development, anthropology, linguistics and sociology. Understanding Indigenous literacy requires a historical view and a contemporary understanding of literacy instruction in the home and
community as well as the formal setting of schools. Indigenous literacies exist in the past and present and teachers need to consider and understand how Indigenous children are socialised into literacy understandings in order to implement pedagogies that are culturally responsive to Indigenous students.

In my discussion on culturally responsive pedagogies and inclusivity, in which I have drawn heavily on the work of Freire, I attempted to illuminate the notion that knowledge and power discourses that have historically framed the forms of literacy made available to different groups of people in different socio-cultural contexts, have excluded and disadvantaged Indigenous Australians. It is this exclusion that has and continues to have overwhelmingly negative consequences for Indigenous students. It is in constructing culturally responsive pedagogies that some answers can be gleaned. But these pedagogies must be borne out of productive interactions between home and community practices and school-based learning.

In the following chapter I will look at the research methodology adopted in this study. The science of interpretive research is a model that provides a depth of understanding in educational contexts. Ethnographic accounts are part of the interpretivist research paradigm, the strength of which lies in their description of actual practices, which allows for the generating of questions as to the significance of any similarity or difference in those practices. This chapter also considers the critical issue of ethnocentricity pertinent to this cross-cultural study.
Many issues in education cannot be addressed adequately using conventional positivist or quantitative approaches. Consequently it is necessary to adopt naturalistic, qualitative and interpretive approaches that analyse social episodes in terms of the ways in which persons construct their social world. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2002) refer to these research processes as the ‘science of persons’. The following chapter utilizes a wide range of interconnected qualitative methods as a way to make sense of the literacy experiences under study. A framework for socially situated research recognizes the notion that I have presented in the preceding chapters, which is that literacy is a social practice. (Street 1984, Barton and Hamilton 1998) This study is concerned with social processes, most particularly, a description and analysis of the literacy events that occur in the home and community of two Indigenous families. The most suitable methodology for this research is an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research aims to generate descriptions of practices through participant observation.

The first section of this chapter considers the purpose of my research and outlines four aims that are designed to be transformative in nature. In the next section I look generally at the field of qualitative research which encompasses a range of paradigmatic formulations. I present a justification for using qualitative research methodology making mention of Standpoint epistemologies. In the ensuing section I examine Ethnographic research. A discussion on interpretive research follows which attends to the crisis of representation and legitimation. Researching racialised discourses, and the role of Critical Race Theory, is examined in the next section. In an attempt to locate myself as the researcher working in a cross-cultural research process I review the notion of ethnocentricity and the non-Indigenous researcher. In the final section I discuss the specific methods I use for collecting and
analysing data, which are the literacy practices and events observed in the two Indigenous participant families.

**Purpose of this research.**

This research is transformative in nature, the purpose of which is not to discover a truth, but to interrupt certain practices that oppress some designated groups inside educational institutions, (Brodkey, 1987, p.67) in this case Indigenous students. The following quote from Taylor (2005a) reveals that transformative learning has more to do with the researcher and the sense of opportunity for change that can arise from this type of study.

> "Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations, our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy."

(O’Sullivan, Morrell and O’Connor, 2002 p. xvii Cited by Taylor 2005a p. 1)

The researcher, through this process, can "explore his/her situatedness, historically and culturally, expand his/her cultural identity, articulate a pedagogical standpoint in life, and write to elicit pedagogical thoughtfulness in his/her readers." (Taylor, 2005b p. 1)

The study focuses on four literacy aims. These are:

1) To observe and record the literacy events and experiences occurring in the home and community setting.
2) To develop a better understanding of existing literacy patterns and practices that are occurring in Indigenous homes prior to and during formal education, that may assist teachers in developing programs that are more culturally congruent with these home literacy practices.

3) To help school communities see parents as vital in the learning process of their children.

4) To examine the deep-rooted nature of power and identity as related to literacy in our society.

The above four aims deal with discovering and understanding the situated nature of literacy. This study also deals with social critical issues that surround the need for transformation of teaching practices and understandings. As educators we make the assumption that education has the capacity to transform the lives of Indigenous people and as such, a number of traditions have informed the policies and practices since early contact to present day. It is the intention of this research not to simply describe or generate knowledge of a situation "but to detect and unmask beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy and to engage in action that brings these about." (Scott and Usher 1999, p. 30) Following Smith (2000), this methodology is grounded in the belief that schools as social institutions are sites of cultural hegemony. Can we interrupt the social practices that are formed and support collective action that has the ability to transform? The conclusions and recommendations of this study aim to promote sufficient self-searching on the part of the researcher, (myself) to realise my capacity for change and to support others in reflections of their practice, if they so choose.

In this study I am looking specifically at literacy practices and literacy events. Heath (1982) identifies literacy events as constituents of literacy practices. Street defines literacy practices as a

broader concept pitched at a higher level of abstraction and referring to both behaviour and conceptualisations related to the use of reading and/or writing. 'Literacy practices' incorporate not only 'literacy events', as empirical occasions
to which literacy is integral, but also 'folk models' of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them. (Street 1993 p. 12-13)

Grillo (1989) further develops the concept of literacy events drawing on the work of Hymes (1974 in Street 1993) who discusses the ethnography of communication. For Hymes literacy events and practices are communicative practices and include "the social activities through which language or communication is produced.....the way in which these activities are embedded in institutions, settings or domains which in turn are implicated in other, wider, social, economic, political and cultural processes...and the ideologies which may be linguistic or other, which guide processes of communicative production." (Grillo, 1989 cited in Street 1993 p.13) For this research I will employ Grillo's definition of literacy events in which they are viewed as communicative practices within a social context.

Hamilton (2000) has produced a useful table of what she suggests counted as typical literacy events in a study she completed in Britain. Her study focussed on 'ethnographic images' (Hamilton 2000 p.17) of people interacting directly with written texts. The components in Hamilton's table provide a useful guide for my own research to describe the basic elements of literacy events and practices within the homes of the participant families. I made some slight alterations based on the definitions produced in Chapter Three of this thesis. The fundamental difference lies in the suggestion that literacy events can involve more than written texts. They include the cultural phenomenon, both visible and non-visible that are part of the practices of the families daily lives. Hamilton cautions the reader to acknowledge that in terms of the definitions she offers in her table, "Visible literacy events are just the tip of the iceberg." (Hamilton 2000  p. 18) Literacy practices can only be inferred from observable evidence. Fleer and Williams-Kennedy (2002) also make this point in their study. Participants in their study discussed what the observer sees and then what the Indigenous participant sees in terms of knowledge, feelings, values and relationships.
Visible documentation of literacy practices is important to ethnographic research. In addition to visible data, analysis of a literacy event includes non-visible constituents, which extend our knowledge of literacy practices. Rich ethnographic inquiry is required in order for both visible and non-visible elements to be understood. In Chapter's Five and Six I have used Hamilton's (2000) visible/non-visible pairing to highlight firstly the clearly observable literacy practices in both Jeanie's and Esther's homes and in my own classroom. Non-visible literacy practices were also discussed as a way of bringing to life a very dynamic process and focusing holistically

Table 4.1 Basic elements of literacy events and practices. (Based on Hamilton 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements visible within literacy events (These may include photographs)</th>
<th>Non-visible constituents of literacy practices (These may only be inferred from photographs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants:</strong> The people who can be seen to be interacting with a text.</td>
<td>The hidden participants: other people or groups of people involved in the social relationships of producing, interpreting, circulating and regulating texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settings:</strong> The physical environment in which the interaction occurs.</td>
<td>The domain of practice within which the event takes place and takes its sense and social purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Artefacts:</strong> The material tools and accessories that are involved in the interaction.</td>
<td>All other resources brought to the literacy practice including non-material values, ways of thinking, understandings, feelings, skills and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong> The actions performed by the participants in the literacy event.</td>
<td>Structured routines and pathways, that facilitate or regulate actions; rules of appropriacy and eligibility - who does/doesn't, can/can't engage in particular activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on the phenomena of home literacy events. This required much discussion with participants in order to ensure appropriate interpretation of values, ways of thinking, understandings, feelings, skills and knowledge.

I utilised Barton’s (1998) taxonomy to categorise the home literacy practices that I observed in Jeanie’s and Esther’s households. An addition was made to Barton’s six existing categories. I gave this new category the title ‘Spirituality/naturalist’. (The use of the term Naturalist’ has been adopted from Ernie Grant’s work (2004) see Chapter Six) Although these activities could have been part of ‘sense making’, ‘private’ or ‘social participation’ categories I believe my addition reflected Indigenous literacies more appropriately. Barton’s framework was established for Western literacies which did not adequately take into account what Grant identifies as ‘Naturalist Intelligence’ and consequent ‘naturalist literacies’ which are the ability to use sensory input from nature to interpret one’s environment, the ability to categorise, observe, adapt and use natural phenomena, the ability to observe changes, cycles, and relationships on the natural world and finally, the ability to understand that signs, signals and habits mean certain things in nature. (Grant 2004)

As noted in Chapter Two, Heath (1983) completed in depth ethnographic inquiry into the socialisation, language and literacy practices of communities in the North Americas, specifically the Piedmont Carolinas. Heath’s study provides a model for ethnographic practice including investigation, description and interpretation of cultural information from the families in the communities studied. Heath gained her data first hand through extensive and prolonged immersion in the field. Kale (1995) and Wilson (2000) have adopted a similar approach. Kale describes and investigates the socialisation, language and literacy practices of a Torres Strait Islander family living in an urban community in north Queensland. Wilson investigates the interactions between family members of an Aboriginal family also living in an urban community in north Queensland and the language and literacy practices that occur. Each of these researchers- Heath, Kale and Wilson - were motivated to complete their studies based on the
poor educational outcomes of students from these minority communities. These studies have informed this research project.

Qualitative research

A concise definition of qualitative research is difficult to achieve. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offer a generic definition that is broad enough that it could cover any human observational activity that one engages in. They identify a number of characteristics, most importantly the situated nature of qualitative research, a naturalistic approach to the world, the transformation of the world into a series of representations that include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to oneself. Studies are completed in natural settings and the empirical materials include "case studies, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts, which describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives." (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.3)

Some researchers have attempted to use life metaphors in order to explain who the qualitative researcher is and the vast interconnected interpretive practices that are deployed in qualitative research. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) discuss the nature of the researcher as a quilt maker and the research process as a montage in which several different images are superimposed onto one another to create a picture. Images, sounds and understandings are blended together. They overlap and shape and define one another and liken this to a Gestalt effect. The Gestalt school of thought in the field of psychology emphasises the fact that a whole is more than the sum of its parts, and that these parts of the whole are often modified by their relationships to it and to one another. (World book Dictionary 1974). Throughout these processes "many different things are going on at the same time - different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision .... works that use montage .......
move from the personal to the political, the local to the historical and the cultural." (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.5) As an interested reader of Buddhist traditions, I am drawn to the formula of Dependent Origination that fits well with some of the features of qualitative research. This formula is concerned with "living, organic relationship, a simultaneous correlation, juxtaposition and succession of all links, in which each, so to say, represents the transverse summation of all the others and bears in itself its whole past as well as all the possibilities of its future." (Govinda, 1969, p. 270)

Through my reading, and indeed engaging in the processes of qualitative research, I think of this type of research as an 'ecosystem'. There are complex elements and functional connections between the elements, no matter how big or small that create the conditions, which give rise to subsequent events. Govinda (1969) describes a notion whereby one story creates other stories. The actors involved give a different perspective according to their viewpoint and, as in the field of music, "Though all musical harmony is based on the same laws, there are not two composers who compose the same music." (Govinda 1969, p. 267) There cannot be a correct telling of an event. However, Govinda suggests that the individual and universal law complement each other. "Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on this incident." (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.6) In my own research project, I am acutely aware that my story and subsequent analysis is but one perspective of the situation. (I return to this theme again in the Personal Justification, in this chapter.)

In addition to the individuality and variability within all humans, I am reminded almost on a daily basis of the fact that within these multiple perspectives there is no value-free telling. If I elevate the media to the position of researcher, which in many cases it attempts to be, then I can observe this multiple narrative as one story but framed by different storytellers (although the media generally only privileges one voice). For example, 60 minutes (13th March 2005) reported on suburban riots in MacQuarrie Fields involving youths, police and other community members. The youths' account violently condemns police actions in which the police
chase of a stolen car led to the deaths of their friends. The police report constant verbal and physical attacks directed at them, and the parents are divided. Similarly in my time on Groote Eylandt, I frequently read newspaper reports that were couched in the storytelling tradition of journalistic hype. Nonetheless they were accounts that through the use of photographs, interviews and participant observation, told stories of events that clearly illustrate the nature of the 'light as it hits the crystal'. Multiple interpretations give rise to a story where the actor’s perspectives differ according to their viewpoint and past experiences. What we know and how we communicate depends also on the social groups to which we belong. The researcher, as the participant observer, takes what is studied and analyses it based on their own experiences and viewpoints - a standpoint. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. I cannot challenge this as it can, because of the very nature of human thought and action, be no other way. The important point of the research is whether or not it communicates something to us.

Standpoint theory, attributed to Harding (1998), acknowledges that researchers speak from historically and culturally situated standpoints. The critical ethnographer, according to Foley and Valenzuela (2005) abandons positivist notions that “research techniques can produce a detached, objective standpoint” (Foley and Valenzuela 2005 p. 218) and rather that they speak from “very particular race, class, gender and sexual identity locations.” (Foley and Valenzuela 2005 p. 218) Standpoints represent particular interests and positions in a hierarchical society. In this way, Foley and Valenzuela argue, they are partial representations of a situation. Standpoint theory also notes that all knowledge is socially situated and not value free.

From where I stand, I have had to work hard to see the many areas of oppression that Indigenous people encounter on a daily basis and even then I cannot claim to understand all of these. I know that the school systems of which I am part contribute significantly to the reproduction of social, economic and cultural levels of our society, apparent in forms of domination based on ‘race’. Qualitative methodologies, and more specifically ethnographic
research paradigms, are valuable because they involve an ongoing attempt to describe and understand local knowledge and practice and position these in a meaningful context. The next section considers ethnographic research.

**Ethnographic Research**

Ethnography is a research method which coexists with other methodologies within the interpretivist paradigm. The focus for this study is specifically the tradition of ethnography, which finds its disciplinary roots in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Ethnographic research asks as a central question, What is the culture of this group? As Germain (1986) writes, "ethnography, a product and a process, literally means, 'portrait of a people'. As a product, an ethnography is a factual description and analysis of aspects of the way of life of a particular culture or subcultural group." (Germain, 1986: 147 cited by Smith 2000) The strength of ethnographic accounts lies in their description of actual practices based on fieldwork, which allows for the generating of questions as to the significance of any similarity or difference in those practices. Ethnographers focus on descriptions of common behaviour patterns within a culture or ethnic group (MacNaughton, 2001 and Holmes 1995) and produce detailed narratives with rich data as opposed to data obtained from larger numbers of participants. (Hanlen 2002c) In this way ethnographic accounts are both descriptive and interpretive. They are descriptive because detail is critical, and interpretive because the researcher must decide on the importance of what they are observing. Ideals of constructivism permeate ethnographic research, in that within this framework all world views are accepted. Knowledge does not represent an independent reality out there waiting to be discovered, but rather multiple realities, which are socially and culturally constructed (Grenfell, 2003a).
The ethnographic paradigm is an attempt to understand the subjective world of human experience. As such, researchers are concerned with investigations of the ‘taken-for-granted’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002 p35). Ethnographers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them. They are interested in the individual and how they make sense of their everyday world. The Ethnographers long-term immersion in the field enhances the research. The following paragraphs highlight aspects of ethnography that make it suitable for my research project.

The Natural setting: Ethnographic research is conducted in a natural setting. In this case the research will take place in two family homes and in classrooms. The researcher observes what is happening as it naturally occurs. Related to this is the characteristic of contextualisation. (Wiersma, 2000) This requires that all data be interpreted only in the context of the situation or environment in which they were collected. Full and accurate descriptions of the situation being studied are paramount. This is important when the subjects of the study are Indigenous Australians. Foley (2000) suggests there are over four hundred and fifty Aboriginal nations in Australia which does not create a homogenous situation. Rather the situation is complex, which is why contextualisation is so important in this research.

A holistic emphasis: The hypothesis emerges as data collection occurs therefore data analysis is inductive rather than deductive. Preconceived notions must be suspended by the researcher, which might influence the interpretations. A holistic view is maintained as the researcher concentrates on the entire context.

Emic versus Etic: The researchers aim is to acquire, as much as is possible, an insider’s perception of the situation. This is referred to as the emic perspective (as opposed to an etic perspective which presents an outsiders point of view). The emic approach to observation has its origins in the Boasian school of thought stemming from the 1940’s teachings of Franz Boas. (Foley, 2000) Qualitative researchers are committed to emic approaches that direct attention
to local issues and the specifics of particular cases. Etic approaches are more concerned with data that will develop and generate generalisations derived from studies of large numbers of randomly selected cases than with rich descriptions of the social world as in the emic approach. The personal 'stories' of the emic approach are used in this research.

An integrated process: Ethnographic research requires an integrated process in which procedures are conducted concurrently. Whilst distinct sequencing does not occur there is a starting point and an end point. The starting point is identification of the phenomenon to be studied. In the current study this is stated in question form.

What are the literacy practices occurring in the home learning environments of members from two Australian Indigenous families?

The subjects of this research will be the families and other residents of two Indigenous households in an urban setting. Indigenous Australians have differing cultural and social values, some of which are deeply urbanised with lifestyles similar to non-Indigenous Australians. Hanlen (2002c) makes the point in her study of urban Indigenous families, that second or third generation Indigenous urban dwellers still retain their cultural beliefs and practices, although these may not be easily identifiable. The families from this study are from a large urban school in Cairns, which in December 2004 had a student population of 523. Of these 231 identified as Torres Strait Islander and 175 identified as Aboriginal. The remainder of the student population is from the Pacific Islands, Anglo Australian families, and countries as far afield as the African continent.
Interpretive Research

Interpretive research is a model that provides a depth of understanding most appropriate to this study. Interpretive research holds a number of major orientating ideas outlined in the following points.

- People act intentionally and situations are fluid and changing rather than fixed and static.
- Events and individuals are unique and mostly non-generalisable. Universal theory gives way to multifaceted images of human behaviour.
- Researchers should not manipulate the social world but study it in its natural state.
- People act on the basis of their interpretation of an event or situation.
- There are multiple interpretations of a single event.
- The complexity of situations calls for detailed descriptions.
- Situations are examined through the eyes of the participants as opposed to the researcher, and the theory that is generated must make sense to those to whom it applies.
- Theory is emergent and arises from particular situations. It should not precede research but follow it.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002)

The methodology of interpretive theories does give rise to issues of legitimacy, validity, generalisability and reliability. Postmodern theory presents a central realisation that all knowledge is socially constructed. This realisation has created what has been termed a 'crisis' of representation and legitimation.

Grenfell (2006) discusses Kincheloe and McLaren’s (2003) suggestion that contained in mainstream research practices is the reproduction of existing forms of oppression and this produces a crisis of legitimation. Grenfell therefore argues that ethnographers "need to adopt an activist role and engage in advocacy for the rights of oppressed groups," (Grenfell, 2006:5). In this sense validity can be found in the transformative effects the research has in raising
awareness and recognition of the situation of a particular social group. Lather (1994) cited by Grenfell (2006) refers to this as catalytic validity, that is to what extent does the researcher act as a catalyst bent on bringing about change. Whilst the crisis of representation complicates the work of ethnographers Grenfell suggests it does not invalidate it. The researcher, through pragmatic necessity and as part of a political process (Grenfell 2006), must choose which representations of 'reality' he or she will describe. Smith (2000) summarises these crisis as an argument about 'truths' and the suggestion that what researchers write is mediated by language, subjectivities and culture. (Smith 2000) Denzin and Lincoln (2005) report that a crisis of representation and legitimation make problematic two key assumptions of qualitative interpretive research. The first of these is the representational crisis, and concerns qualitative researchers and their inability to directly capture lived experience. By writing about and interpreting these experiences, researchers create the social text. The second assumption concerns the legitimation crisis which problematises the evaluation and interpretation of qualitative research.

The struggle to make sense of these crises has prompted researchers to explore different ways to represent the "Other". "Epistemologies from previously silenced groups emerged to offer solutions to these problems. The concept of the aloof observer was abandoned." (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 20) According to Denzin and Lincoln, participatory research and local small-scale theories which were situation-specific evolved. The researchers personal biography stands behind the researcher "who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community." (Denzin and Lincoln 2005 p. 21) So how do we record accurately our observations and uncover their meanings? A range of interconnected interpretive methods of research have been mobilised that enable subjects and indeed researchers to offer accounts and stories that explain their actions and intentions. The subjects in this study are Indigenous Australians. Historically it is these communities that have been vulnerable to research and the consequent reproduction of forms of oppression. Smith (2005) discusses the differing views of writers about what Indigenous research is. Some, Smith contends, suggest it is research
carried out by Indigenous researchers with Indigenous communities for Indigenous people. Others, as noted by Smith, define Indigenous research as that which is committed to transformation, "that is active in pursuit of social and institutional change, that makes space for Indigenous knowledge, and that has a critical view of power relations and inequality." (Smith, 2005: 89) In the next section I will discuss research as a racialised discourse that can reproduce particular social relations of power and maintain notions of the 'Other'. Racialised discourse speaks through these relations of power and presents challenges to the researcher and research process.

Researching Racialised discourse and the role of Critical Race Theory

In the following discussion I introduce the belief that non-Indigenous authors, in attempting to write about Aboriginal issues, have rendered Indigenous people invisible. This leads to a discussion of the term Aboriginalism and I follow this by reflecting on the use of racist discourses by researchers and non-Indigenous authors. Finally I consider Critical Race Theory which advocates for the equal redistribution of power and resources for disadvantaged groups.

As a western race, we have been prolific in our writing about and on behalf of Indigenous people. We constantly compare and contrast, label and generalise. As noted in the beginning of this chapter Denzin and Lincoln (2005) identify the traditional phase of qualitative research characterised by overtly judgment laden and often contradictory accounts of culture and language. Communities of people were "subsumed by the obectifying gaze of white racism under the undifferentiated label of Aboriginals." (Johnson 1992, p. 35) Identities were obliterated and Aboriginal people became invisible. James Miller (1985) expresses similar sentiments. "The recorded view of my people began in the early nineteenth century....However, all these
documents were written by white men, most of whom had anti-Koori views. Few white men had pro-Koori views...[The] white men who held positive attitudes...interpreted events in their European way of thinking. When they wrote about injustices...against the Koori, they in fact wrote about British justice as an English man would understand the term." (Miller, 1985 cited by Roughly, 1991)

In America, Indian communities have had to grapple with what it means to be Indian. In Australia Indigenous people have also fought for their Aboriginality to be understood. Whilst we know that the cultures of Indigenous Australians are diverse, their experiences as a result of colonisation have meant that there are a number of shared experiences. (Tonkinson 1990)

Acts of discrimination, subversion and injustice that exclude and marginalise members of Indigenous populations can be seen to have a twofold outcome. On one hand they lead to constructions of an homogenous group, but on the other they unite people in their understanding of positions of exclusion and marginalisation. Indigenous Australians have experienced a racialised identity and the term Aboriginality is often used to define this identity.

Aboriginalism is a term coined by Attwood (1992) and others to describe the way in which dominant cultural groups in colonial or settler societies produce authoritative representations and stereotypes about minority groups (the colonized). Western constructions of knowledge about Indigenous Australians are characterised by unequal and oppressive power and authority relationships. In this way the term Aboriginalism and Aboriginality can act to disempower Indigenous people, constructions of which create stereotypes that misrepresent and frequently compare and contrast romantic images of the supposed 'real' Aboriginal people. Muecke (1992) argues that Aboriginality is constructed in discourse. All language has grammatical, narrative, vocabulary and rhetorical structures which serve to "create values, bestow meaning, and constitute (in the sense of imposing form upon) the subjects and objects that emerge in the process of the inquiry." (Shapiro 1985-86: 192 cited by Richardson 1990) In
Muecke's (1992) discussion on discourse theory, he notes that one of the slogans of such theory is that "Discourses create their own object" (1992: 22) and further that language itself becomes the fabric of knowledge. It is this theory that Muecke suggests, provides ways of understanding how people are situated in the linguistic framework noting that we are not all positioned in the same way in relation to the dominant and available discourses. Aboriginalism is framed by and for the dominant European majority. As government policy shifts occur, Aboriginal discourses are redefined but almost always they remain comparative, restrictive and classificatory.

According to Muecke (1992) Aboriginalist discourses as discussed by Europeans, generally fall into three main categories. They are anthropological, romantic and racist. These are articulated on perceptions of difference, using an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. They serve to maintain the power relationship of domination and subordination. Of most concern to this project is racist discourse which functions to designate people as other than ideal. (Muecke 1992) In my time working in one of the community schools on Groote Eylandt, I read some of the historical accounts of writers and missionaries. One such writer was Cole (1971) who provides an account of the establishment of the Groote Eylandt Mission. He discusses the missionary care of the "half caste children." (Cole 1971: 25) He says, "….it should not be thought that the Groote Eylandter's were completely neglected…..Services were held for them and medical care provided. The half castes, however were completely segregated from them." (Cole, 1971: 25) The Groote Eylandt Aboriginal people had been living without the missionaries for thousands of years. Cole suggests that without their overseeing, defined in terms of neglect, the Groote Eylandters would not have survived. Fesl (1990) notes that the use of the term 'half caste' serves to divide and rule Aboriginal people. The children who were seen to have some white racial mixture are seen to be 'savable'.

These terms and sentiments are still being used in the schools I have worked in over the past three years. So whilst my reference to Cole is in the early 1970's, the sentiments and some
terminology are enduring. This racist discourse positions Aboriginal people as subject to the authority of the superior non-Aboriginal writers. This prompts the question, who should write about Indigenous people? Attwood (1992) continually reminds us that knowledge is situational, contingent and political and as such important considerations must be made when assessing the representation. Issues such as where the research was completed, how the knowledge was gained, what is the purpose of the writing and what will be the effects of this knowledge being publicized, are all worthy considerations when writing. Aboriginality and what that means can only be authored by Indigenous Australians. Researchers working in cross-cultural fields cannot enter another culture but we can interpret events and patterns which must lead to dialogue with that cultural group in order to give voice to the silenced and excluded.

Forms of subordination and discrimination as experienced by many Indigenous Australians, have the potential to be uncovered through a research methodology known as critical race theory. This process can help us account for the role of race and racism in our schools and education systems. Analysis of the data from this research utilizes Critical Race Theory notions that assume racism exists and that it operates in daily life. Critical Race Theory "honors and respects local knowledge, customs and practices" (Denzin, 2005 p.950) to enable a process of change and transformation.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory draws from a number of disciplines, epistemologies and research approaches. Mills (2003) suggests that the term 'critical' has several different meanings. Firstly critical race theory distances itself from the uncritical "race theory" of previous centuries. Critical Race Theory is explicitly antiracist. Secondly, it uses the term 'race' as indicative of its constructed rather than biological character. Finally Mills suggests that the idea of "critical theory" "seeks to understand structures of social oppression for the emancipatory purpose of transforming them." (Mills 2003: 199) Critical race theory is an analytic tool for considering difference and inequity. (Ladson-Billings and Donner 2005)
Solorzano and Yosso (2001) present five themes which they suggest form the basic perspectives, research methodologies and pedagogies of a critical race theory in education. The first is that critical race theory in education begins with the premise that race and racism are endemic and permanent in our school systems. They are central to explaining individual experiences and the subordination of minority groups. Solorzano and Yosso consider race and racism to be at the centre of critical race theory, but also acknowledge that gender and class are other forms of subordination that intersect with race and racism. Secondly, traditional claims of racial neutrality, social justice, equal opportunity, colour blindedness and objectivity within the education system are merely camouflages and in reality do not exist. Thirdly, Solorzano and Yosso envision critical race theory in education as committed to social justice. It is transformative in that it eliminates racism, sexism and poverty. Ladson-Billings (2000) echoes this sentiment claiming the theory is liberatory in that it empowers under-represented minority groups. Fourthly, critical race theory legitimates and recognises the experiential knowledge of minority students. Indeed it is critical to the understanding of racial subordination in education. Finally critical race theory insists on analysing race and racism in education by situating them in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Denzin (2005) argues that critical race theory cannot work within Indigenous settings without modification. The author claims it must be "localised, grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs and community relations that operate in each Indigenous setting." (Denzin 2005: 936) Localised critical theory is possible, according to Denzin, if the goals of emancipation and transformation are not considered to have "universal characteristics that are independent of history context and agency." (Smith 2000:229 cited by Denzin 2005: 936) Denzin further argues that Western researchers must decolonise their Western systems of knowledge making those systems the object of inquiry rather than the Indigenous knowledge systems themselves.
As a Western teacher I have made assumptions about what literacy practices are valued, what are not and indeed what constitutes a literacy event or practice. All too frequently I hear my colleagues lament the fact that the Indigenous students in their class do not have any literacy skills. These attitudes, values and beliefs reinforce inequalities for Indigenous students and contribute to low educational outcomes. Many teachers and school staff express concerns about social and racial justice but as I mentioned in Chapter One, education department programs and policies have done little to support Indigenous students in reaching outcomes commensurate with their non-Indigenous peers. Are we as teachers only prepared to go so far in support of the diverse populations of students we teach? We feel sorry for our students and dislike the inequity (those of us who acknowledge there is inequity) but ignore the structures and discourses that maintain these inequities. Ladson-Billings and Donner (2005) urge researchers to consider a new construct within the realm of critical race theory, that is 'political race'. This notion, gleaned from the work of Guinier and Torres (2002), suggests that 'political race' as opposed to current racial discourses, "relies on building cross-racial coalitions and alliances that involve grassroots workers who strive to remake the terms of participation and invigorate democracy." (Ladson-Billings and Donner 2005: 290) The authors suggest that such a possibility can be conceived through critical race theory. The construction of literacy practices has created tensions between diverse populations and a resistance by those who feel marginalised. Narrow views of literacy as merely reading and writing, do little to advance the notion that literacy encompasses art, music, dance, cultural understandings and more. Critical race theory urges teachers to make space for literacy practices that are different to their mainstream conceptions and narrow views of what constitutes literacy. Are we as teachers afraid to admit that race and power intertwine at every level of society (Ladson-Billings and Donner 2005) including schools, and that we are in the power positions in these educational settings?

Critical race theory has been used in the analysis of racialised discourse in this study by analyzing the language and expressions white middle class teachers have used when they view
their own mainstream culture as normative and the correct way of being in schools. In addition the stories people told were examined to identify the topics discussed in teacher interviews and those that were ignored. For example many non-Indigenous teachers chose not to talk about culture lessons in the school as implemented by an Indigenous teacher, but freely discussed families perceived disinterest in their children's schooling. Importantly, I saw this research as collaborative whereby I looked at my own ideologies, stories and language in conjunction with the teachers interviewed. This was self-revealing and sometimes confronting. At the same time the knowledge and experiences of Indigenous participants was recognized and their experiences with racism considered. The localized nature of this study allowed associated schools to become the object of inquiry rather than the Indigenous knowledge systems themselves.

The non-Indigenous Researcher and the danger of Ethnocentricity

The research I am undertaking has the ability to challenge existing social and educational inequalities. This being the case, as a researcher I must remain acutely aware of my Western conceptualisations and value systems when working with Indigenous communities. I continually ask myself, to what extent does my ethnic identity impinge upon the formulation, execution and dissemination of this research? Foley (2000) discusses the use of interventionist research as a methodology to reduce bias. The research must be of benefit to the Indigenous group.

"Interventionist research and resultant observation can only be from within the Indigenous pedagogy, Standpoint Theory from the Indigenous perspective and...Insider/Outsider theory. Interventionist researcher crosses the gap of cultural difference." (Foley, 2000:22)
There is no doubt that research is political. It foregrounds the nature of power and access to power. (Mirza, 1998) Eurocentric agendas dominated by white middle-class researchers construct subject communities as problematic and consider white middle-class to be the norm. (Troya, 1998) In this light it is essential that I consider the power, obligations and responsibilities of social research. Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2000) cite Behar (1993) who explains that "We ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable but we ourselves remain invulnerable." (Behar 1993, p. 273). "Our informants are then left carrying the burden of representations as we hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality." (Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong 2000, p. 109) So how do I write myself in to the study? It is in fact a difficult thing to unhitch my mind from my ethnocentric ways of thinking. This barrier can be alleviated with reflection and awareness and it is with this awareness that I write myself into the story.

As a non-Indigenous researcher, many questions come to mind when I am embarking on a cross-cultural project. I ask myself, who is listening to whom and why? Whose interests does the research serve? Consider Langford's (1983) article titled “Our heritage, your playground” and Tony Birch's compelling poem titled “Halfcaste”. More recently Foley (2000) comments on the 'private zoo of whites'. Langford, Birch and Foley are Indigenous Australians disclosing how they feel when non Indigenous people write about them. "You see me...an intellectuals commodity...you make me, arranging and rearranging my history and identity. I turn to see myself...reassembled in Gubbah discourse." (Birch 1993) Hanlen, (2002c) an Indigenous researcher, notes that "there are many non-Indigenous researchers who set out to establish Indigenous perspectives and produce essential knowledge and understanding which benefits the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities." I hope this research becomes part of that body of literature.

To avoid assumptions that research is apolitical, value-free and scientific, a stance taken by white western epistemology, Black feminist standpoint epistemology has evolved. (Mirza, 1998)
According to Mirza, this stems from the desire to understand the position of Black women and their experience of what Du Bois (1983) refers to, as double subjectivity. Du Bois argues that Black women have 'double consciousness', which is explained as the way in which, "We are in and of our society but in important ways also not 'of' it....We are observer and observed, subject and object, knower and known." (Du Bois 1983 p 111-112) Collins (1990 cited by Mirza 1998) asserts that this double consciousness enables a process of self-actualisation whereby Black women as researcher or researched are 'active' subjects. They have the ability to be both 'inside' and 'outside' that which is being researched which acts in opposition to the trend for them to be dehumanised in academic research.

The Black feminist standpoint epistemology can only be produced by Black women. (Collins, 1991 cited by Mirza 1998) However, I can champion feminist standpoint epistemology that argues for the development of Indigenous standpoints. In subscribing to this standpoint I need to remain close to the studied world of the participants in my project. Grounded theorists, according to Charmaz (2005) interpret data based on their relationship with the research participants. This does not subscribe to notions of impartiality and requires that as a researcher I locate myself within the research scene and interpret this scene based on my prior experiences and interests. Critical to this interpretation will be the need to develop relationships with the participants and the ability to locate myself within the collected renderings of the empirical data I study. (Charmaz 2005) Some researchers have referred to this phenomenon as 'placing' which is important in cross-cultural research.

Placing refers to the ways in which personal characteristics of the researcher and the participants provide these participants with contexts in which to locate the researcher within wider social structures. (Mirza, 1998) These may include, class, gender, race or religious affiliations. In my experience working with Indigenous people, relationships of friendship and trust develop over significant periods of time. Finding a category to 'share' is critical. I expect this to be gender in most instances and a commitment to improving student outcomes for
Indigenous students. Issues of 'identity' impact on 'placing'. Researchers must know who they are before beginning their field work as others will certainly define us in both positive and negative ways. Writing my own stories has helped me understand this personal identity.

A personal justification

In this section, I return to the question I raised earlier, that is, am I justified in researching this topic? I feel I am. Adelman (1985, cited by Mirza, 1998) argues that researchers should be competent members of the culture they are writing about. I am employing elements of narrative research, to essentially explore how non-Indigenous teachers working with Indigenous students and families can provide successful learning experiences for their students. I do not seek to label and generalise. My analysis will be but one version of the story. I identify with Nayler (2002 p. 10) who writes "The visibility of me as the author, who says some things and does not say others, who selects some material and omits other material......mine is only one voice...." Also, Hammersley (1883) points out that "the most striking feature of language is its capacity to present description, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety ...." (1983 p107) My voice is grounded in years of practice and experience working with Indigenous people yet it is still one version. Denzin (2005) calls himself an "allied other" (2005: 936) "a non-Indigenous scholar seeking dialogue with Indigenous scholars." (2005: 936) It is my belief that non-Indigenous teachers need to better understand the students and families we teach. There are inequities. There are major cultural differences. How can we break down our racist assumptions and not perpetuate the stereotypes that sustain power relationships and simplify versions of the truth? One answer lies in a notion explicated by Solorzano (1998) who notes that,

"......... most of the methods we use ........are rooted in.....racist epistemologies. However, it is our responsibility to acknowledge these epistemologies and, where appropriate, use them for transformational purpose while continuing to move toward more antiracist ...... epistemologies." (Solorzano, 1998 p 133)
I hope the stories I tell create spaces for dialogue. I want to challenge what I do with the pictures of the world that I have witnessed. (Grumet, 1990) Critical to this process is frequent participant checks. I continually return to the families to check the accuracy of my recollections, the meanings of stories and the nature of my findings. I am grateful for the experience of working with Indigenous people. These experiences have led me to interrogate and resist. Interrogate the existing teaching conventions within which I operate, and resist the knowledge and power relations inherent in much of current Indigenous education policy and practice.

The study

Data Collection

Selecting willing participants and negotiating access

Ethical clearance from Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Committee was obtained in accordance with guidelines proposed by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. An Application to Conduct Research in Education Queensland Schools was submitted to the Executive Director of Schools Cairns and Cape District, and approved. The Principal of the school involved also gave approval.

The principle criteria in the selection of families was willingness to participate. I initially approached a Teacher Coordinator who supervises Indigenous students studying TAFE courses. She spoke to the students that were enrolled in TAFE study based at the school I worked in at the time and their building was right next door to the teaching space I taught in. A few days after we had spoken, she told me she had two interested, possible participants. She took the time to introduce us as I explained my research proposal. Those first students who expressed
an interest were Jeanie and Esther, both of whom seemed pleased to be involved and were readily available for interviews and filming sessions. Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong (2000) alert us to the danger of exploiting participants and leaving them exposed, and yet these researchers suggest that there is a flip side to this. Many participants are pleased to be involved in studies recognising that researchers can take their stories to audiences such as policy makers in ways that they cannot because often they would not be listened to. "They (and we) knew that we traded on class and race privilege to get counter narrative out." (Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong 2000, pp.115) When I initially approached prospective participants, I described my research and a number agreed emphatically that these are stories that need to be told, "for the sake of our kids".

This study of the literacy lives of these two families tells us something about individuals, about family life, and about the history and culture of the larger society in which these families live. I must acknowledge that descriptions of culture patterns inevitably obscure the individual and neglect the range of variation in custom and behaviour which can lead to constructions that highlight differences between cultures and tend to ignore the fundamental similarities. I am, however, able to draw on sixteen years of living and working with a variety of Indigenous communities which allows me to consider these experiences (through my white eyes) in light of the whole picture of home literacy practices in Indigenous families. Having said that I remain acutely aware that there are great contrasts between remote Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land, the Kimberley’s and the Pilbara, and the Torres Strait Island people. The histories of contact alone appear to have a huge effect on the present culture of the people. Impact can be seen particularly in language use and identification with the past pre-white invasion.

I collected background information on the two families using a number of schedules. These dealt with household composition, an inventory of household items, for example, books and other literacy related materials, religious artifacts, recreational artifacts, a summary of
school history, a summary of employment history of the adults and a brief discussion of student academic achievement (for those students living in the participant home and attending school). Because of the sensitivity of the material I always asked the participants about its appropriateness for inclusion or otherwise. Names of all participants have been changed in order to protect their identity.

The studies of the families led to the establishment of strong personal ties which enhanced the data collection process. For example, Jeanie and I had long conversations beyond the research process where we discussed intimate and personal experiences not discussed in the study. I attended family parties, church meetings, helped fill out forms, drove people places, helped consider employment options, visited participants at their workplace etc. The questions on life histories began only after I had visited the families regularly for a few months and learned about their lives through general conversations. Ongoing conversations to discuss interpretation of data occurred. Both participating families allowed me to interview the teachers of their school aged children in order to establish how they were achieving academically.

Other participants in this study who agreed to be interviewed were ten Indigenous students, four identified as Torres Strait Islander and six as Aboriginal. Eleven Indigenous school staff consented to be interviewed and ten non-Indigenous teachers agreed to be involved in this study. The Indigenous school staff included class teachers, a home liaison officer, a canteen worker who was also a parent of students at the school, and a student teacher with the RATEP TAFE program. All school staff were from the school I have called 'Westville'.

Information and consent forms

The Indigenous participants involved in this study are all ESL speakers. As required by the human ethics department of the university, written consent was mandatory. In addition to
consent forms there is also the issue of the mandatory plain language statement. This posed a number of difficulties for me. I was aware that the Standard Australian English I used may be an area of difficulty for the parents of students involved and indeed the students themselves. (Consent from both parents and students under 18 years of age was sought). To alleviate this I spent a great deal of time with each participant explaining verbally the consent forms and plain language statements. With regard to the two main participant families involved, I felt that it was not unreasonable to assume literacy levels that would enable them to understand and access the documents I presented. This assumption was based on the fact that when I met them, the two women (and heads of the households) were studying TAFE courses. I still spent a great deal of time explaining the study, its aims and situating myself as the researcher. This involved bringing photos of my family, the communities in which I have lived and worked and informal discussions about my working and personal life.

**Participant Observation**

The techniques of participant observation are predominantly observation, interview and document analysis. The methods used in this study are a combination of traditional techniques used in sociology and anthropology and include observations, interviews, biographies and whole family case-studies. Data collection in this ethnographic research is conducted primarily by participant observation. According to Smith (2000) it is crucial to actively and consciously frame questions and define the field in which the research takes place. This means that the focus is re-situated into wider social, economic and political realities in which it has been constructed. Smith asks the researcher to move from asking ‘transactional’ questions to ‘structural’ questions. Structural questions alert the critical researcher to relations of power. The consequence of this is that the researcher acknowledges that he or she constructs knowledge and as such is forced to consider whose interests are served by the research.

Gitlin (1990) discusses research questions and his sentiments are worth mentioning here as relevant to interview questions. Gitlin writes, "The research questions we ask are never simply
our own. Instead they reflect an ongoing negotiation among the influences of material conditions or contexts, cultural norms and self. If a teacher states for example, that his or her biggest concern is how to get control of the students, this question or problem is related to, among other things, a set of cultural norms about the legitimate authority of teachers, a personal philosophy about teaching, and the influence of material conditions...found in the school. (Gitlin, 1990: 454) Smith (2000) suggests research and interview questions can be formed to check "tentative hypothesis building, to corroborate other data sources, to ascertaın a range of insights; not only perceptions, but attitudes, evaluations, forecasts and the like." (Smith 2000: 169) Added to this, Smith further suggests that research questions can be closely connected to, and informed by, prior observations and document analysis.

Semi and unstructured interviews, such as those taking place during the home visits are constructed to seek descriptions of experiences, reflections and to elicit assessments. Fontana and Frey (2005) note that participant observation and open-ended, in-depth (ethnographic) interviewing go hand in hand.

The emphasis on these home visits was on facilitation of a natural social setting. At the beginning of each session I sat with the adults and chatted or 'yarned' (Hanlen 2002c) about what had been happening in our lives since the previous visit. The children would initially hover around but would soon get bored with the adult conversation and go about their activities. The home visits were not intended to follow a highly structured format. Each visit lasted 1-2 hours and arrangements for the following visit were made at the conclusion of each visit. Flexibility was essential to suit the needs of the participant families, as there were times when I would turn up for a scheduled visit and the participants had either forgotten our arrangement or had another pressing engagement. This posed absolutely no problem for me as both families lived near the school I was working at and as many of the visits occurred after school, I was in the area anyway. I expected that I would need at least ten visits per family to collect enough data for this research.
**Videotaping:**

Ethnographic research requires a multi-methods approach to data collection. In this research I relied heavily on the use of videotapes. Field notes supported this as did reflective narrative stories from previous experience. I believe this allowed for precise, reliable data collection. Not only was this approach technically reliable, but it allowed for the essence of the daily experiences to be captured. The video captured the facial expressions, the speech and language interactions of the participants, hesitation, laughter and nuances such as tone and expression. The whole transcription became a living document. I believe that the videoing technique best allowed the process of home literacy practices to be examined and questions of how and what to be analysed in detail.

This means of data collection, completed in the home, would provide an informal environment which would hopefully encourage the participants to engage in their normal activities. Whilst it can be intrusive, I hoped that the participants would come to feel at ease over time. The video taping did not actually prove to be a problem to the participants. After the children’s initial interest they soon forgot about the camera. As Collins and Blot (2003) clearly illustrate, “any understanding of literacy and literate practices allowing cross-cultural comparison calls for ethnographic descriptions of those practices in their cultural contexts.” (Collins and Blot, 2003:61) The video footage was only observed by me and the 'actors' and I intended to use it as a springboard for discussion for focus groups discussions. At the conclusion of the study the footage will be securely stored for five years and then destroyed in order to protect participants identity and autonomy.

Copies of all videotaped footage were given to the participants. Both families were happy about this with Jeanie’s husband Terry taking it home to Papua New Guinea for his family to see their grandchildren. Esther also sent some footage home to her family in Torres Strait so they could see their children and grandchildren.
Videotaping was also considered advantageous for the next stage of the research process which was to conduct focus groups to discuss the observations. Repeated viewing would assist this phase.

**Focus/discussion groups:**

I had intended to use focus groups to collect data as I was drawn to Madriz’s comments regarding their utilisation. Focus groups allow multiple lines of communication offering participants "a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs and attitudes in the company of people from the same socio-economic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds." (Madriz 2000, p. 835) I envisaged that the interviews would be conducted with first a small group of teachers and then a group of students. I proposed that video segments would be viewed and act as a starting point for discussion.

In the final collection of data I decided that focus groups were not the most appropriate data collection technique for this study. There was firstly the logistics of getting all the teachers together for a group discussion and secondly with regard to the students I felt that in the end, they would be influenced too much by their peers. Consequently interviews were conducted separately.

**Interviews:**

Formal interviews were conducted with ten students and a total of twenty one Westville school staff. There has been much written about the way in which researchers influence the study both in methods of data collection and techniques of reporting their findings. (Fontana and Frey (2005) Postmodernist interviewers, according to Fontana and Frey are attempting to minimise traditional status, knowledge and power differences between interviewers and respondents by showing their human side, answering questions and expressing feelings. "....this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and a greater insight into the lives of
the respondents...." (Fontana and Frey 2005: 711) In this way participants are encouraged to control the sequencing and language of the interview as well as open-ended responses. (Fontana and Frey 2005) Rapport is critical in order that participants trust the interviewer thereby reducing the distance between the two. Given that I had worked with all the consenting respondents, it was my intention to conduct informal interviews and encourage a relaxed tone. I consider it an advantage to have an existing relationship with the participants and know something of their lives and they of mine. This enables a free flow of communication between the interviewer and respondents. It also enables research questions to be intimately connected to, and informed by prior observations and document analysis. (Smith 2000) Questions have been constructed to seek both descriptions of experiences and assessments of a situation.

Photographs

Still photography is used in Chapter Six of this thesis to trace literacy practices as part of contemporary social life. Bezencenet and Bresheeth (1986) suggest photographic images can make for the organised retrieval of the images of the past and the systematic documentation of the present. Further to this they assert that the use of visual mass media like photography and film records "is of crucial value to the furtherance of class/gender struggle." (1986 p. 62) These authors suggest that photographs collected during research work can allow for the examination of aspects of liberation and oppression. They are not necessarily exciting visual material but they can be powerful. In the field of literacy research, Hamilton (2000) considers photographs useful to focus and extend knowledge of literacy as a social practice. While Kozloff (1994) argues photographs present us with certain knowledge which is visually the case for only 1/125th of a second, Hamilton suggests photographs are useful as they "are able to capture moments in which interactions around texts take place." (p.17) Harper (2005) argues that visual documentation (photographs) become "part of research triangulation, confirming theories using different forms of data." (Harper 2005:749) Kress and van Leeuwin (1990) assert that images elaborate written texts. These can then be used directly as an
additional source of data and it is this use to which I will incorporate photographs in the present study. The photographs are informational rather than serving an aesthetic function.

**Work samples**

I have used work samples from students in my classroom and even in past classes which I have taught. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) refer to the collection of artefacts noting that their importance cannot be ignored. As a teacher I have used collections of children’s writing endeavours as assessment tools for many years. They reveal an unparalleled wealth of information about attitudes, influences, beliefs, significant events in children’s lives and of course skills. I cannot stress the importance of work samples as what I have found to be a source of rich and crucial data.

**Critical portrayal and narratives**

"The author of the narrative engages in a re-visioning and see themselves in a new way." Mitchell and Weber (1999)

Narrative methodology forms a significant part of the methodology of this thesis. Ethnographic research results in a report. Critical reports come in the form of narratives. (Smith 2000) The data from this study has been transformed and presented in narrative form. Having spent many years living and working in Aboriginal communities from Western Australia to Arnhem Land and now Far North Queensland, I seek to use my experiences and observations to explore "the storied nature of human interpretation." (Sandelowski 1991, p.162) I am a teacher who has spent the majority of twenty three years teaching and working in cross-cultural contexts, both migrant and Indigenous communities. The project is personal and allows me to reflect on my own submission to colonialist education. Through stories I can position myself so as to work toward connecting stories with development and action. These stories
could potentially provide access for other teachers working cross-culturally setting up a culture of inquiry as opposed to demonstration. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990)

Through writing personal narratives within my teaching experience, a kind of unpacking of memories occurs. I can observe the silences, the symbols and consider the meanings. This leads to a better understanding of 'ourselves'. Mitchell and Weber espouse these concepts in their book *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers* (1999). The opening quote in this section by Mitchell and Weber illuminates the notion of reflection and subsequent transformation. Narrative inquiry attracts a diversity of foci and methods. The stories one writes have the capacity to be professionally, and in many instances politically, transforming. Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht (1995) champion teaching narratives noting:

> Teachers' stories, these positive and negative personal accounts of our lives in classroom, are central to the type of inquiry and reflection that lead to professional development and personal insight. Educators must delve beneath the routine, the surface, and the business-as-usual if they are ever to unearth the heart of teaching and, in the process, nurture their souls as teachers. The word soul is used deliberately here, not to raise religious eyebrows but to refer to our inner being rather than our professional façade..... we contend that it is through careful examination of real-life classroom experiences-both lived one's self and borrowed from other teachers- that teachers explore the complexities of what it means to teach. it is in the narrative mode that teachers consider daily dilemmas, examine their motives and misgivings, savour their successes, and anguish over their failures." (Jalongo, Isenberg with Gerbracht 1995 p.xvi-xvii)

issues, I had come to feel that I had no place in this field. Through my stories I do not seek to compare and contrast, label and generalise. I am not attempting to speak ‘for’ others. I do not intend to perpetuate stereotypes and simplify versions of the truth. I wish only to tell of my experiences from where I stand to those who are interested and have not had the experiences of living and working with Indigenous Australians. Narrative can give voice then to wider sociopolitical, cultural and pedagogical issues. (Clough, 2002) Researchers can analyse similarities and differences across narratives but must acknowledge that every narrative is particular.

Gudmundsdottir (2001) notes that narrative approaches are more suitable for capturing the complexities of a situation including the social interactions that take place. The researcher considers the whole context and context-specific situations in which the actions and activities are taking place. Gudmundsdottir (2001) does however, urge us to be aware that narrative descriptions are local, provisional and essentially personal and are out of place when used to generalise to situations and contexts. This is true enough. However I do not perceive it as a deficiency of this form of inquiry. It is a strength. We are able to develop professionally and reflect on how we are architecting our professional lives. Clough (2002) poignantly sums this up in the following quote in relation to narrative. His aim in Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research is to, “attempt to ‘trouble the common sense understanding of data’; ‘to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently’. It is not so much a ‘how to do’ as a ‘what is possible to do’.” (2002:4)

The spontaneous and unaided narratives of individual teachers are referred to as autonomous writings. (Thomas, 1995) These narratives allow us to see the events which have led to reflective transformation, a concept echoed by Mitchell and Weber (1999). The authors use the term ‘reinvention’ of one’s professional and personal identity through different modes of self-study, narrative being a dominant theme. Through this process we are able to generate questions for ourselves. As Aoki wrote, “I was becoming one of many; I did the many things
that many did; I had come to own the many things that many had valued. I was becoming very comfortable in the city, yet discomforted by the very comfort that seemed to surround me. So I struck anew - I became a stranger again in a new surrounding...." (Aoki 1983: 330) I have always engaged in the writing of notes and detailed letters as I reflected on my lived experiences. Grumet's (1990) reason for making journal-like notes is simply that they represented "Moments of being in a world that I want to save. Pictures of the world that I have witnessed. A sketch returns it all to me. A half page in even the little journal is all I need to remember, in some later day, the whole scene, the whole situation and all of what I felt about." (1990:322) These notes, help the writer to access a level of meaning that perhaps we are only dimly aware of while living through the experience. (Mattingly 1991 cited by Mulholland and Wallace 2003) Teachers are isolated. We are always complaining that we don't have enough time to talk with our colleagues about what is going on in our classrooms. Narratives can unlock that separation and draw us together through ‘the solidarity of experience’ (Grenfell, 2003).

Going beyond the personal, Thomas (1995) reveals how narrative can give voice to wider socio-political, cultural and pedagogic issues, a concept also espoused by Clough (2002). Clough suggests that stories can provide a means by which truths, which cannot be told in more conventional ways, can be uncovered. Through my own stories I could see how, in the past as a white teacher, I perpetuated some of the racialised practices I have uncovered throughout this study. I have been able to see how the system that employed me was unrelenting in its covert racist practices. Thomas (1995) quotes from Carl Rogers. "What is most personal is most general." (1995: 8) My experiences in Indigenous communities were retold over and over through other teachers’ stories that I read and heard. The performers changed but many aspects of the plot never did. Having said that, it is important to remember that using narrative methodology there is a danger (I mentioned above) in making my stories context free and then using them to generalise to other situations. Conle (2000) refers to such stories as ‘hardened stories’ which are portable and used anywhere, anytime for illustrative
purposes. This she suggests kills the spirit of inquiry. There is no doubt in my mind that stories are a powerful research tool but at what cost? Can we really disguise our characters? Clough uses ‘symbolic equivalents’ (2002: 79) which he claims conceal the identities of actual people. Biographic research must be, by its very nature intrusive even invasive. However, on the other hand, Schaafsma (1996) asks us to consider the sentiments of Rich (1993) who comments “Where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, violence” (Rich, 1993:26 cited by Schaafsma, 1996:110). We must grasp all opportunities to tell our stories and provide opportunities for others to tell theirs. Schaafsma describes this as ‘liberatory’. (1996:110) It is in this light that I use a narrative approach.

Narrative as a research method unlocks other useful concepts. One of these is counter-storying as presented by Solorzano and Yosso. (2001) This research methodology appeared particularly relevant to cross-cultural educational issues. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) discuss storytelling and counter storytelling as a methodology to challenge social inequality. Other terms employed that work towards multiple tellings of stories are restorying (Clandinin and Connolly, 1990), collaboration (Thomas, 1995) and narrative vignettes (Smith 2000). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) cite Delagado (1989) who suggests that counter story telling is a method of illuminating the lives and experiences of those that are not often told such as those people in the margins of society. It is also a “tool for analysing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse - the majoritarian story.” (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001: 475) Solorzano and Yosso identify four theoretical, methodological and pedagogical functions that counter stories can serve. The first is the belief that counter stories endow an educational theory and practice with a human face which can build community among the margins of society. Secondly, counter stories can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s centre by providing a context to understand and change established belief systems. The third function that counter stories can serve is to open new doors into the reality of those at the margins of society by demonstrating possibilities. The final function of counter stories is that they can show that by marrying
elements from both the story and the current reality, a richer, alternative world can be constructed that is more fertile than either the reality or the story alone.

Solorzano and Yosso utilise counter story telling to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination experienced by minority university graduate students. They develop these stories from at least four sources. These include the data gathered from the research process itself, the existing literature on the topic, their professional experience and their personal experience. They then develop composite characters which illuminate the lives of the minority university graduate students and engage these characters in dialogue. Thompson (2000) has employed a similar strategy in her text "Schooling the Rustbelt kids." It is not possible to develop composite characters outside one's cultural group, however in Chapter Five I have employed this method to develop non-Indigenous teaching characters in 'the writing lesson' vignettes.

Narrative allows for collaborative accounts to be told which provide a record on multiple levels (Thomas, 1995). Bishop (2005) suggests collaborative storying is very similar to testimonio. This method evolved in my own research as I got to know the participants and saw them socially beyond the formal data collection phase. Cooperative sharing of experiences which promoted connectedness, engagement and involvement with the research participants, occurred. (Bishop 2005)

In a cross cultural context collaborative accounts seem particularly appropriate as different people 'live' their stories and experiences in different ways coming from often vastly different world views. Narrative as a research tool acknowledges the social and cultural construction of knowledge. (Grenfell, 2003a). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990) the researcher engages in a close relationship with the subject. The two narratives of the researcher and the participant become a vehicle for social change characterised by the progressive political intentions of the researchers. Ryan (1999) suggests that this approach
allows for previously marginalised discourses "to emerge and compete on equal terms with previously dominant discourses." (Ryan 1999:187 cited by Bishop 2005)

Readings on narrative have forced me to locate myself in my relationship with subjects. This has been illuminating. I find contradictions and implicit domination in my relationships which were not part of my conscious intention. I also have doubts about the powers of articulation when I am working cross-culturally and in ESL settings. Have I interpreted others stories correctly? My analysis and interpretation potentially suppresses the voice I seek to make audible. I need to be very aware of how easy it is to make ethical and moral judgments and as Grenfell (2003) asks, for our consideration, whose ethics are they? This alludes to Gudmundsdottir's (2001) culturally situated voice. People in all cultural groups develop distinct ways of knowing about, understanding and perceiving their physical and social reality. This narrative mode of thought (Bruner 1986 cited by Gudmundsdottir 2001) gives rise to a narrative tool for people to interpret their experiences and relate them to others. Postmodern theorists assert that individuals have the right to speak for themselves and have their voices heard. This voice is accepted as authentic and legitimate. Narrative is a vehicle for achieving this.

The merits of narrative as a process of inquiry are clear. Gudmundsdottir (2001) believes that the natural qualities of storytelling aids the formulation of practical solutions. The process has the ability to work well in cross-cultural contexts and challenge existing social inequalities, it allows us to see the human side of educational experiences whilst capturing the complexities of classroom practice, and it can be used as a vehicle for authenticating and legitimating the diversity of voices that have been historically marginalised by other forms of research. Most importantly, it is through the process of reflection that narratives can be utilised as a basis for action.
Critical analysis

After the recorded observations, video footage and interview transcripts were produced and verified by the participants, the analysis of their contents occurred. This consisted of a holistic description that created a family profile of literacy events and activities. In this analysis I combined analytic account with narrative vignettes in order to look for patterns and create rich portrayals of literacy practices and events. A cross comparison of my data with the research completed in this area, was made. I sought to discover whether my data supported other research completed in this field. The main thrust of this critical analysis was to know and understand Indigenous students in order to improve school outcomes for these students. This involved the identification of the major areas of contradiction (Smith 2000), which emerged as patterns and related to differentials in power and subordination along cultural and class lines. Areas which were examined were: Valuing parents as teachers versus domination of Western educative systems; The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage versus social justice; Acknowledging and valuing diversity versus cultural hegemony; inclusivity and the nature of learning versus exclusion and invisibility; and Understanding Indigenous youth versus oppression of youth.

Findings.

Brodkey (1987) suggests the critique provides an interruption to the narrative that allows a "systematic verbal protest against cultural hegemony." (1987, p. 67) The significance of the findings (Brodkey employs the use of the term ‘critique’) is "to point out disparities between the story and the experience" (1987, p. 67). Smith (2000) suggests these disparities are the food for critical reflection and possibly transformation. In this study findings are reported through descriptive analysis and the inclusion of short vignettes and reflective accounts. These present insights that aim to develop a better understanding of existing literacy patterns and practices that are occurring in Indigenous homes prior to and during formal education. Links can them be made that have the capacity to assist teachers in developing programs that are
more culturally congruent with these home literacy practices. Findings and implications are presented in Chapter Nine.

Triangulation and validity

Triangulation is an important consideration when completing qualitative research. The most appropriate form of triangulation to this study is the use of multiple data sources and collection methods. Multiple methods of data collection in this study include the telling of personal stories, narrative, interviews, still photography, video taping procedures and the collection of work samples. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, video taping of the family literacy events allowed repeated viewing of situations and enabled analysis of transcripts to be conducted with confidence. I conducted weekly or sometimes fortnightly visits extending over each of the four school terms (and contact was maintained post data collection.) This provided opportunities for the observation of routines and activities on many occasions. The visits were generally after school hours and sometimes on the weekends.

My background of living and working in Indigenous communities for the past sixteen years provides me with some cultural familiarity and cross-cultural understandings essential for completing this study and contributing to reliability. This gave me an 'inroad' for working with all the Indigenous participants involved. I believe it allowed a hastened acceptance and trust of my presence as well as the co-operation and help of the families without whom there would be no study or possible benefit to Indigenous students and school systems. A testament to this is the fact that I have maintained regular contact with Jeanie’s family whom I visit and talk to frequently on the phone.
Conclusion.

In this chapter I have outlined the methodological process that this study utilises through the incorporation of emerging alternative approaches to socially situated research. The methodology used recognises the wide range of interconnected qualitative approaches as a way to make sense of the literacy experiences under study. Social interactions are emphasised as the basis for knowledge and the fact that these are constructed and specific to each different situation. There are many problems that social science research faces but what is important is that it is an enriching process that can lead to enhanced possibilities of making sense of the human world. (Connole 2000)

In the next chapter I will discuss the texts and literacy practices of the participant families. This involves observing the repertoire of social and cultural practices that occur in the homes. Also presented are the findings of a series of interviews that I conducted with Indigenous students, Indigenous staff members at Westville School and non-Indigenous teachers. The practices outlined reveal that there is a plethora of rich and diverse literacy events and that these interact with the cultural practices of a community.
Chapter 5: Ethnographic account of two families’ literacy practices.

In this chapter I will discuss the texts and literacy practices of two Indigenous families. In an attempt to establish the repertoire of social and cultural practices occurring in the homes. Following this I will present the findings of a series of interviews I conducted with Indigenous students, Indigenous staff members at Westville School and non-Indigenous teachers. In the final section of this chapter I present two narrative vignettes which I have called ‘The writing lessons’. These vignettes attempt to add to the existing data by contributing to the scene that is being set and flag issues that are central to this study. They are based on field notes, direct quotes and my own teaching experience.

Setting

There is definitely a sense of community within the geographic location surrounding Westville School. Both Jeanie’s and Esther’s families reside there. The number of rental properties is high and rents are low. The population is made up of distinct cultural groups, which, in many cases appear to be bound by ties of kinship. The groups are predominantly Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Cook Islander. There is a sense of local community that from my outsiders point of view approaches that of a remote Indigenous community. According to Jeanie, there is deprivation, low socio-economic standing, violence and substance abuse. I have seen mothers waiting anxiously in the foyer of the school offices, asking to have their children brought to them. In one incident, the husband had threatened his wife or children, and she was desperate to get the children out and to a refuge. In another, a mother was killed in front of her children just outside her house due to a domestic dispute during the time I collected data. Many of the residents in the street witnessed the events including children from the school. The school has
a name amongst the white middle class residents of Cairns. People say "that's a rough school, you don't want to work there." The demographics have changed over the years. It was once a predominantly white school. In fact Jeanie reports that when she went there, in the 1980’s, she was the only black student in her class. The teachers who have been at the school for more than twenty years note this change in student demographics with some regret.

Real texts and lived practices

Jeanie

In Jeanie’s household there are five primary inhabitants who form the basis of my participant study. They are Jeanie, Terry (Jeanie’s husband) Jasmine (8 years) Leticia (4 years) and Serena (3 years). Jeanie and her family are all active in their use of print and engage in many literacy events. I was able to observe and record a variety of these literacy events.

In my view Jeanie is an extremely strong woman. She has many stories to tell that are at times painful, yet throughout these she has remained 'unbeaten'. I asked Jeanie to describe herself. She said thoughtfully, "I never describe myself. Give me an example." Jeanie’s daughter Jasmine interjects, "You're frightened of carpet snakes." Jeanie looks to her sister, Dulcie, for help. "You're always happy," says Dulcie. "Yes I’m happy. I never like to be sad. I'm happy go lucky," says Jeanie. Dulcie says, "You’re kind and you have a big heart." I witnessed this 'big heart' of Jeanie’s on many occasions. The homes she lived in during the course of this study, were always in housing commission areas. As such there were many people who, because of economic disadvantage, resided all around Jeanie. She would observe the people in her environment, in particular children. She noted on more than one occasion the high incidence of drug and alcohol use. She also talked about sexual abuse. Jeanie would take in young children who she felt were in danger of being sexually abused and look after them for as long as she could. Police were never involved but Jeanie felt God was guiding her. "I'm very spiritual," continues Jeanie, "and outgoing. I talk to anyone." One of my perceptions of Jeanie is that she
is very bicultural. I tell her. She looks at me quizically. "You know," I say, "You can move between the two cultures very comfortably. "Yes" responds Jeanie, there are certain customs from my island that I choose to keep.....the decent ones." I discover that there is tension between Jeanie’s religious beliefs and her traditional island culture. She says that many of the customs "Don’t interest me anymore." She sees them at odds with her church life. When I ask her which ones, she does not want to talk about them.

I ask Jeanie about her literacy history. "What do you mean?" she says. "Well tell me first about school and your island." Jeanie signs a big cross to me. "Not so good" she says. This leads us into a long autobiographical account of Jeanie’s early life. Certain details of the treatment Jeanie received from her adopted family have been omitted, out of respect to them. Jeanie was born to a Boiugo Island (Torres Strait) mother and a Fijian father. She has never met her father and was adopted out to another family when she was very young. She says she also has "Aboriginal blood". The family she was adopted into had four boys and no girls. Jeanie's adoptive mother was a very close friend of Jeanie’s birth mother.

Jeanie begins to talk about her early school life. "I went to [Westville] State School in grade seven. I came from island at that time with my adopted family. I did grade one to six at Malukiai State School on Boiugo Island. I loved island school. Our best game was 'bang bang'. You hide in long grass. It's army game. Two teams jump up from long grass and shoot each other. You have to be home at six o'clock or police come and belt us."
"Curfew" interjects Dulcie.
Jeanie continues. "One teacher belted us across these knuckles with a thin stick if we were naughty....or twisted our ears. It made us go to school. If you stayed home, you’d get it! He's dead now so we can’t really sue him." Jeanie and Dulcie laugh hysterically.
"I didn’t like [Westville] ’cause no other black kids at that time. It was a big change. All of a sudden there were only white kids around me. Down here I found school hard. I didn’t know how to speak English. The teachers weren’t very helpful. They went too fast. They thought I knew
stuff but I didn’t. I wish there were other island kids to make me feel at home. After year
seven I went to local High School. I liked that by then. I could speak English. I could speak up
to teachers. My parents took me out [of school] in grade nine. I don’t know why. I had to stay
home and cook and clean. That part of custom I don’t like it’s typical hey?” Jeanie turns to
Dulcie who nods in agreement. "I ran away. I called the police. I was adopted. My real mum died.
My dad’s Fijian. I never met him. It was like what Jesus went through."

Jeanie’s school and early childhood experiences are not memories she treasures. The socio-
cultural and historical contexts of her childhood have meant she has challenged parts of her
culture. She clearly finds the ‘adopting out’ of children a painful memory.

At this point Jeanie tells me about her life with her adopted family. Her adopted brothers and
mother treated her very harshly which is why she ran away. She was unable to get back to her
family on the island and so sought refuge from a pastor she knew.
"I rang pastor. He was white man. He got church family to look after me. They taught me to
pray and taught me to look for job. I thank God for pastors. I never lived with my family again.
A lot of my cousins are still there, [on the island] too frightened to leave the house. The
Christian family taught me about C.E.S. (Commonwealth Employment Service) to look for work.
They told me to pray so God would see my faithfulness and reward me. They said to go every
morning to C.E.S. at 6:00am. By end of two weeks I got a job. I told them about my situation
and I got job in a fruit shop. I worked for three years there. I wanted to finish grade 12 but I
didn’t because of my parents. They were strict. If I didn’t get up by 7:00am they belt me with
broomstick or hose. All my mum’s sisters were back on island, so they couldn’t stop them. If
they knew about this there would be big war. You don’t treat adopted child like that. Fruit shop
were great. We got bonus at Christmas time of $50.00. Fruit shop owners were kind. They gave
me extra work as a cleaner. That boss taught me how to budget money. I save over $1,000. I
was 16. I showed off to my cousins. I go on shopping spree. I got them suit with jacket and
skirt. It was expensive, maybe $70.00."
The discussion turned to literacy in the workplace and then moved on to religion. We somehow always got on to the subject of religion during my visits. God is a very important part of Jeanie’s life. She attends a thriving Cairns church called "The Power of the Spirit Fellowship." This she describes as a church 'on fire'. It is obviously very dynamic and vital and Jeanie loves the multicultural nature of the congregation. She says, "Some churches haven’t moved on. Ours is not old fashioned way of teaching. After hard week, I look forward to church. I dance. Some churches are too strict. You can’t worship how you want. We have Aboriginal pastor. He explains things really good." There are church conferences that Jeanie attends where worship extends for an entire two week block. Guest speakers from all over Australia and the world come to meet and talk and pray. Jeanie says, "There is church morning, noon and night. A time to laugh, have fun, listen to guest speakers. So good... I feel like in heaven." In the times when church is attended every night, it appears to be very draining and taxing on their family life.

Jeanie said that when she got her first job in the fruit shop, maths was a major problem. "I went and did courses at TAFE. Access courses, office and business studies. I’ve worked all sorts of jobs. I’ve been a pizza driver. You have to read maps. I’m local so it was easy. Shop assistant, teacher aide, cleaner, house keeper in a hotel, police officer. We caught Australia’s most wanted criminal....trying to escape from Australia through islands. We had to hold him for twenty four hours. He was pretty dangerous. He had needles in his pocket. I was an undercover cop on the islands. We were trying to get 'sly grogging'. Ninety per cent of T.I. kids are smoking marijuana. It comes from PNG. Before traditions was strong and kids didn’t turn against their family. If you swear your mum and dad can kill you. It’s that strong and strict. Many parents turn against their children because this is a wicked generation. The bible says it. This is an abomination to God. Most T.I.’s know God because of the Missionaries. We still celebrate the 'coming of the light'. Even if they not Christian they still have a respect. There is lots of religious fighting. Born again Christians against Catholics." The 'coming of the light' is a ceremony that is held annually on the islands and in Cairns. Participants re-enact how the Gospel
came to the Torres Strait Islands, brought by the missionaries. This is incorporated with traditional dancing and a feast. It is a big event on the Torres Strait Islander calendar.

I asked Jeanie if literacy was important to her. "Not really" she said. "I use it for bible reading and bible study. We read bible stories to the kids every night." Despite this comment, Jeanie uses literacy in so many ways. She met her husband Terry when they were both studying at Central Queensland University. She was doing a course in Law and Welfare and he was studying to be an accountant. It appears that prior to, and following this course, Jeanie has started many courses, mainly through TAFE. These courses require active participation to enrol and then complete them. Not all have been completed, however she is clearly driven by a desire to improve her financial situation and her own personal development. Terry has made inquiries into completing a primary school teaching qualification.

During my visits to Jeanie’s house I observed many literacy practices. The following is a description of what I observed through the eye of the camera. Visibility in this sense refers to those practices that are clearly observable. This includes the participants, setting, artifacts and activities. Non-visible constituents as discussed in subsequent sections, include the hidden participants, the domain of practice within which the activities occur, the resources that are brought to the activity that include ways of thinking, understandings, skills, feeling and knowledge and the established culturally determined behaviours and routines that regulate actions.

**What is visible.**

On my first visit, Jeanie introduced me to her three girls. They were instructed to call me 'Aunty Kathy' which is a name they continue to use. They were all very out going, especially Jasmine (8 years) who offered me drinks and sat with me while Jeanie organised herself. Jeanie and her husband Terry, proudly showed me their house. Within this 'life space' they presented
each piece of furniture highlighting the fact that it was all second hand, and recalling its cost. They talked about how they had bargained the second hand dealers down and were very pleased with their efforts. In the 18 months I worked with Jeanie, collecting data for this research, she moved house four times. Her family’s living arrangements are characterised by frequent moves. The houses were all housing commission residences attracting subsidised rents. They were all in what are recognised by the local Cairns community as low socio-economic areas. It is not always appropriate to apply these labels as it maintains constructions of ‘us’ and ‘them’. The locations are residences of disadvantaged families. This description of location is not intended to define a collective identity but to recognise place as a factor that affects people’s lives.

Jeanie clearly displayed the bible in the front room of her house. There was not a bookshelf or other books although on a later visit, Jasmine took me into her room and showed me two children’s bible stories that she had. Jeanie said she read to the girls from the Bible every night. The walls were decorated with a biblical passage (poster), family photos taken at professional studios and also certificates attained by Jasmine at school. Jasmine attends a Christian College which is a fee paying private school attracting fees of $150 per month. I gasp at the cost but Jeanie says "I don’t mind because look what they get out of it." Jasmine brings home the daily products of her schooling. Jeanie does not discuss this work with Jasmine. She says Jasmine is a very good student. "Her teacher says she is good at reading...she is above the class average...and she writes stories....... I didn’t know that." I asked Jasmine what kind of stories she likes to write and she says "Fake ones." "Tell Aunty Kathy about the one the teacher told me you wrote," says Jeanie. She walks off to do something leaving Jasmine to tell the story. "Well there’s this gorilla called Ricco and she’s playing in a waterfall with her friends." I nod with interest and Jasmine continues. "When it got dark the friends went home but Ricco stayed because she was too frightened to go home. She was scared of the dark and that creepy crawlies would come out of the ground and get her. She finds secret place to sleep and next day the friends came back. When it got dark again they went home. Ricco was too
frightened to go home again. She stayed in her secret place. Her friends made her a teddy......
to give to Ricco. When they gave it to her she wasn't frightened any more."

Jasmine loves school and after every holiday was always looking forward to her return. I was
particularly interested in her teacher's approach to literacy learning. Jasmine has been a
successful learner and since I had worked so closely with Jeanie and her family observing their
home literacy practices I was keen to see if these practices were supported at school or indeed
what strategies and programs the teacher employed. I asked Jeanie if she minded if I went to
the school and with permission from the principal talked to the class teacher about Jasmine.
The classroom is filled with Scripture posters and Biblical texts on the walls. There is a memory
verse on the blackboard, which is a scripture changed every two weeks. Jasmine’s teacher said
that memorisation of this is part of the students set homework activities. The Biblical texts
that are around the room relate the theme that is being studied in class for the term. Formal
religion lessons occur three times a week with Monday assembly and some extra chapel meetings
and services. Bible study throughout the religion lessons involved reading comprehension
activities or sometimes a response to a text through art or drama. There are fourteen students
in the class and Jasmine’s teacher reported that she does not do much whole class teaching
preferring to organise the students mainly in mixed ability groups. She believes this helps with
any behaviour problems as the students monitor their own and their peers behaviour. The
principal of the school believed that Jasmine’s success was the result of matching texts and
discourses between home and school. The use of Bible texts at school aligned with those Jeanie
used at home and with what Jasmine was familiar with when she attended church services and
Sunday school.

Jeanie puts her two youngest children in day care on the days when she is studying. She likes
this arrangement and thinks it is good for them. I ask her in what way. She says to mix with
other children and the carers “teach them things.” Jeanie sees the formal learning of literacy
as a teacher's role. It appears that Leticia is following in her older sister Jasmine’s footsteps
at school. The following year when Leticia was old enough for preschool, Jasmine told me how Leticia had been moved up to prep in term three. "She passed a big test and her drawing was clear," said Jasmine who was clearly very proud of her younger sister. I asked Jasmine what she wanted to be when she grew up. She said a "soccer player or a doctor to give needles and stuff….Lou wants to be a teacher." Leticia nods. Serena chimes in, "I want to be a bird." The girls always answer my questions in Standard Australian English. Jeanie speaks to them in Torres Strait Creole, but Terry discourages the use of this and when he is around they don't speak creole. Creole texts are not used at school.

Jasmine and her two younger sisters loved reading the 'junk' mail that they received in the letterbox. They would look through the colourful pages talking about what they would buy, scanning them for information on specials. "I have this one this one Barbie one for me," "That one I like." Jasmine tested Serena on the characters in the Toyworld catalogue. "Who is this?"
"Winnie the Pooh"
"Which Wiggle your favourite?"
Serena knew all the Disney characters, Wiggles and other television characters.
The girls all 'read' environmental print. As already stated, they read the 'junk' mail, they read labels on food packages and pointed writing out to me on their clothing. They could recognise KFC and McDonalds. Junk mail and television were playing a part in shaping their identity in that they saw themselves as part of a consumer culture.

I could see from time with Jeanie's family that school-orientated home literacy events were not numerous but they were present. The three young girls were at various stages of constructing themselves as literate people. Jasmine was seeking sponsorship for the 40 hour famine. She interrupted Jeanie's and my 'chat' with information from school, "Mum, you have to sign this one for me to go to Birdworld." There were few child-orientated print materials available to the children in Jeanie's household apart from a two or three bible stories.
were no children's fictional stories. In this sense Jasmine has had few opportunities to build on the fictive narrative genre that we use so frequently in schools. However, Jasmine clearly knew the functions and purposes of many print materials in her environment. The younger girls know how books work and that there is a message carried in print. On one visit Leticia showed me a book that Jeanie had brought for her to write in. She was very proud of this book with its fluffy bright cover and matching pen. There was even a lock on it in order for the writer to keep it as a diary. Leticia played at writing with it and was helped by Jasmine. Jasmine would teach and encourage her. The older Jasmine clearly modelled literate practices for her younger siblings. This is culturally appropriate to look after young siblings in all ways. Literacy was one such way. Jeanie would tell Leticia to go and write a letter in her book but did not sit with her and offer instruction. Access to writing materials was not apparent very often. The girls spontaneously produced written work at home but this was limited.

The children do not have construction toys such as building blocks, or puzzles to complete. There were a number of soft toys in their room and a few items from McDonalds 'Happy meals'. On one visit Jeanie proudly showed off a second hand activity table she had purchased for the little girls. She did not interact with them in using this but she would encourage them to use it. The girls spent a great deal of time during my visits watching their favourite videos. On my first visit, this was "The Lion King." They always watched it at a dangerously loud volume. They also watched children's shows on both commercial and ABC stations. The television gave them a great deal of local information. Jeanie purchased Cairns show tickets with information from a TV advertisement, noting proudly the savings made when purchasing pre-paid ride and entry tickets. TV is clearly a source of entertainment, information and tool for learning. The family further read the Cairns show guide prior to going to this large regional show, so they knew exactly what they were going to purchase.

Jeanie and Terry tell the children stories about their youth. They use these as teaching stories, in the traditional way Dreamtime stories were used in the past. Jeanie tells one story to her
children about a Torres Strait Island 'Devil man'. This is how she told the story to me. "This one is about a little boy who didn’t listen to his mother. This little boy loved red grapes. You know the kind that the Torres Strait people love. There are lots of them there. They are a really delicious fruit. The little boy found one red grape left on a tree. It was all by itself. He picked it and gave it to his mother to look after. He told her he would eat it when he came back from wherever he was going. His mother ate it. When the little boy came home he wanted his grape. His mother said it was in the bag. He looked and looked in the bag but he couldn’t find it. Not in the bag. The little boy cried and cried. He wouldn’t stop crying. A big giant man, 'Dog Eye’ came. That’s the Devil man. He had big eyes, big ears, big nose, big mouth. He took the little boy to his cave and chopped him up and ate him in pieces. He ate the head last. The family followed that little boy’s footprints to the cave. They tried to get Wyreg out. Wyreg, that the name of the giant man. They lit fires and tried to get him out with that. You see this story is trying to get kids to stop crying. I told it to my girls but it made them too frightened. But they did stop crying a lot. I don’t really want to tell them these ones too much."

Many of the stories Jeanie and Terry tell are stories that are within their memory and experience. They talk about how people came to know and love God. Terry tells one about his grandfather who had dreadlocks down to his knees. God told him to cut them off and shave his head. He also told the grandfather not to eat pig. The point of the story is, according to Jeanie that God spoke to him. The grandfather didn’t know God at this time, but still he heard the voice of God and obeyed without question. Again the stories have a teaching function. In this case, love and obey God without question.

Jeanie and I chatted about her study. She was, at the time I met her, studying a teacher aide course through the Cairns TAFE. The course was called RATEP (Remote Area Teacher Education Program) and gave Indigenous teachers skills and qualifications to work in schools. At the highest level of RATEP, Diploma, graduates could enter the James Cook University teacher education program. The Indigenous students saw this as a good grounding for James Cook
University. Statistics are not available as to how many graduates of RATEP actually go on to study with James Cook. My understanding is that it is very few. Jeanie’s aspirations for doing the course were to go back to Torres Strait and work as a teacher.

During my visits Jeanie was so open and would talk freely about subjects that were obviously painful to her. She said she enjoyed listening to my outlook on things. At one stage she referred to this as ‘white business’ then apologised for using this term. On the first visit we began to talk about her experiences with racism. She had many stories of white people being rude to her particularly in customer service positions. She talked about how she had gone into an office to pay her rent. She was waiting patiently as white customer after white customer came in after her and was served immediately. Jeanie said "I could tell with that look on her face...she kept me waiting." Jeanie was left to wait endlessly. Finally she said to the lady behind the desk, "I’m not your enemy, treat me as a customer." She also had similar experiences at supermarkets where she would ask shop attendants who would not serve her, "Have you had a bad day?"

Although she laughs about this treatment, her experiences are not isolated incidences but frequent occurrences. "Do you know that real estate lady came and told me to clean my oven?" I ask what real estate lady? Jeanie tells me that a representative from Access Housing who looks after the house she rents came one day unannounced. She told Jeanie to keep the kitchen clean especially the oven. Jeanie rang the Tenants Union to ask what her rights were. She was told that the lady from Access Housing was in breach of duty and she must send a letter before arriving at a tenant’s residence. Jeanie said "she should send me ‘remedy breach’ which is warning, and then notice to leave." Jeanie said she felt very victimised. I asked her why she felt this and she said because they were Torres Strait Islander. "I said to her, [the Access Housing representative] How am I supposed to live a normal life when you invade our privacy?" Jeanie continues, "It’s like Big Brother, being watched all the time."
Jeanie's stories above reveal that racist relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians do not only occur within an isolated individual framework, but also within institutions highlighting very real subcultures that exist. These racist attitudes are played out everyday in Jeanie’s life. The Access Housing employee typifies many of the interactions Jeanie has with non-Indigenous people who do not see themselves as racist, but are uncomfortable with the idea that Indigenous Australians are seeking equality. Despite our discussions and Jeanie’s heartfelt reflections on some of her experiences with racism, she remains optimistic about the future for her children and her culture. She spends time teaching her girls the things she believes will stand them in good stead for their futures.

Jeanie says that she wants to teach the girls to be independent and to look after each other. During our conversations Jasmine gets the younger girls drinks and sandwiches. Jeanie tells me she buys packet cake mixes for fifty cents at BiLo. Jasmine reads the directions independently and serves these to Jeanie and her friends for morning tea.

Family was clearly very important to Jeanie. She spoke about a friend of hers who was having marriage problems. She said "Poor thing. He only has his mother, father and brother here,,, no one else." To my mind that was family support, but to Jeanie, an absence of extended family equated with no support. They maintained communication with distant family members via the phone and sometimes letters and cards. Jeanie received personal mail from non-Indigenous friends. This was clearly important to her and she enjoyed the correspondence.

During one visit Jeanie said quite out of the blue, "Kathy did you know we’re gonna have a son?" "Great," I said. "When?"

"At Christmas. It’s my sister. When you lose a child usually your brother or sister give you a child for healing. Its our custom." Later Jeanie tells me that she wants her sister to sign papers to make the adoption legal. She is worried that a family member could come and take the
baby away if they don’t think she was doing a good job. "How do you do that? I ask. "Legal aid. It’s really easy."

On another visit I arrived and Jeanie and her husband Terry were filling out a form. There was a non-Indigenous female assisting them explaining how the forms should be filled out and what the implication of them were. Jeanie said the forms were about payment of fines. Jeanie had a traffic fine and because she hadn’t paid a number of previous fines, her license was disqualified. The woman was clearly explaining what the payment options were and what the consequences were for non payment. Terry and Jeanie listened attentively but did not appear fazed by the visit. There were many letters from the Office of Family Assistance, requesting notification for changes in family circumstances and letters from the Department of Housing for rental reminders. Car problems were common in Jeanie’s house. She and Terry have a Toyota Tarago but it is frequently at the mechanics with increasingly serious problems. None of this contact with bureaucracy seemed to bother Jeanie who took it all in her stride. Dealing with many different office personnel was part of her daily activity.

Jeanie teaches Sunday school and showed me her lesson preparation. She had typed up a story which she said she would read to the children and ask them questions. She said that she got her inspiration for her lessons from God. Something would just come to her, sent by God and she would use it in her lesson. Usually this would be in the form of a dream. Jeanie often said how she had a dream about someone in trouble and she would go to them and the dream would be true. Dreams were important to Torres Strait people Jeanie said - especially when sent by God. Jasmine would play the organ and sing church songs on afternoon visits and Terry would play songs on his guitar for the children to sing. Many of the church literacy events are socially meaningful for the family and highly charged emotionally.

On one occasion Jeanie said she was very tired because they had been busy. She and Terry had been driving around town and had spotted a For Sale sign outside a house. They inquired about it
and were told that if they could get $450.00 together by the next day for legal papers to be drawn up and another thousand for a deposit, they could move in to the house straight away. They could pay rent which would be really paying off a mortgage. Jeanie said they drove frantically around trying to scrape up the money. They finally had a cheque for the amount but nowhere to cash it. They went back to the person who had advised them about the $450 legal fees and $1000 deposit who said that the deal was off. Jeanie and Terry didn’t know why but they were very disappointed. They were confounded again and felt betrayed.

Jeanie received many school notices which she read and displayed. There were application forms, consent form, invitations, newsletters etc. One note she even framed which had 10-15 ideas for helping your child to read. Jasmine had homework which Terry and Jeanie sometimes helped her with even though she was quite an independent worker. Jeanie said that the school had sent home a note requesting that children not be allowed to watch cartoons before they come to school in the mornings. Terry elaborated saying that the kids come to school and act out the violence that they have just watched. Jeanie said that kids had to be brought up strictly and they agreed with the school note and would try to enforce the request.

Along with the many school letters to deal with, Jeanie had other official correspondence from government bodies and solicitors. Prior to my meeting her, she and her family had been involved in a serious car accident in which, devastatingly, her smallest baby (6 months old) had died. Her deep spiritual beliefs seemed to ease her pain but naturally this incident was on her mind a great deal and she talked about it with me. She and Terry had also been hurt quite badly and both were seeking compensation. She expected this to be quite a large sum but obviously it involved much work through the obvious agencies including doctors and solicitors. There were visits to Brisbane and meetings and appointments. Jeanie and Terry said they would use the money to buy a house and small business in PNG. She felt that it was "more better making business up there." She also said that the girls knew their Torres Strait and Aboriginal families and they needed now to know their PNG families and heritage. Throughout this time Jeanie and
Terry arranged train, airline and bus bookings. Terry made a visit home to Papua New Guinea and they were planning a family holiday there at Christmas. Jeanie had family connections in Townsville and would frequently book bus tickets there. Concession cards and blue cards were also negotiated by Jeanie.

Jeanie had an older daughter (Patricia, 15 years) who lived “down south”. This was a difficult situation that required Jeanie to deal with a variety of institutions and their accompanying discourses, especially legal services with custody issues. The father of Patricia and his family fought with Jeanie over custody. Jeanie had to seek legal advice and deal with the lawyer's letters that were sent from Patricia’s father. Jeanie also looked after her niece for a short time. This caused Jeanie much heartache as her niece’s behaviour proved difficult for both the school and Jeanie to manage. Again, there was more correspondence to the school imparting some complex and sensitive written language. Jeanie had clearly mastered this form of literacy very successfully.

Jeanie was involved in a community radio station that broadcast to the Torres Strait Islands. She had an ‘on air’ name and all the appropriate lingo down pat. I visited her at the radio station on one afternoon and was impressed with the combination of D.J. lingo and Island lingo that she used.

"Okay stand by, [music is playing] Okay radio BBN 98.7 FM the time for you pla now 5 to 4. I wanna say my yawaw for you pla now. I hope you been enjoying the program. Don’t forget you pla tuned into the deadly station BBN 98.7 FM. We got more deadly Eastern Island song comin up. But for now I hope that listeners who have been listening this afternoon for this TSI program..um...I hope you have been enjoying the program and um stay tuned again next week Friday from 2 till 4 with [radio name] don’t forget on TSI program, life is black..."
Jeanie’s children sometimes listened to her program and she soon turned her radio segment into a Christian youth program. She reported that some of the other presenters didn’t want her to do this program and she subsequently left.

It was not uncommon in Jeanie’s household for the phone to be cut off as bills were not paid on time. This did not seem to bother Jeanie who maintained lists of frequently used telephone numbers on the fridge. The phone would be reconnected when she had the money to pay the bill. Jasmine and Patricia were given mobile phones for Christmas and these were on a ‘pay as you go’ plan. Jeanie’s and Terry’s incomes were very small. Once rent and bills had been paid there was very little left for food and other necessities. "Sometimes I got only $50.00 left for food" Jeanie would comment.

During the course of my visits with Jeanie she decided that she would stop studying the TAFE RATEP course. She was unable to get a blue card and so would not be able to work with children. Blue cards a mandatory requirement for anyone who works with children in either a volunteer or paid capacity. This was a great disappointment to her and the consequences have been far-reaching. There are many job opportunities that would now be closed to her. She asked me if I knew of any way she could make money. She was struggling to pay bills and make ends meet. Terry worked at the radio station in a paid capacity but the amount he received each week was small. I suggested that because of her excellent people skills she should try and tap into the lucrative tourist market. We talked about art (paintings and weaving from the islands) selling traditional food at the popular local market and other tourist ventures.

Following that conversation, a week later Terry brought out three paintings that had been done by Jeanie’s uncle. Their composition was a combination of Torres Strait Island symbols with a contemporary background. Terry told me the story for each and explained what each symbol meant. We talked about artistic talent and he told me of a friend he admired who wrote beautiful songs and poetry and seemed surprised that his words were so fluid given his English
as a Second Language background. Anyway the paintings were to be the beginning of a market stall which never really got off the ground. Jeanie inquired into an art course at TAFE but never began this program. Jeanie and Terry continued to search for ways to make money. One idea Jeanie told me about was to sell a product called Barley Green and Olive leaf. These, she explained were herbal treatments and they were sold in a program "A bit like AMWAY". She was already supplying some people in the Torres Straits with the product. Money was a real problem and making ends meet was a daily challenge. Terry and Jeanie were always trying to think of ways to supplement their minimal income. Jeanie felt that moving to Papua New Guinea would be much better for the family. She talked of the markets and organic food. She was growing Taro and Hibica in her garden. She said these were good for stews and your heart.

Jeanie searched many times for TAFE courses that she could do to improve her education which she felt would lead to better job prospects and financial situation. Every idea seemed to be fraught with stumbling blocks. She did find a Business Studies course that she was very excited about. "Abstudy pays fees. $400 for 12 months. I can finish it in that time. Indigenous one......is good. Certificate three. Lady teacher is one way. Doesn't stop if you can't keep up. Male teachers are excellent.... Because English is not our language, they spend time and explain things." This is a full time course and Jeanie hopes to do "payroll and myob" in the future. Myob, she explained, is when the pays are done through the computer and not manually. Jeanie was excited about this course and the job prospects it may lead to.

After I had completed the data collection for this study in 2004, I kept in contact with Jeanie and her family. In 2005 she purchased a computer for herself and Jasmine. She said Jasmine needed it for school and she needed it for her study. She was not connected to the internet but used the computer to type study related work.
What is less visible.

Jeanie’s early story reveals, at times, painful and dramatic events that have included family disruption, violence, brutality, lack of love, lack of formal education - in short, a picture of some deprivation. Jeanie has managed to turn this around in a single generation with her own children. She has aspirations for her children to be well educated at school and also to have strong spiritual connections and understandings. The Bound for Success discussion paper notes that international research reveals a “strong connection between a student’s school performance and the aspirations that they and their family hold for the future.” (2005 p. 5) The family had moved house a number of times during the data collection period and were frequently faced with car problems, church and extended family pressures and financial hardships. There was still sadness in Jeanie’s life however there was some hope when Terry returned home to PNG and his family for a holiday after being away for more than ten years. He decided that it was time the family (Jeanie and the three girls) should move home to PNG and spend time with his family. They thought they could set up a fruit and vegetable shop in his village to which Jeanie would add her herbal business.

Jeanie and her family’s cultural capital is different to that of non-Indigenous families. The differences are many, but those that are most obvious lie in the knowledge that family relationships are at the heart of Torres Strait Island culture. Therefore fundamentally Jeanie is deeply aware of the social, religious, cultural and familial webs that connect individuals in her community and the surrounding communities both within the islands and in Cairns. These also extend beyond Cairns to Townsville, and through to Brisbane and for Jeanie also to the islands of Fiji. In having this knowledge Jeanie has a deep respect of the Torres Strait way of life. This understanding and teaching of respect begins very early in an Indigenous child’s life with appropriate behaviour and discourse clearly evident. I often heard Jeanie talk to her girls about their family ties. Whilst I was not a member of Jeanie’s family, she quickly taught her girls to
call me Aunty Kathy and on each visit all would greet me very respectfully as modeled initially by Jeanie. Jasmine would offer me a cup of tea and talk politely about my day.

Jeanie’s knowledge of her cultural background is extensive. Embedded within this are her values and attitudes towards the material world and towards other people. She has acquired this knowledge throughout her life experiences. In addition to this she possesses an extensive linguistic capital. This lies in her knowledge of Torres Strait Islander languages, Aboriginal languages and Standard Australian English. This knowledge is more than simply the competence to produce grammatically correct expressions. It also involves using appropriate language varieties and styles within a given setting or particular context of a situation. (Corson 2001) Jeanie also possesses a great deal of knowledge about Western society. She can negotiate the social and cultural aspects of school, and the many government departments she has to deal with on an almost daily basis. Every time I visited Jeanie and her family, even after official data was collected, she had made contact with another government body or organisation and had a story to tell about her interactions. Most recently was the Migrant Settlement Services as she had been involved with supporting a neighbouring Sudanese family, after which other Sudanese families had sought her and Terry’s help to negotiate government departments. The support she gives to friends, family and neighbours has extended to a broad range of people from the community. Many people seek advice and counsel from her as she regards her responsibilities to fellow citizens as extremely important. Jeanie’s (and Terry’s) passion for other people’s well-being means that she makes links between informal friends and acquaintances and more official ones, such as government departments. Not visible is the hurt Jeanie feels when she experiences negative racially inspired behaviours against her when she approaches some of these departments in the course of helping others or attending to personal business. Although she brushes these off, she remembers all the details of scenario’s that happened many years ago.
Jeanie's biculturality is both visible and invisible. We see her negotiate the two worlds she moves between. Part of this biculturality is the high regard in which Jeanie is held, by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous community members. These include people from her church, her study and work colleagues, people who live in close proximity to her, the wider Indigenous community, people associated with her children’s school and out of school activities and indeed many other people she comes into contact with as she goes about daily activities and engages in literacy events. Many of these social relationships involve people, or groups of people who are not visible. These hidden participants influence and regulate interpersonal activities as they bring values, ways of thinking, feelings, skills and knowledge to situations. This extensive network of friends and acquaintances and intercultural interactions that Jeanie engages in have supported her bicultural understandings.

Esther

This discussion concentrates on the literacy practices in Esther’s household. There are three people primarily involved. They are Esther, her nine year old brother Mathew and her five year old son Rhys. Esther’s 18 year old brother and a couple of her sisters are also regular visitors at Esther’s small flat. Her brothers and sisters who do not live with her but reside in Cairns visit regularly. I first came into contact with Esther at the school I was teaching at in Cairns. Esther was a student completing a preliminary course in teacher education with a view to studying at James Cook University to complete a Batchelor of Education. The James Cook University course is delivered externally with phone conferenced tutorials and weekly readings that are accessed via the web. The preliminary course was delivered by TAFE and Esther was close to completing it when I met her. She intended to go on to James Cook, however felt that the TAFE course had been quite grueling and wanted at least a semester’s rest in between. She had about two essays to complete and had seemed to lose her momentum. This delayed her James Cook entry even further.
Esther is a 26 year old single mother responsible also for her nine year old brother. Her parents are still on Yorke Island in the Torres Strait but she has brothers and sisters also living in Cairns. I asked Esther to describe herself. She doesn’t like the question but it makes Mathew laugh. "I'm straightforward….a hard worker….a family person."

My second question makes her gasp. "Tell me about your literacy history," I ask. Esther asks if by this I mean school reports. "No, just what you thought about school and whether you liked literacy work, what schools you went to.... that kind of thing." I try to reassure her. Esther traces her school life back to grade one. She completed grade one, two and three at Westville School which is the school where her TAFE course is based and the school I teach at. She also went to a neighbouring school just down the road from Westville.

"I liked school, but the lower levels were not easy....I can speak Standard Australian English but I found it hard when I was small. I didn’t talk much. There were lots of black kids there then."

Mathew interjects. "Like we talk black. What’s it called?" he asks looking to Esther. "Black speak?"

"We talk Creole," says Esther.

"Like 'wa' means yes," says Mathew.

At that time Esther lived with her family who were all down here but in year six and seven the family returned to Yorke Island where she completed primary school. "That was good. I liked that. All the teachers were community teachers except the Principal."

"After year seven I went to Thursday Island High School. I did year eight and nine there. I had to go by myself. I stayed with my dad’s older sister. Her second son was at school there, so I went with him. I did year 10, 11 and 12 at Westville High." (This school is a few minutes down the road from Westville State School). "In year 10 I stayed with my uncle and in year 11 and 12 I stayed with a teacher. She had a few student boarders."

After school Esther completed an 18 month tertiary access course at James Cook University. When this was completed she went home to Yorke Island and worked in a CDEP program. She laughs when she tells me this. I ask her why.
"I think I could do more than that. With CDEP I worked at seafood factory......a back-breaking job....as an assistant for my father. My father is the manager for the factory. It belongs to council. After that I was a teacher assistant. I enjoyed that ...every minute". Esther says her number one priority is to work at St. Pauls school on Yorke Island. "There are no white teachers there only community teachers. They trained at RATEP".

Finally I ask Esther how important literacy is to her. "It’s really, really important... for everything. I depend on it more and more. I read books to the kids and help them with their homework".

What is visible

During my first visit to Esther’s flat, I met Mathew and Rhys. We sat at the kitchen table and the boys played with my video camera. They were so interested in it, wanting to press all the buttons, video each other and watch what they had just videoed. I had brought along pencils, a drawing/writing book, plasticine and stickers but they were not really interested in them at the time. Esther speaks to them in Creole and gives many English corrections as they speak to me. For example, on one occasion Mathew was talking to me about a recent event that had rocked the Torres Strait Island communities when a family of six travelled in a small dinghy between islands. A storm washed them all out of the boat and three young teenagers survived swimming for many hours to a small rocky island where they were later picked up. The mother, father and small baby went missing and were presumed dead. Mathew retold the story with much theatrics. He relied on Esther for the details. A small part of the conversation went as follows:

Mathew "Um....da bot....da bot"
Esther "The boat Mathew. The boat. Say English"
Mathew "Um yeah...de boat..... an..... rap win....was it Ga?"
Esther "yeah, a rough wind came up an' the boat turned over."
Mathew "Dempla swim an....."
Esther "The older ones swim"
Mathew "The older....what?"
Esther "Older ones"
Mathew "Older ones longtaim wet. (He looks to Esther) yeah?
Esther "Wait for a long time to be picked up."

They both laugh.

Walsh (1985) suggests that clarification, paraphrasing and even repetition, are aspects of 'motherese' which is the optimum model for language learning. Interlanguage where first and second language are combined also help the language learning process. The way Esther is modelling the language for Mathew in this example exposes him to target language structures for this situation, she negotiates meaning when errors are made and has made the language appropriate for the audience (me).

The boys, and Esther, are friendly and open. They offer me some brightly coloured cake that they made with Esther the day before. Their ‘life space’ is a two bedroom dwelling. Esther apologises for not having any chairs except for the kitchen chairs. Her living area has a television and video player and a computer which is perched on a corner desk. The room is sparse. There are photo’s on the wall and certificates from school for good work and attendance. There is also some school work which Esther says were paintings by Rhys for her last birthday nearly a year ago.

Mathew was in grade four at the commencement of this study and Rhys was attending preschool. Both are at Westville School. A year later, when Mathew was in grade five, at the time of benchmark testing, he was exempt from completing the tests. This decision was made by his teacher who reveals that his literacy and numeracy levels are so low as to warrant this exemption. Mathew receives an hour a day from the learning support teacher. He is withdrawn from class and given one-to-one tuition. This is generally literacy support. He also receives tutoring support from an ATAS tutor. I observed Mathew read his home reader on a couple of
occasions. When he read he attempted to use his grapho-phonic knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. He did not use other strategies to support his reading, consequently reading was laboured and decoding became ineffective. Mathew and Rhys speak Torres Strait Island Creole. Their formal school learning occurs in Australian English which does not have the same sounds or speech patterns as Torres Strait Island Creole. "Many common errors in Islander students; English pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary clearly result from transference from TSC phonology, grammar and semantics. Others are typical of second language learners of English, from whatever their language background." (Shnukal 1996; 11)

A year later when Rhys was attending grade one, he received oral English support through the ILSS program. He was withdrawn from his regular class for an hour every morning to receive support to enhance his English oral language skills. He came to school with knowledge about how books work and that there is a message carried in print. He recognised some alphabet sounds and letters and words and symbols of familiar environmental print such as KFC and McDonalds. This is a good basis for formal literacy development.

In Esther’s flat there are lots of notes around. These are reminders, letters, bills, TAFE correspondence etc. Rhys tells me who everyone in the photos are. They are all of family members taken by a professional photographer. He also talks about his certificates which he is very proud of. He asks Esther where "da yellow one" is. She reminds him that they sent it to their father.

The boys clearly love technology. They fiddle with the video and television, changing channels, adjusting antennae and putting on favourite videos. There are no other visible toys in the flat. Esther showed me into her 18 year old brother’s bedroom. The boys dive for the Play station and begin a game. It’s a fighting game which they quickly become engrossed in. Esther says the Play station is a "side dish for when there’s nothing on TV".
There are no visible books in the flat, however during one of my visits Esther received a specially delivered package. She opened it up to reveal a huge Bible that she had ordered from a letterbox advertisement. She rang up to order the special edition making six times monthly payments of some fifty dollars. After it is carefully opened, Esther rubs her fingers over the textured cover. She is clearly happy with the purchase. "Will you read it?" I ask. "Yes" she answers. Esther says she attends church regularly and shows me a couple of prayer books that she has hidden away. She says the church is important in her life but rarely refers to this again during my subsequent visits. Esther puts the Bible away and calls Mathew, who is watching television to come and help her cook dinner.

Esther invited me to Rhys’s fifth birthday party. I asked her if she wanted me to video tape it so she could send it to her family on Yorke Island. She thought this would be a great idea especially as she had booked the services of a clown and lots of family members would be present. When I arrived the party was in full swing and the clown was doing her show. There were about fifteen children of different ages (all family members) who sat watching the routine. The show was interactive where the clown would get them to participate by singing songs, talking to her puppets and playing games. The children were shy at first but gradually they appeared happier to be involved and seemed to know what was expected. They teased the clown, laughed in the right places and responded appropriately. Esther said they see these kinds of shows at shopping centers and other family parties. Rhys’s cake was decorated very elaborately using a transfer of The Hulk. He seemed impressed and Esther read out the happy birthday message decorated in icing, for him before she cut the cake. Presents did not seem a big part of the whole event. He did receive a book which he looked at for a couple of seconds but moved on quickly to another present, an Action Man (from me) which he played with and held onto for the rest of the day.
Mathew did not have a party the year I collected this data. Esther said that she took turns and the boys had a party every second year. Mathew had received a bike which he and Esther put together following written instructions.

I went shopping with Esther, the boys and her sister on a couple of occasions. This was for groceries and Esther would have a note which she referred to frequently. She and her sister compared prices, always choosing the cheapest and argued with Rhys about what was not going in the shopping trolley. Esther allowed each of the boys to choose a treat for their school lunch. She said that they generally chose according to what they had seen advertised on television or what packet looked the best. Recognition of logos and labels were what influenced their decisions the most. Shopping was the usual challenge for a mother and we tried to get through it as quickly as possible.

Esther plays for the 'Dragons' which is an indoor volleyball team. She says that all the girls in the team are from the Torres Strait, "that way I can speak to them in lingo." Much formal literacy is involved in being in the team. There are training schedules, notes about up coming games and competitions and information on special events such as state titles. Esther wanted to get the boys involved in an out of school Rugby team. (The boys did play Rugby in the following year but later Esther said it was too rough and they finished at the end of the year. Mathew won a number of awards.)

The boys watched television frequently in the afternoons when they got home from school. They interacted with music and dance in shows where young comperes asked their audience to join in. Mathew uses TV as a partner for conversation. For example, when presenters speak to their audience, as is the case for many children's programs, Mathew will answer their questions and respond appropriately with actions or what ever is required. In this way he is not simply a passive observer. He has learnt to read the codes and conventions that enable him to participate, which shows that he has attached meaning to what he is watching. This televisual
literacy is influenced by socio-cultural factors, in that children's interpretation of their social and cultural surroundings, will be relevant to their interpretation of television images. (Harris 2002) As well as watching television after school, Mathew would also do his homework.

Mathew was always assisted by Esther to complete homework. She kept up to date with what was going on at school by reading the school newsletters, reports and other notes that came home. There was much written information supplied by the school and Esther would often call into Mathew's class to check that she had the right information from the notes.

Esther and the boys spent a great deal of time talking together. The story mentioned earlier about the family of six from a Torres Strait Island that had encountered a storm whilst travelling in their small boat from one island to another was told and retold. Three of the six passengers miraculously survived and this was the topic of conversation on many occasions. The story would be re-enacted and much discussion would follow between Esther and the boys. It is worth noting here that retelling stories in sequence, listening exercises and drama activities such as recitation and plays, are integral to the Walking Talking Text program (See Murray 1998). The telling of community stories aligns with the activities of this program.

Esther read the Torres News, a weekly newspaper printed on Thursday Island. As 'the voice of the islands' it had reports from all over Torres Strait. Stories featured local island events and celebrations, advertisements, television guide, sports, jobs and letters to the editor. The 'Torres News' papers I read were about 40 pages in length. Esther had a great deal of reading to do for her course and read all the mail that went through her letter box. She also had a great deal of school correspondence which she kept up to date with as soon as the notes, newsletters and messages were brought home.
What is less visible

Esther is a mother figure to Mathew. Her brothers and sisters offer a great deal of support, however, like Jeanie, financial strains impact a great deal on her ability to follow through with her plans to continue studying. Esther takes the education of her younger brother and her own son very seriously reading all the information that comes home in notes and newsletters. She keeps close correspondence with her mother and father who are back on Yorke Island.

Esther is strongly encouraged by the tutors in her teaching program to complete her final two assignments, in order for her to be eligible for entry into James Cook University. She feels the pressure enormously and made a few references to me about how she was worried about the academic levels and her ability to successfully complete the course. Her family is also very keen for her to complete the teaching course at James Cook. Esther feels the pressure and imposes more on herself. She sees the long term benefits of completing the courses but the here and now and her Cairns family commitments are strong.

Like Jeanie, Esther possesses cultural capital from both her Island culture and Western culture. She talked about traditional ceremonies back on her island. Many ceremonies, especially funerals, are planned and run by the in-laws. Esther talked about tomb site openings and explained the process of these. She said this custom was more to do with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque. I had imagined that the burial site was uncovered and people looked at a decomposing body. She laughed at my naïve imaginings explaining the process further. About four years after someone has passed away a tombstone is ordered by the family. These generally have dates and prayers, names and decorative tiles on them. A person is chosen by the family to unveil the tombstone. Esther said this was a great honour and in about year seven she had been chosen to unveil her great, great, great, great grandfathers tombstone. Gifts are laid out on the covered tombstone for the person selected to unveil. There is a blessing of the headstone and feasting. Other ceremonies that Esther is involved in are weddings and the
'Coming of the light.' She does not dance and screws up her nose when I ask her. Esther likes to support these events and participate by attendance and some organisation in the background.

Esther moves very freely between the culture of her island home, the culture of her friends and family in Cairns and the Western systems that she interacts with. Whilst she comfortably negotiates and collaborates with the Western world, she affiliates more with Torres Strait Island culture. The links she maintains with her home both preserve and construct her identity. This identity is drawn from her relationships with people, places, knowledges and her community and personal history.

**Student Interviews**

During my time at Westville School I worked with a group of 10-13 year olds. All were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and I sought permission from ten of these students and their carers to interview them about their home literacy practices. I had initially intended to conduct interviews through a focus group arrangement, showing the edited video footage of Esther and Jeanie’s literacy practices and use this as a springboard for discussion. I felt after I had collected the video footage that the focus group discussion might not be the best way to get data. I did not want to influence their responses in any way. I was concerned that my necessary presence as facilitator may effect the authenticity of the interactions in the focus group. (Madriz, 2002) Having taught these students for nearly one year I felt I knew them well and expected that they would be very influenced by each other’s responses if they were involved in a focus group arrangement. I did not want students to respond in ways that they thought I was expecting and would reward. They are clearly able to predict what responses they think teachers will ‘value’ and answer accordingly.

Westville School is recognised by the local community as being in a low socio-economic area. There are many housing commission homes and flats and some residents with whom I spoke
reported high crime rates, late night fights and clearly visible drug deals. The student population at the time of this study was 523. Of these 231 identified as Torres Strait Islander and 175 identified as Aboriginal. The remainder of the student population are from the Pacific Islands (particularly the Cook Islands), Anglo Australian families and countries as far afield as the African continent. The home liaison officer at the school is a Torres Strait Islander woman who has a great deal of contact with many of the families at the school and has been involved with this school community for years. She told me that the lives of the students are filled with activities and events that I would not even be able to imagine. Conscious of confidentiality issues she said that she could not reveal any details but drugs, violence and abuse were the main themes. I mentioned earlier that the school has a reputation in the wider community for being ‘difficult’ to work in. Teachers from other schools share the same perception, particularly supply teachers, many of whom spend only minutes in the room before escaping, vowing never to return. This ‘demonising’ of the school produces damaging discourses and has implications for both individuals and groups. The discourse that frequently emerged was often to do with race and racism which was ‘read’ locally as students being deviant in some way, having criminal tendencies and being violent. Added to this was the belief that educational standards were lower.

The school, has a significant proportion of families that experience economic and social hardship. It is also recognised, as I noted previously, that the perceptions of the outside community are that this is a ‘difficult’ school to work in because of the behaviour problems that are thought to occur in proportions higher than in other primary schools. Yet all schools have ‘incidents’ and issues that the community and the media love to embellish with details that easily become exaggerated, even mythical. Of the many schools I have taught in, all have had students that become legendary because of the problems they have caused, all have teachers that become legendary because of the way they do or don’t cope with situations, and all have at least some parents that stand out for different reasons. Westville is no exception. It is a large
school which makes communication between teachers and the administration staff, at times difficult.

It is a school that has a high profile with the local media, sometimes for positive events and sometimes for negative incidents. This is the nature of schools and education. I would suggest that the present teaching community at Westville is somewhat demoralised. Student welfare is at the heart of many teachers’ daily activities. Increasingly teachers are finding themselves “balancing a series of acts on high stakes wires: between the old commitment of welfare and service and the new commitment orientated towards the enterprise and entrepreneurialism.” (Robertson 2000:182)

Global competitiveness has produced a huge moral panic about how teachers are preparing the future generations for a rapidly changing world. Hargreaves (1994) uses the words of Halsey to reinforce his suggestion that at times like these, schools become the “wastebaskets of society.” (Hargreaves, 1994: 5) He continues, suggesting that they (the schools), become “policy receptacles into which society’s unsolved and insoluble problems are unceremoniously deposited. Few people want to do much about the economy but everyone – politicians, the media and public alike – wants to do something about education.” (Hargreaves, 1994: 5). Westville School has not managed to escape from this climate.

This is a snapshot of the current educational landscape as I have experienced it. It is in this light that I present the following data.

I asked the students three questions. The first of these was "What do you think literacy is?" The second related to their home literacy experiences, "How do you use literacy at home?" and the third question was designed to prompt reflection about teachers they have had in the past and elicit responses about what strategies have assisted their learning. The question was phrased, "Think about how you learn at school. Which teachers have helped you the most? How? What things do you find, that teachers do, make you a strong learner?" I asked this question in
parts. In its entirety there is too much for respondents to think about, particularly as these are ESL students. I will now discuss student responses.

Without exception, all the students saw literacy as language, reading and writing. It was clear to them and straightforward.

The second question incited much more discussion, and experiences with literacy at home appeared to be similar amongst the students. As the teacher of these students I knew only too well that most of them never completed any homework tasks as set by me. School policy demanded I set it, but it was rarely completed. Two of the students reported that their parents read the Torres News. One of these students frequently brought in the paper to show photos of family members whose stories appeared in that edition. These were often birthday notices or births and death notices. The students paraded them with pride. One student also reported that her father read the Cairns Post and another said her mother read to her little brothers from this paper. I asked her what sort of stories her mother would read to them and she replied "about a car crash or something like that." I went on to ask if her mother read any other books to her young sons. The student replied, "the Bible". She reported that they had no other books in the house. One student said she had a book at home. She was very proud of the fact that she had a copy of *The Little Mermaid* and she said her mum got it at the supermarket.

The female students said they would often tell their younger siblings and cousins stories. "Do you read to them?" I asked. "Just tell them stories." one replied. "Do you have any books?" I continued. "No." Some of my students lived with older members of the family, usually grandmothers and for some, negotiating the demands of school literacy was difficult. In such cases the students reported that they would write notes for their older guardians and explain some of the school notices and newsletters, some of which required signatures for permission. At other times, grandparents would wait for visits from a family member who was more
comfortable with school literacy before responding to school correspondence or other requirements.

When I asked them about writing they said that they didn’t really have writing resources in their homes. Again, a couple of the older female students had diaries and note pads that they purchased from the two dollar shops and other cheap outlets at their local shopping centre. They are adorned with feathers and sequins and filled with notes about who loves whom. I see them in their desks for about a week and then they disappear. They are not coveted and kept for safe keeping. They generally become part of the ‘junk’ kept at the bottom of their bags or in their desks until a new one, more bold and colourful, replaced the old one.

I received notes on a number of occasions from my students’ families and carers. These were almost always explaining absences as departmental protocol demanded it. One mother frequently scribbled notes about Jesus on the top of her message. The student reported that her mother was a preacher at their church and had, on a number of occasions, brought photos to show mass baptisms that her mother was performing. These were reminiscent of Biblical baptisms with full submersion in a local river.

Church was an activity the majority of them attended on the week ends. Frequently two of the students would attend church gatherings out of town. Church was clearly an important part of their social life and they talked about events and meetings. The churches that predominated were The Independent World Church and The Uniting Pentecostal Church. The students would talk about ceremonies to celebrate “the coming of the light”. This was a time that they clearly looked forward to people from all over the Strait, who were now living in town, gathered together to re-enact the coming of the first missionaries to the Torres Strait. A feast was central to this celebration.
The third question provided insights into what students had liked about their teachers and what they felt had assisted the learning process. This was actually a difficult question for most of them to answer. Some students wanted to answer what they had been taught such as 'computers' 'maths' 'reading'. I had to probe but did not feel it appropriate to provide examples as I thought this would result in biased responses based on what I had said. What I did glean from this question was that pacing was important for students. For example, "When I was in grade one I wasn't smart enough but she [the teacher] went slow." Also "I liked Miss ___ 'cause she waited for me if I didn't know something." All of the students said the word 'kind' when talking about teachers whom they felt they had worked well with and four of the ten students talked about teachers who were "funny" or "made them laugh". Further research would be beneficial with regard to qualities and strategies in teachers that students find helpful, but this exceeds the scope of this present study.

Teacher Interviews

My time at Westville allowed me to work with a number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff many of whom consented to be interviewed for this research. Some of the Indigenous teachers made it very clear that they were consenting only because they knew me and they had established relationships with me. I did not pursue this issue further but from comments made I would suggest that they had been participants for many research projects and felt that they were at times being exploited. I interviewed teachers, parents, the school liaison officer, the ASSPA president, canteen workers and student teachers. Once again I had intended to ask the questions in a focus group situation but this became impossible due to people's busy schedules and other commitments. Getting everyone together in one place and at one time proved too difficult. I was also very conscious of the fact that I was encroaching on people's precious time and wanted to fit in entirely with them. This meant working individually with each consenting participant.
Indigenous teachers responses

I interviewed eleven Indigenous staff members. Five identified as Aboriginal and six identified as Torres Strait Islander. Some had been in the Cairns district all their lives, others had grown up and gone to school in their respective communities. All had strong ties with their community.

I asked each participant to define literacy. Many said it was about reading and writing. Some acknowledged that it was about communication and comprehension. Many of the Indigenous teachers saw it as something about 'English.' One Indigenous teacher said my question was "no good". He asked me to change it, so I asked him to define knowledge. He was much more comfortable with this, saying that my initial question was too narrow and it was a word for school culture. Literacy to him was information in written form in English, whilst knowledge covered Indigenous literacies. In responding to this question many participants talked about how they teach reading and writing. The words 'model' and 'scaffold' reoccurred frequently. "I model writing to my kids." "I teach Walking Talking Text and scaffold their reading." Another common thread that ran through the Indigenous teachers responses concerned small group work. Many said that this was how they preferred to operate in their classes.

I asked teachers in what ways the parents of our students supported their children's literacy development. All participants said that there were some parents who supported their children by helping them with their homework and others who encouraged them to come to school everyday. However all Indigenous teachers said that many of the parents did not know how to support and help their children's literacy development. Either they simply did not have the literacy skills themselves or they see English and school literacy as a teachers job. The students responses echoed this sentiment in a sense when we discussed books and writing materials in the home. Most said that the only reading materials they have are a copy of the Bible, (usually not a child's edition) and sometimes newspaper, catalogues and other junk mail.
From my experience, the parents of the students in my class do not ensure their children complete homework.

Whilst respondents did not use the term 'Indigenous literacies', they did note that there was much support by families for activities that I have interpreted as Indigenous literacies. Family, church and special cultural events are celebrated. Songs and dance, cooking and craft are valued and receive a high profile in the media. Spoken vernacular languages are strong but are only a small part of the weekly culture lessons that each class receives. One teacher said that parents teach their children environmental literacy such as the print on signs and labels. She said the students recognise symbols and emblems of their favourite basketball or football team or the insignias of fast food outlets. Spending time with Jeanie’s children I could see how the children recognised the fashionable fads in the 'Toys R Us' catalogues as they see them advertised on television during prime time program viewing. They are able to instantly recognise cartoon characters from media texts and popular culture texts.

Following discussions about parent support and literacy development, I asked teachers what they felt the aspirations of parents were for their children. The majority of Indigenous teachers believed the parents wanted their children to have the best education in order to get a good job and have a career. "The parents want their children to advance to their full potential. I never did. I wasn’t given opportunity." This response came from one of the Indigenous staff members at the school. It echoed the sentiments of many of the parents who I would talk to about their children’s progress during the course of my own teaching at Westville. One of the teachers said that parents want an 'education package' for their children. They wanted something to be handed to their children that would unlock the doors of the 'white world' and allow their children to get in. This staff member said that they (the parents) see the education process as something that is given over in discrete compilations of knowledge and skills. Each year/grade level you are given a certain amount. This view is in line with the bestowing of traditional knowledge which occurs at various stages of a persons life.
When a young person is seen to be ready or has earned the right, certain knowledge is given to him/her. But the knowledge is not given all at once. The traditional initiation process takes many years and at each stage more knowledge is given.

Do parents see school as being able to hand over knowledge in the same way? Many teachers operate under this ritualising system of classroom lessons. For example, it is not uncommon for teachers to begin their day with roll call, 'newstime' or 'show and tell' as it is called in junior classrooms followed by general business such as lunch orders. But for McLaren (1999) ritualisation goes beyond these prototypical rituals and becomes part of all daily lessons. Ritualised transmission of knowledge is a key facet of cultural production. McLaren argues that classroom ritual at a school in which he completed an ethnographic study, worked to reproduce and reinforce existing patterns of class and ethnic dominance. Current curriculum innovations could be considered rituals of revitalisation that function to "inject a renewal of commitment" (McLaren 1999 p.82) Such innovations are neither politically or ideologically neutral but they can emerge from 'collective reflection and constructive dialogue.' (McLaren 1999 p.85)

Westville School, at the time this study was completed was involved in a curriculum innovation called New Basics. The philosophy behind New Basics is that the four identified groups of practice that are considered essential for survival in our rapidly changing world act as curriculum organisers. Through completing a series of Rich Tasks students are taught how to learn. 'Information packages' are not handed out but through a selection of appropriate cognitive, cultural, linguistic and social skills, real-world tasks are completed. Integral to the New Basics categories is the explicit orientation towards researching, understanding and adapting to the newly emerging social, cultural and economic conditions of our world. (New Basics Project. Queensland Government 2000 and New Basics - Theory into Practice Education Queensland 2000) I discuss the impact of the New Basics Project in Chapter Seven but it is worth noting here that the New Basics orientations are designed so teaching and learning programs are not content driven. The Rich Tasks are designed to have real life application. The
notion that schooling is not simply the handing over of 'content' is difficult for some parents to understand.

As a non-indigenous teacher, I have undoubtedly led students through a cultural maze of what I believe is a meaningful process. As teachers we often say, "It's the process that's important and not the product." In my integrated approach to teaching the curriculum, I often combine art and language. Students would take home their creations through which I have tried to teach English and their parents have put these straight in the rubbish bin. I have perceived this to be a difference in understanding of the learning process at school. The students have researched and designed a product, made it independently, problem-solved any hiccups and completed the article. I blindly assume they have learnt something. I can check this off on my assessment sheet. But what have they learnt? If have not made any connections with the home learning style has this learning been meaningful? Discussing some of these issues with the families of our students is a necessary course of action. This also helps teachers to understand the priorities of the communities from which our students come.

Is school literacy a priority in Indigenous communities? I asked the teachers this question. The respondents said that for some it was. Stories such as Noel Pearson's boarding schools for remote Indigenous students to improve their literacy levels, and other reports that shame and blame teachers for low literacy levels in Indigenous students, put Indigenous literacy on the public agenda. The teachers I interviewed believe that for some communities and community members this is a priority. Stories in the media abound that show people in Indigenous communities implementing innovative programs to improve educational outcomes for students. These are often driven by teachers and the school. It is my experience that there are so many other 'life' issues facing some people in Indigenous communities that competence in English literacy is not on the critical agenda. One Indigenous staff member commented "So much is going on in these people's lives that literacy is not a priority. These are low income homes. Parents are frustrated at home so they splurge on themselves instead of their kids, buying
drugs and alcohol. They end up being victims of what they are trying to stop their kids from being. Their lives are not stable. Housing and transport are the biggest problems. The kids need emotional support first."

Attendance is a perennial issue. Students that I have taught in the past have had poor attendance for a number of reasons. These have included funerals and other important ceremonies, and trips to outstations and homelands for hunting and general family business. As I walked to school each morning in a coastal community in Arnhem Land I would frequently pass a group of my transition students carrying a large tyre inner tube and heading in the opposite direction to the school. They would great me cheerfully, "morning Miss" and continue on their way to the beach. In many cases in remote communities a five year old is able to make decisions about where he or she wants to be, and I know that the open classroom filled with the exciting waters of the Arafura sea and fresh breakfast, would be infinitely more exciting than a classroom with four walls and board full of unfamiliar scramble.

In an urban setting like Westville, school may be perceived as a place to go when nothing more important is happening. In my Westville classroom, older female students were frequently absent as they were responsible for looking after younger siblings. If mum had another appointment they were expected to stay home and care for their younger brother or sister. The family is of the utmost importance and supercedes anything else. "Family comes before everything. That’s why if a sibling stays at home to look after a younger child, that’s what is expected". This comment was made to me at the final assembly for the year. The whole school community was there and some presentations were made. Three 'state of the art bicycles' were wheeled in and the Principal proudly gave a speech indicating that the bikes were for three students who had not missed a day of school. The Indigenous staff member who had said that family comes before everything, spoke to me about the fact that young children have no control over whether or not they come to school. "It’s life issues. Parents don’t get up in the morning …they are in a hole, yet the children are penalised. They feel defeated." This event made me
reflect on many of the reasons students I have taught in the past have not come to school. Where is student X? I would ask. "He got no clothes Miss" or "He got no food." "She lookin' after her little brother Miss." If education is seen as a package by parents, then to those parents absences should not be an issue as what was missed on one day can be 'given' on another. This reflects the notion that whilst school may be seen to be important, other aspects of life come first.

Two of the teachers believed literacy was a priority in Indigenous communities. They were also of the opinion that if Indigenous literacy was valued more by teachers, then school literacy would also become more important to community members. One staff member said that school literacy was crucial to "our survival. If you can’t read and write you can’t look after yourself." Another participant talked to me about the Indigenous world view. She explained that in her language there is a word for "being at peace with your inner self. The art of 'being' and embracing the moment you are in. Not living for the future and not viewing people’s goals and lives as separate entities but as being part of a group. In your Western view you always think of tomorrow and what you need to do to get there. We have a spirituality whereby we enjoy the present and live that moment. For many people this may be why they seem as though they are not interested in school life and literacy is not a concern."

I asked the participants if as teachers, we catered for Indigenous students learning styles and literacy needs. The majority of Indigenous participants believed that teachers did not cater for Indigenous students needs and learning styles. "You don’t understand who you are teaching. I've lived it. If I was to go to China wouldn’t I want to learn about their culture and language? Learn about them? You don’t know our kids. You are with Indigenous kids but teach only white culture." Another participant said "No. The whole education system in Queensland doesn’t." And further, "No. You try, which is better than nothing, but you don’t have enough knowledge."
One Indigenous teacher discussed this question at length. She commented that she did not believe in the concept of 'Aboriginal learning styles'. "We have a shared historical context. All people come with individual learning styles." She suggested that if people see Aboriginal learning styles as a phenomenon, then their teaching becomes limited. She believed it was inappropriate to make assumptions and generalisations about learning styles. In the past non-Indigenous educators have discussed ways in which Indigenous students learn and advised teachers on how to work appropriately with Indigenous classes. Rote learning and visual cues were considered particularly appropriate. The participant said, "Rote and visual is limiting for students. The different cultures are put in a box and people are teaching to that box. The expectations create problems. School is a culturally appropriate context. School gives you the context. I teach explicitly to each context and make it culturally appropriate. If I teach a subject of flight, I mention the boomerang as a scientific invention. I bring Indigenous knowledge into the present. At school I wanted to hide and move away from the stereotypes. In my own class I try to move away from them. The kids bring themselves down because they live out the stereotypes. This is why they latch on to black American culture." So whilst acknowledging that everyone has an individual learning style this teacher does not subscribe to the notion that we can apply general 'rules' for groups of students. As an Indigenous teacher this participant has 'insider' understandings about her students. From a non-Indigenous point of view, 'learning style' theories were critical to my cross-cultural teaching. This teacher has however, raised an important question about how we incorporate or address culturally determined learning styles in our classroom and one to which I will return in chapter seven.

I asked teachers how they thought we could be more responsive to the needs of Indigenous students. That is, what they thought should change in order to support Indigenous students better. This question is one that is really crucial for me in my search to provide a more culturally responsive teaching environment. The Indigenous participants believed that teaching Indigenous students "one on one" and in small groups was an appropriate strategy. "That gives the kids the feeling that they are getting attention.........and you can really see what they know."
One teacher said we should do more phonics. I asked this respondent to enlarge on her answer. She said the children need to see the patterns of language. "They know about patterns. We should do more of this in school to bring what they know from outside school....the way they see things." She went on to say that this gave the students a feeling of security. One respondent commented, "I expect my kids to succeed." This comment reflected the notion that high expectations are important to student success. Two teachers suggested that mentors were a good way to support Indigenous students learning. A number of them also said that non-Indigenous teachers need to socialise with the students outside school. "Talk to them, find out their interests so they can see you as a human being and respect you." Another echoed these sentiments commenting that non-Indigenous teachers need to "understand the whole Indigenous theme of Australian Indigenous people. Our kids have two identities. One is inside school and the other outside school. White teachers don’t know this because you don’t go and join in. You don’t try to fit in and be seen in the community. So, step one, go and be seen in the community......and ........get to know their families." Another said, "Be positive.... Talk to them this way."

In answering the question of how we can support Indigenous students better, one participant said that "Politicians must change their views. Get rid of standardised tests. They [the government] destroyed ATSIC, the voice of black people." Testing is an integral part of education and centralised reporting and testing are operating across government and non-government schools in all Australian states and territories. These are based on national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Some respondents suggested that we need to get more Indigenous people involved in schools, especially parents and elders from the community, "we need to go out into the community. Parents don’t want to come here." Another said "Break out of the boxes. Up the expectations. Just because they’re Indigenous don’t use that as an excuse". In line with this comment, one participant said we need to change the image of the school. "These kids are poor. Their home
life is different to how white kids are brought up. They are coming from families who are just surviving. You need to think more like a black person." Further to this, one staff member said that "white teachers are in denial about the social problems that face the kids. Cultural awareness programs need to be regular and ongoing."

Finally I asked teachers what they thought were the key factors that influence Indigenous students literacy development. The responses were varied. The recurrent thread however, related back to non-Indigenous teachers really knowing their students. "Go where these people come from. Go and see what makes these people who they are. Alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse are prevalent. I've learnt English. Teachers don't make an effort to learn my language." Also, "The kids are hungry for someone to treasure their culture. We have sat in the background for a long time. We want you to know about our culture. We don't want rescuers." And further, "Parental involvement. That's the backbone. I don't like this watered down cultural stuff. We want deeper cultural stuff." "These kids want to write about Indigenous things. Write about tombstone openings and feasting and dancing. They get so much excitement from that. They look up to Indigenous role models." These comments clearly indicate that to Indigenous teachers and staff members, non-Indigenous teachers are not providing programs that are relevant to Indigenous students. The recurrent theme of 'you don't know our kids' was reiterated time and time again. A number of respondents also discussed this question noting the inappropriacy of non-Indigenous teaching styles. "In our learning, everything is visual and demonstration. I learnt this way from my parents. School is threatening. At home you join in and go out when you want. In our minds time is unlimited." Indigenous staff members have insights into the lives of Indigenous students that non-Indigenous teachers will never have. But we must make concerted efforts to get to know our students and unpack what it is they know in order to build on this. We must not be closed to new ways of thinking and working.

This study is a serious attempt to understand and know Indigenous students better. These clear threads, as mentioned above, raise important questions about the direction of Indigenous
education. How do we get to know the students we teach and how do we teach in a culturally appropriate way? Responses to these fundamental questions are discussed in chapters seven and eight.

Non-Indigenous teacher responses

I interviewed a total of ten non-Indigenous teachers. Their backgrounds were varied as was their experience working with Indigenous students. Some had been at the school for many years, others had been in mainstream schools and others had taught in Torres Strait and Cape communities. Some had taught in community schools in the Northern Territory.

I asked these teachers the same questions as the Indigenous teachers. The first question, to define literacy revealed a 'new literacies' approach. Many talked about multiliteracies and using the skills of reading and writing and adapting these to all facets of life. The teachers clearly knew the expected responses and the most politically correct answers. Some of these teachers talked about how they implemented these philosophies in their classroom. Others were clearly more traditional in their understandings of what literacy meant. One example I observed directly was when I was in a classroom of one of the respondents. The teacher had an early childhood class and set the students a writing task. One student came up to the teacher and said, "Do you have to write, or can you draw the answers?" The teachers abrupt reply was, "This is not an art lesson, you have to write it!" Whilst I understand that written responses were what the teacher required, her attitude that drawing was only in the domain of an art lesson revealed a compartmentalised approach to teaching and literacy.

I asked the teachers how they saw the parents of their students supporting their children's literacy development. Most were very certain that school literacy was not important to the parents and as such they did not support their child's literacy development in the home. One teacher did comment that the Cook Islander parents supported their children's literacy development in the home but that Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal parents did not. "We
shouldn’t need Reading Recovery if parents did what they should." Many teachers referred to the practice of home readers, noting that these were generally lost and if they did come back had not been read. These teachers often aborted the idea of home readers after initial attempts at the start of each year to get the process happening. With reference to this question, a number of teachers suggested that whilst parents did not support their children’s school learning, they did support them in a cultural and language way. They taught kids about "traditional cooking" and "making fires". One respondent said there was "Lots of hands on oral literacy." Another teacher suggested that parents, by "plugging" their children in to televisions, videos and DVDs, they were providing them with visual literacy that had the potential to support literacy development.

Teachers were, on the whole, very negative when I asked them about what they felt were the aspirations of the parents for their children. Some teachers were able to answer this question in the light of direct comments through interviews they had with parents and community members. Those who had not had this direct experience answered that the future was not so important to the families. The teachers saw their students as second and third generation welfare dependents and as such this was entrenched in attitudes that transferred from generation to generation. This resulted in what the teachers perceived to be an absence of goals for the future and reasonably low aspirations. "These kids spent their entire lives seeing all their family members without work. That is normal to them. They turn to crime because they are bored and then that becomes a norm too." Teachers tended to view the jobs that parents had as generally low stature positions such as CDEP programs or cleaners. One respondent reported that she had spoken to a year ten student who had aspirations to finish year ten and would then get a job as a school cleaner. Teachers also commented that the parents did not show their kids that they expected them to succeed. "They don’t push them or encourage them."
Some respondents did feel that parents and community members wanted their children to succeed but felt powerless to know how to help them. Two respondents said that they felt parents were very divided about what they wanted their kids to learn. They wanted them to learn Standard Australian English but also maintain their culture. From my experience working with Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, this is not a new idea. The 'both ways strong' is a common phrase that is often the topic of discussion particularly in bilingual programs. The meaning of this is clear, the method of achieving this is not so clear. A number of the teachers felt that the "Grandparents were well-educated" and this had a positive impact on their grandchildren. "They are the ones that get their kids to school." From my experience, many grandparents were trying to encourage their grandchildren to come to school regularly and many were the contact people when issues arose that required parental attention.

When I asked respondents if they felt literacy was a priority among Indigenous communities, there was a resounding 'no'. "No", "no", "Absolutely not." Many teachers acknowledged that "Life issues" were more important. "Food and housing are the important issues." One respondent said she didn’t know because she hadn’t spoken to enough parents.

All the non-Indigenous teachers interviewed from Westville School felt they catered for Indigenous children’s literacy needs and learning styles. "I think we consider both the educational needs and the physical needs of the students." Most believed that they used culturally appropriate resources such as picture books that depicted Aboriginal lifestyles. Examples provided were Jeannie Adams’ Pigs and Honey and Jeannie Baker’s Where the Forest Meets the Sea. One teacher used the word "language flood" referring to her classroom set up. This respondent believed that a print saturated environment supported students’ literacy learning. This teacher had a long career in ESL teaching and was the only teacher who mentioned her classroom environment as a tool for literacy teaching. Teachers talked about how they needed to simplify "everything" for their students. When I asked how they did this, they were referring to making some of the texts they used in class, simpler, "when they had time."
Teachers reported that they approached their literacy teaching using small group organisation. Some teachers felt these literacy and reading groups were only partly successful because they did not have enough support staff to monitor all the groups and students tended to "get off task". One teacher said, "We are trying.....I see teachers bending over backwards for these kids an' still they're opting out." A couple of the teachers said they had been in-serviced on Ernie Grants Framework but they did not use it in their classroom programs. Ernie Grant is an Indigenous man originally from the North Queensland Tablelands. He devised a framework for non-Indigenous teachers working with Indigenous students which is becoming widely used in some far north Queensland schools. In his book My Land, My Tracks, (1998) Grant presents a framework of six components for organizing and presenting information on a range of topics for teachers to use with students. The six components are: Land, Language, Culture, Time, Place and Relationships. Grant suggests this Holistic Framework is a powerful tool to assist both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in promoting cross-cultural understandings. At the time of data collection for this thesis, most teachers at Westville were not using this framework. (Teachers at my current school use the framework frequently reporting it to be an effective instrument in all areas of the curriculum.)

In terms of changes required to work more effectively with Indigenous students, all teachers felt that we needed to know our families and communities better. "Relationships with parents are imperative." One teacher said we need to be more active when working with parents. "Go back a generation to young mums and dads and work with them. Sit at home and teach them how to work with children......help them understand that we are value adding. They provide the foundation and we add." Two teachers suggested that we need to have "better teacher training". There needed to be "more cross-cultural stuff" in order that we have deeper understandings of the students we teach. There was a feeling expressed by one teacher that we needed more Indigenous staff working at the school. This correlated with what some of the Indigenous teachers said.
The final discussion point with teachers was related to what they felt were the key factors that influenced Indigenous students' literacy development. They produced a wide range of responses most of which revealed that we "haven't cracked it yet" which meant we don't know what factors are critical to successful school literacy development for Indigenous students. Some teachers who had initially said they felt they were doing all they could for the Indigenous students in their classes, came to the conclusion that perhaps there was more they could do. Teachers needed to have deep understandings of the home language and cultures of the families. Teachers felt that they "were doing it alone." By this they referred to the fact that they often "bent over backwards" for the families and parents of their students, but parents were not "coming to the party." A number of teachers were of the opinion that parents were passing on a "passive resistance" of Western schooling to their children. "It's subliminal, subtle, but it's there. There's a political undertone to it [resistance]........ The little kids aren't aware of it but they become aware as they get older... then they completely opt out.....they totally disengage." This comment by one teacher was echoed in the words and sentiments of another who suggested that "Disengagement [for Indigenous students] was an epidemic........their synapses are not snapping...because they watch too much TV and their parents don't care." Resistance theory, whilst unpopular with many academics is worth noting here. (See Giroux 2001 and 1983 and McLaren 1999)

Giroux (2001) suggests Resistance theory helps understand "the complex ways in which subordinate groups experience educational failure, and directs attention to new ways of thinking about and restructuring modes of critical pedagogy." (Giroux 2001 p.107) Giroux argues that resistance has a great deal to do with the logic of moral and political indignation and not with the logic of deviance. The notion of resistance compels educationalists to understand the "complex ways people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experiences and structures of domination and constraint." (Giroux 2001 p.108) In this sense domination is not seen as a static process or one that is ever complete and power is not seen as
uni-dimensional. Within the notion of resistance there is "an expressed hope, an element of transcendence, for radical transformation." (Giroux, 2001 p. 108) Further discussion of the construct of resistance as an educational principle follows in Chapter Seven.

Two teachers referred to the fact that we need more explicit teaching to help Indigenous students achieve better outcomes at school. They claimed Standard Australian English needs to be made more explicit for students in order that they access the curriculum. These teachers had worked extensively with ESL students prior to coming to Westville school. Other key factors that were identified as requirements for literacy development included attendance. "There’s too much transiency...not spending enough time in one place to develop relationships with the teacher. We are seen as a child minding centre." Along with attendance, food, sleep and general health were cited as requirements for successful literacy learning at school.

The interviews provided insights into students and teachers beliefs, values and literacy practices. The most salient feature was that as non-Indigenous teachers we do not really know our Indigenous students. This sentiment was reiterated many times by Indigenous staff. This is not simply knowing what they do in their spare time, but how they respond in class to the teaching and learning situations we provide. Teachers were very candid as were the students, most of whom were in my class which I suggest was valuable in terms of honesty of responses, established understandings of home and family and the importance of life histories. Through my interviews and observations I could see that there were indeed many roads to literacy. Many of these paths were visible but there were clearly invisibilities that teachers were not aware of. This challenges teachers to incorporate into their teaching and learning programs resources from the home and community in their work with Indigenous students. The resulting activities have the potential to interrupt established power relations by creating spaces for students from diverse backgrounds to learn in.
I finish this chapter with two vignettes that are brief moments in a teacher’s day. It is my intention to make clear through these stories "the theorisation of the production of educational disadvantage" (Thompson 2002) for Indigenous students. They are a way to present some of the major issues that impact on the lives of Indigenous students in Western school systems. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) use counter-story telling as a method to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination experienced by minority students. Like Solorzano and Yosso I have developed these vignettes from sources that include the data gathered from the research process itself, the existing literature on the topic and my professional and personal experience. From this, composite characters are developed which illuminate the thoughts of some teachers and the lives of some students. Much of the information has been collected during my time working in schools with predominantly Indigenous students. Whilst these stories do point out racist ideologies, I do not mean to criticise my teaching colleagues. These are the result of many years of conversations, some by concerned teachers, others by teachers who, simply did not want to know. They are intended to highlight practices and beliefs that perpetuate the subordinated position of Indigenous people in the school and wider community. This process has helped me understand my own racist assumptions and work to change them.

The writing lessons

The first lesson occurs in a large urban school. The majority of the students identify as Indigenous.

Teachers are gathered informally in the staff room before the bell rings to begin the day.

"Another day in this hell hole." Mr. Peters has been at the school for twenty years.

"You know it didn’t used to be like this, eh, Marg?"
Margaret Nichols looks up from the newspaper and shakes her head. She is also a long time resident on this school staff.

"No, once the families were good families,........ you know, like ours - normal. There were standards. You could ask the parents to do something, and they would. Not the same now. They hardly ever set foot in the place. Leave us to clean up their mess. They don't even feed their kids! That's why I can't be bothered any more. Just deal with the kids as I see fit."

Robin Kennedy chimes in. "Yeah, I spend most of my day on discipline. I've had four suspensions in a week. Better go, they'll be killing each other if I don't get there. Can't read or write, but they shine at a fight. Teasing, I swear to God it'll be the death of me. Got a new kid too. Bushy hair mob. Usual story....doesn't know shit."

She makes her way to the classroom.

Her short journey is interrupted by a young student who hands her a note. Robin reads it.
"That'd be right. Not even proper English" she mutters.

The volume of her voice changes and she peers into the face of the young girl. "Tell your mum that you should be at school every day. You can't learn if you're not here."

Dear Teacher,
Sharnie was sick on Friday
because I had to go to somewhere personal.

Katrina Simon (mother)
She enters the classroom. "Okay everyone, sit down, let’s get started. Any one like to share a weekend story?………Come on……there must be a church or hunting story somewhere." Her voice is sarcastic.

"Saw a tall man last night Miss," volunteers Kain. "’E got red eye an ’e smells bad."

"This is just silly superstition. I’ve told you that before," says Robin. "Jamal! What are you doing?" The determined steps of the teacher striding to Jamal’s desk force him to screw up the paper he is drawing on. She snatches it out of his hand. "I’m so over the red, yellow, black thing. All you ever do is draw this flag and use these colours. And it’s not just you. I see it on projects, workbooks, bags. If it means that much to you, you can stay in at lunchtime and draw it then. Now everyone get out your journals. Kain, remember we are writing real stories, not ones about ghosts and gremlins and when you’ve finished that I want you to copy the writing on the board about capital cities."

Later that day………

The principal interrupts lunch break in the staff room.

"I have some information on a Gifted and Talented PD to be run next week. Sorry about the late notice". There’s a pause where glances are exchanged and words muttered under breath. "Any takers? Could be good. It would be good to have some of our Indigenous students involved in a program."

"For what? Is there a session on flag drawing?……my kids are gifted at that," Robyn laughs.

"Or chanting the filthy lyrics of 50 Cents or whatever other black American crap music they’re listening to," interrupts another teacher. "Or watching ‘Chucky’." "Or playing Smack Down or Hulk? ………something X Box or Playstation," returns Robyn.

"Gee their lives are meaningful! You know they write about this stuff in their journals. It’s all they do at home."
The teachers laugh with each other.
"These kids don’t even have basic literacy skills, let alone be gifted and talented," says Mr. Peters, "anyway they get enough with all this extra tutoring support."
"Yeah at least we’re doing something for these kids…… just trying to get them literate enough to fill out their dole forms."
"So, no takers?" The Principal screws up the printed email and throws it in the bin on the way out.
"As if," says Robin, half laughing. "I’d be happy if my kids could get past the 2nd level of the Dolch basic word list. I hammer those words every day…. and for homework and they still don’t get it. Mind you most of them never do homework…parents don’t care. God how am I going get them through Benchmarks?"
A young teacher sitting with Robin looks puzzled. She’s new to the school having arrived at the beginning of the term (three weeks ago). Her previous school was in a middle class area in the Western suburbs of Brisbane.
"My grade 1 and 2 kids at Redhills State knew all those words like the back of their hand. I mean it’s not like these kids are speaking a different language to us."
"Well most of my grade 6’s and 7’s don’t have a clue," responds Robin.
"Why don’t they get it?"
"Their parents don’t help them and these kids don’t want to learn. I don’t know why we bother."
"I send note after note home, asking for parent help in the classroom and I never get anyone."
Robin laughs. "You’ll learn. It’s just pointless."
"I feel like I'm working in a ghetto."
"You are…… same colour, same issues. Violence, drugs, alcohol, abuse, crime. You name it, we got it. One of my kids watched her mother get shot outside their house a few months ago. Domestic violence thing."
"How’s the little girl?"
"Oh they’re used to it. See it all the time".

The bell rings.

"Thank God for non-contact," she says reclining back on her chair.

"Except that the kids come back absolutely off the rails."

"Because they’re so bored. What’s the point of learning that other language when their English is so crap? Be better to put the time and money into learning English properly."

"They don’t learn anything anyway. Spend their time watching videos and colouring in."

"Wouldn’t expect anything else from that teacher." (The language teacher is a Torres Strait Islander and the subject she teaches is referred to as ‘culture’. She is heavily involved in The Torres Strait community, working on festivals and other community projects.)

"Gotta go...there’ll be a riot. I don’t want to sound racist but Island kids are problematic. I have to overplan so there’s not a punch up in the class when they finish their work. Keep ‘em busy with ‘busy’ work...You gotta love colouring in sheets and photocopiers."

"Before you go Sandy, can I see you about NAIDOC week. I’m on the committee. If I don’t start now nothing will get done."

"Yeah, sure, but if I were you I’d just do the usual sausage sizzle and open day. Invite the parents up."

"They won’t come." Robin still has her nose in the paper. "They never do. We do all this stuff for them and they never come."

Another lesson

"Hi Miss." Five happy faces carrying a large tyre inner tube skip and dance excitedly in the direction of the beach. The sparkling turquoise waters of the
Arafura sea are more of a draw card for these young students than the confines of a restrictive school building. A treasure chest waiting to be unlocked. Each day slightly different to the one before, but still with a familiarity borne out of a deep knowledge and understanding of this country.

"Aren’t you supposed to be……………….." Miss Norman’s voice trails off. She is a young teacher, and this is her first permanent position. Prior to this she had been doing supply teaching for six months in Melbourne. She watches the children as they continue laughing and playing with the tyre along the red dusty road that leads to the beach. She marches briskly the rest of the way to school.

The principal is standing of the verandah in front of the office.

"John, I just passed some of my students heading down to the beach." There is a long pause. "They should be coming to school."

"You know what it’s like," replies the principal. His voice is disinterested as he continues. "The parents don’t make their kids come to school. They don’t value learning like we do."

Ms Norman sighs and raises her eyebrows. She makes her way to the classroom and gets ready for the morning session.

She sits at the front of the class and marks the roll.

"Why is Karl away and Jasmine, Riley, Shy One and Marissa for that matter? I haven’t seen you before," she says looking hard at the unfamiliar face. "I don’t have any paper work for new students. Have your parents enrolled you?"

The new student is silent and hangs his head.

"Quick…What’s your name and date of birth?"

"’e bin outstation Miss."

"Well, you all need to be at school everyday. You don’t learn anything by not coming to school. You know I have to write reports and I’ll be getting your parents to come up and have an interview."

"What about these others? Where’s Lester?"
"'e got no clothes Miss."

"What do you mean, he hasn’t got clothes? Everyone’s got clothes."

"And Solomon...where’s he this morning?"

"Gone ‘unting for stingray Miss," answers Sharnie.

"Right time now," adds Vincent. "They’re good an' fat."

Zeke bursts into the classroom.

"I’m 'alfway dead Miss, starvin'" he says dropping theatrically to the floor.

Everyone laughs.

"Don’t laugh. He’s being silly. You must have a proper breakfast before you come to school.

"Got no food Miss."

"Well that’s not good enough. Tell your mother she needs to provide you with a proper breakfast."

"Stay with dad."

"Well tell your dad. Now, journals. Loreena get the journals for me please.

Remember the who, what, when, where, and why questions that must be answered. I hope you boys are listening. I don’t want to see any more hunting stories. We’ve had enough of them. Edit your work before you bring it me, do your own work and do it quickly. No copying."

"Where’s Helen? What’s the point of having a teacher aide if they never turn up?"

She mutters under her breath. Ms Norman’s comment is heard by some of the students.

"Funeral, Miss."

"What?"

"Funeral."

"Another one. Think that’s just a bit of a scam. Whose funeral anyway?"

The children hang their heads.

"Get back to your work."
"What did I say about hunting stories Aron?" Aron is silent. "I specifically said no more hunting stories, I'm sick of them. ...and you haven't done the who, when, where, what and why. You kids never answer the why part. And look, you keep repeating the word big. You only need to say it once. AND you said your grandmother cooked it twice. It's not proper English. It just doesn't make sense. Go back and do it again"

The bell rings. It is a welcome relief.

Miss Norman locks the classroom door and marches to the nearby staff room and slumps in a chair.

"I'm sick of parents who don't give a shit and kids who don't know anything" she says. "As soon as I can I'm going to put my energy into kids that really deserve it."

Yesdadey we climbed a coconur tree in I go hom then
We eat a coconur a big big big big coconut Justin smashed
That coconur then I go hunting for fish in oyster
My grandmother cook a fish she cook a fish
My grandmother then I ate then we see a video a bout monsters
And I’m not giving them breakfast. Their parents get heaps of government handouts and they should be using that to feed their kids."

"Well, I’m staying," says Tracey, a newly arrived graduate from Melbourne. "I think I can help these poor little children."

The above vignettes will be unpacked in Chapter Nine where they will be discussed in the light of the key themes utilized in Chapter Two. The implications for teachers and schools will also be considered in the light of data collected and presented in this chapter.

Conclusion

A vast array of literacy experiences are evident in the lives of the participants in this study. The children had many opportunities to engage in home literacy activities, however these were not recognised by family members as opportunities to enhance a child’s early literacy development. The home environments were linguistically rich, and children observed some family members providing a model of reading books, magazines, letters and bills, catalogues, newspapers and so on. Observable differences were noted in the interactional routines with and around the literature that is in the homes and that of literacy experiences at school. This is discussed in Chapter Seven. Older siblings are a crucial literacy model for younger children who ask them to scribe or draw pictures. I have observed this many times whilst working in Indigenous communities. These older siblings are an important literacy source who can be seen to scaffold their young family members literacy activities. It was evident throughout my observations in the homes that the literacy experiences of the families involved in this research, the quantity of literature and range of print materials available in the homes, do differ to those teachers commonly use in their classrooms. In other words, families are orientated to literacy differently to the way teachers orientate students in the classroom.
The interviews with students confirmed the above observations. Teacher and school staff interviews revealed a range of attitudes to teaching and learning with Indigenous students. Differences between the Indigenous interviewees and non-Indigenous interviewees became apparent. With the exception of one, all Indigenous staff and student participants defined literacy in narrow terms. This reflects an education system that values Western concepts of literacy and knowledge to the exclusion of literate practices that occur in the homes and communities of people from diverse cultures. Indigenous staff felt that parents of their students did not know how to support and help their children’s literacy development and that they saw education differently to non-Indigenous views of learning. The term ‘package’ was used to highlight the notion that parents saw education as something that could be handed over as a ritual performance. Non-Indigenous teachers were more critical of parental involvement suggesting that school literacy was not important to the parents and as such they did not support their child’s literacy development in the home. In contrast to this, Indigenous staff reported that the majority of parents wanted their children to have the best education they could have in order to get good jobs and have careers.

All non-Indigenous respondents were emphatic that school literacy is not a priority in Indigenous communities. Indigenous staff were of the opinion that some communities had prioritised school literacy as important for their children’s future. Indigenous teachers highlighted the fact that for Indigenous people, the family always takes priority which can account for many students absences. This led to discussions about catering for Indigenous students learning styles and literacy needs. The majority of Indigenous participants believed that non-Indigenous teachers did not cater for Indigenous students needs and learning styles with a resounding assertion that we do not know our Indigenous students. Reference to this notion occurred time and again. Indigenous participants claimed we need to go out into the community and see our students in their home environment, listen to the language they use and the dominant discourse’s and infuse these into classroom activity. This would help us to understand where our students are coming from. All non-Indigenous staff supported the notion.
of knowing families and students better in order to respond more appropriately to Indigenous students needs. Indigenous respondents also suggested non-Indigenous teachers did not understand social problems that face Indigenous students. Regular and ongoing cultural awareness programs were offered as a suggestion to support non-Indigenous staff.

It became clear that non-Indigenous teachers operate under the dichotomous notion of 'us' and 'them' when working with Indigenous students and their families. They are generally not aware that as teachers we operate in a system where racialised policies and practices permeate our schools. This is evident in the over-riding beliefs that white people, our values, knowledge and standards are the norm reference group, setting the standards for everyone else. There were non-Indigenous teachers involved in this study, and indeed many of whom I have met in my teaching experience, who situate themselves as victims. This is indicated by notions that Indigenous Australians receive many more benefits and affirmative action policies than non-Indigenous Australians which puts non-Indigenous people at a disadvantage.

The most salient finding of the interviews was both implicit and explicitly stated. *Go where our students are, both physically and emotionally.* It is not until we as teachers do this, that we will be able to work effectively with Indigenous students and move towards improving educational outcomes.

In the following chapter I use Yetta Goodman’s framework and build on this to illuminate the many paths to literacy that I have observed in the homes of the participants and in classrooms. This analysis uses photographs as a means to build a picture of the literacy practices occurring. The photographs capture moments where literacy events are occurring and add a further dimension to the picture that I am attempting to create.
Chapter 6: Tracks to literacy

In this chapter I look at the many tracks to literacy through the eye of the video camera. (The video footage has been taken in the homes of participants, and my own classroom.) Yetta Goodman (1997) provides a valuable discussion on the multiple roads to literacy. I have used the word 'tracks' as opposed to Goodman's 'roads', as I felt it was more appropriate to this study in that a track refers to marks left by people, animals or natural and manmade phenomenon that ate then read by an observer, or literate person. Goodman calls for educators to respect and acknowledge the variety of literacy experiences in different homes in order that families come to believe their home literacy events are legitimate roads to literacy learning. Rivalland (2000) constructs a similar view. Crucial to this notion is the relationship between schools and families.

Families read advertising material, share letters, school correspondence, and in the case of Jeanie and Esther, read the Bible together. Both Jeanie and Esther write letters and notes. There are bills and notes on the refrigerator doors, cards and letters are also pinned up. Some children’s work is on the walls and certificates are hung up prominently. Many of the students I interviewed reported that their families read the Torres News (a weekly paper printed on Thursday Island), and the Cairns Post. Jeanie passively encouraged her girls to write by buying them small, colourful note books from the 'two dollar shop'. A pen with fluffy feather work on it or a new packet of inexpensive textas was usually available. Esther also had pens and paper available for the family. However these were kept in a 'safe' place and the boys did not independently seek them out. What is clear is that the range of literacy resources and the way they are used are varied. They are the foundations of our students' literate lives and as such teachers must seek to understand these home and family practices. In this study I have sought understanding with the use of video stills and still photography.
In analysing the video stills I have utilised Hamilton’s (2000) framework in which she focuses on the visible and non-visible elements of a literacy event. As noted in Chapter Four, Hamilton’s table was devised for written literacy events. I consider a literacy event to be texts other than those that are written and hence include dance and music, the oral telling of stories and paintings and production of other artefacts, and the use of media technology.

The survival track to literacy

Goodman (1997) uses the term "the survival road to literacy" (p. 57) which was clearly observed in both Esther’s and Jeanie’s households. This term refers to "the reading and writing related to health care, business transactions and the general "goods and services" necessary for the well-being of the family." (Goodman, 1997 p. 57) The ‘survival road to literacy’ requires a great many skills, some of which are not visible, in order to negotiate and enact them. For Jeanie this included paying bills including rent for her house and phone, doctors and specialist visits, correspondence and interaction with legal personnel and the police who sent official forms and letters, purchasing, negotiating and paying for second-hand and new furniture, reading newsletters from the school, church and soccer club correspondence, activities related to running a rather unreliable car including registration, towing services and mechanics, correspondence from the department of family services and using child care facilities. It is a similar story for Esther.
The playing at literacy track

The "playing-at-literacy" is another of Goodman’s roads to literacy. I observed all of Jeanie’s children engaged in this kind of activity. Jasmine and Leticia had at times used their telephone book as a Bible, pretending to read verses from it as though they were in church or as they had experienced Jeanie reading to them. The church service as a structured framework is a knowledge they are very comfortable with. Jasmine also read to her younger siblings and guided them in writing activities.

Jasmine was pretending to prepare school work for her younger sister. The visible participants are Jasmine and her younger sister whilst invisible participants in this instance are the teachers whom Jasmine mimics. Mimesis is an important learning tool for the children. They imitate Jeanie and Terry, people at church, their teachers and other people they come into contact with during the course of the day. Learning occurs through the direct and indirect social interactions the children have during the day. Lave and Wenger (1991) have referred to this type of learning as 'legitimate peripheral participation.' (See Chapter Two.) There is watching and listening, an internalisation of the event which includes all the interactions between people and then enacting
the event later. Clearly, the people in the children’s lives are role models and social behaviour and discourse are learnt by making observations. This occurs over an extended period of time. In the same way that adults demonstrate for children, older siblings demonstrate behaviours or tasks for younger siblings. This was evident when Jeanie was teaching the girls to make ‘susu’ damper. (See below) Jeanie taught all the girls but focussed on Jasmine, then Jasmine took the left over un-cooked dough outside and began to instruct her younger sisters. The ‘playing at literacy’ path will frequently begin by silent observations which are then imitated through play experiences.

In the classroom I frequently observe ‘playing at literacy’ activities. Sometimes these are specially set up for children and other times they engage in these activities spontaneously.

The environmental print track to literacy

Environmental print as a road to literacy (Goodman 1997) is frequently used by the participants in this study. Esther read labels during shopping activities and sometimes pointed out printed features on the packaging to the boys. Non-visible constituents of this literacy event include the marketing and advertising participants who actively promote consumption thereby helping to construct the children as consumers. In this photo the boys were actually choosing school
lunchbox snacks. Esther was reading the packaging and making decisions based on what was in them. The boys were decoding the visual stimuli by recognising products they see advertised. They are adept at reading the images on the packaging, a skill which may be derived from potent visual experiences via television. Mathew and Rhys clearly rely on their perceptual or visual learning which illustrates the power and permanence of this mode of gaining knowledge.

I observed both families read catalogues from Coles, Kmart and other stores that they had received in the mail.

The visual aspects of these catalogues are very salient to readers, especially young children who are dazzled by the colour and layout. What is not visible is that young children and adolescents internalise the whole consumer culture. Not only do they want what is in the catalogues but they also recognise a great number of the products and their accompanying logos and icons. They use this knowledge in their school writing. (See below)
Westville school also had signs up around the school in an attempt to promote positive attitudes to the school.

The above visible artefacts or signs appear on the groundsman’s shed which faces a main road in the community. This kind of street graffiti style sign acknowledges that what counts as writing is much more diverse now than in the past. Conquergood (1997) suggests that street literacy or ‘graffiti’ "abandons the conformist ideal of a singular literacy, opening the door to multiple and non-standard literacy practices" (1997 p.354) which he notes have been called local literacies, vernacular literacies and grassroots literacies by various theorists. Conquergood also notes that this kind of literacy emphasises the overlap, exchange and interaction between oral and literate channels of communication and foregrounds the politics of literacy, focussing on how it is implicated in the distribution of power and literacy. (1997 p. 354) What is interesting is that in my experience Westville school did very little to foster the belief that it valued a variety of literacies. The message ‘Many as one’ is a visible and authorised attempt to unify the school population and communicate to the general population that it values the diverse identities within. The message attempts to make diverse cultures feel included in the school and is a gesture that creatively masks some of the glaring racial tensions that exist between some staff and students. ‘You can do it’ is a slogan for a life skills program that Education Queensland schools have been encouraged to implement. The principal was vigilant about removing any weekend graffiti work that was done by community members or students.
Some one had managed to strategically change the sentiments of this sign by putting a 'T' after can. The power and control that the school sign symbolises is challenged by the perpetrators of the graffiti who bring with them the non-visible artefacts that include negative feelings towards the school and/or teachers, and a clear form of defiance as regulated by peers. Whilst we do not know who added to the existing artwork, the person, or people, feel a sense of eligibility in being able to engage in this activity. Non-visible participants include the perpetrators peer group, who help regulate such texts and encourage conformity to the group way of thinking.

**The demonstration track to literacy**

Goodman refers to seeing others read and write as the demonstration road to literacy. I would also include those activities that do not involve traditional notions of reading and writing but involve 'reading' a situation. For example, for Jeanie and Esther's families and the students I interviewed, this involved watching ceremonies and the performance of dances, cooking or hunting with family members. Hidden participants in such activities are many and include grandparents and other ancestors, extended family and community members. These invisible
participants produce, circulate and regulate these texts. Participants are regulated by 'Law' and rules of appropriacy and eligibility apply. For example, I have observed the very clear roles that men and women, girls and boys have in particular ceremonies in Arnhem Land.

In the following picture, Jeanie makes 'susu' damper, a traditional food from Torres Strait, "to remind her of home," and bring her closer to her family and culture. The importance of teaching her children these skills is clear. It is a social necessity in the sense that her children know their cultural heritage and are part of Jeanie's history and community. Whilst Jeanie instructed them, it was clear they already had much knowledge and many skills required for making the damper.
After Jeanie had made 'susu' damper, the girls went outside and role-played what they had just learnt...under Jasmine’s (older sibling) careful direction.

Both Esther and Jeanie frequently read the Torres Strait News. Their children often picked up these papers and looked through them, identifying family members and people they knew or completing puzzles or children’s pages.
It is interesting to note that the leading story in the issue pictured is 'Unity' (Bousen 2004). The story highlights a meeting of Torres Strait leaders "to give their united commitment to improving the lives of the people of the Torres Strait." The theme for the meeting was, "It Is Time." Indigenous Coordinating Council Chairman Robert Sagigi reportedly told those attending the meeting that the people of the Torres Strait were "going to take control" of their own future within a three year time frame. A meeting Elder was quoted as saying the meeting represented a "pilgrimage back to the mecca of freedom." (Torres News: The Voice of the Islands 25th -31st August 2004 No. 617) Giroux (2001) notes that within the notion of resistance there lies "an expressed hope" and "images of freedom." Notions of emancipation have been explicitly stated as has the need to struggle against domination and submission. In the interests of emancipation the Torres Strait leaders call for a united front. It is not impossible to envisage Jeanie and Esther, being engaged in a kind of passive oppositional behaviour. There is a non-visible social and political purpose in the notion of unity. Whilst this may not be analytically precise, and I did not seek an interpretation by the subjects, Esther did suggest that the story was "very interesting" to her and she was "proud" of the sentiments expressed.

Esther had just received this Bible in the mail and Mathew was intrigued by the beautiful Renaissance style illustrations that featured throughout. Esther's religious beliefs are not on display for public admission but she says she is a Christian and goes to church regularly. This affiliation is an invisible part of her parents' expectations, a social and historical family tradition, from her home in Torres Strait.
Both Esther's and Jeanie's refrigerators are covered with literacy samples, all in the form of reminder notes, bills and calendars. They are important daily reminders in the lives of busy families. They are contextualised within a discourse of recreation, social and the private organisation of life and daily events. The skills of budgeting and time management whilst not visible are significant.

The technological track to literacy

For the participants involved in this study, the technological road to literacy (Goodman 1997) includes computers, video games, television, DVD, video, the X Box and play stations and mobile phones. "When people learn to play video games, they are learning a new literacy." (Gee 2003 p.13) Mathew and Rhys spent a great deal of time playing their X Box games. Esther saw this activity as a reward. Loftus and Loftus (1983) believe that the following skills can be learnt from playing interactive computer games tracking, eye-hand co-ordination, self-generated or intrinsic motivation, well-defined goal structure, problem solving, visual memory, visual searching, engagement of a person's self-esteem, and the ability to apply old knowledge to understanding new things.
Every time a word came up on the screen during a game, the boys would shout it out, 'fight', 'win', 'lose', 'kill'. They were clearly learning those skills as suggested by Loftus and Loftus. They can extract meaning from zooms, pans, fade outs, replays and flashbacks. They are also learning to distinguish between fact and fiction. In conjunction with these skills they are utilising specific learning styles. As I noted in chapter two, Harris (1984) was instrumental in popularising the theory of Aboriginal learning styles. Despite the criticism that Harris received for this work, many Indigenous scholars have utilised the notions he presents on the five major
learning strategies he observed in Aboriginal students. Four of these can be identified when Mathew and Rhys engage with the X box technology. These are learning by observation and imitation as opposed to verbal instruction; learning by personal trial and error; learning in real life rather than contrived settings (the fight scenes are contrived but the physical setting of the X Box is real life) and learning context-specific skills in contrast to abstract, generalisable principles. Hidden participants include the boy’s peer group and Mathew’s older brother’. Playing these games has a social function which is the sense of belonging to a group, the member of which clearly value the ability to play such games and in deed own an XBox.

Watching DVDs is also part of the popular culture track to literacy discussed below.

In the previous photo, Mathew was showing me one of his favourite videos here. As well as many children’s videos, he also had access to adult videos which he said he liked more.
At the time of this study, the Indigenous students I taught were seven and eight years old but already adept at using mobile phones. Their deep knowledge of some of the features of these phones is positively astounding. They can take and send photos, play games, text each other and find the time. They are also adept at teaching a rather incompetent adult how to use them! (MSN messaging is also becoming a major way young people communicate today.) What is not visible is that communication with family members is very important which is perhaps why they have embraced this technology. They have clearly spent time observing and learning through trial and error and have come to value mobile phones as a way of contacting people at any time. This knowledge and understanding of technology, and the ability to learn through trial and error and observation extends across to classroom technology.

In a school that values the integration of information technology and electronic forms of literacy, my classroom is becoming a very visually technologically-based learning environment that utilises interactive telecommunications. The nature and functions of literacy are transforming. Our technology artefacts have, among other things, enabled students to travel the
globe on Google Earth. One Indigenous student has taught me how to navigate the program, playing with it at any opportunity he could, and learning through trial and error.

This interest in technology has spilt over into the home causing major changes in life styles. Many of the students I have taught in the past, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous rarely read for pleasure. Television viewing on the other hand is a frequently engaged in activity. I have observed that in the homes of my students there may not be print literature but there is almost always 'top of the range' electronic equipment including plasma TVs, the latest DVD players and X boxes. This transforms what the students learn, but for Indigenous students is perhaps more in line with how they have traditionally acquired knowledge. I can recall many instances and stories highlighting the use of visual imagery as employed by Indigenous students. This has been a preferred style of learning. For many of my students, the introduction of data projectors and mimio tools into our classroom on a daily basis has captured their attention with its highly visual output modes of icons, hypertext, animations, photos, symbols, movie clips, three dimensional and maneuverable graphics all laterally connected.

The family literacy tradition track

Family literacy traditions are a road to literacy. (Goodman 1997). Both Jeanie's and Esther's families have big celebrations for birthdays. Cakes were elaborate and incorporated the latest popular movie and video characters. For Rhys this was the Hulk, which was a favourite of his at the time of his fifth birthday. Esther had organised a clown to come and entertain family members at the party. The children clearly knew their roles and responsibilities when interacting with the clown. Rhys also received presents, one of which was a book. He seemed quite surprised, flicking through the pages quickly before discarding it for an 'Action man' toy. Esther asked me to video the event, a copy of which she sent home.
Birthday cakes frequently have written messages on them.

Jeanie said she read to her girls every night at bedtime. On one visit I brought along a book as a gift for the girls. Terry was interested in the Biblical stories and the girls quickly gathered around to look and listen as well. On one occasion I saw Jeanie trying to get the girls to memorise part of a story. She taught them sentence by sentence. Traditionally the church
utilises this kind of memorisation task which is very familiar to Jeanie. Verbatim performances are prime ways of showing off knowledge. (Heath 1983) Jeanie wanted the girls to be able to do this.

Esther, Mathew and Rhys often spent time telling each other stories and laughing or otherwise at the content. This was a time when Esther would often talk about, and tell stories from Torres Strait, usually about family members. They value a good storyteller who can tell contemporary or recent past narratives and who can also tell traditional stories. Story telling is a valuable form of cultural education. There was one occasion when Jeanie said that some of the stories she knew from the Torres Strait were too frightening for her children. What is not visible is that Jeanie may have been influenced by her Christian religion with her attitude to these stories. Also, considering her very difficult and strict up-bringing with her adopted family, she may have been uncomfortable with some of the memories that these stories now evoked.
Jeanie and Esther displayed certificates prominently. This picture shows certificates won by Jasmine, and a religious text. They are hanging in the lounge room of her small house which also happens to be the entrance to the house and the place where visitors socialise. Jeanie was very pleased to have found this mounted poster in a second hand shop saying she had wanted it for a long time and here it was one day, presenting itself to her. Hamilton (2000) notes that such displays of literacy have a 'commemorative' role. This includes certificates and plaques. Jeanie did not often speak of Jasmine's literacy success, but this display of certificates shows that she is very proud of her daughter's achievements and wants all visitors to see her success. It is visible and clearly apparent that Jasmine has achieved success at school. There is concrete evidence framed and displayed. What is not visible are the hidden participants who have supported her learning and include family members, teachers and friends.

With regard to the prayer or rather verse titled 'footprints' Jeanie was making a visible public admission of her faith and falls into Hamilton's classification as 'literacy as Ritual Public Gesture' (Hamilton 2000 p. 21) The words read as follows:

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he notice two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him and the other to Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened to be the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way.

But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life,
there is only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why when I
needed you most you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would
never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see
only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

This is a significant prayer for Jeanie evident in the central and prominent position in which it is
featured. The strength of her faith is relatively new. She has experienced a great deal of
suffering in her life, most significant and most recently with the death of her youngest baby in a
car accident. This prayer gives her the knowledge that God is omnipresent and particularly so in
times of great personal difficulty. This prayer presents a highly emotional force for Jeanie and
a great source of comfort. It also represents Jeanie’s non-material values and involves a
number of hidden participants including the rest of her family and her wider church family, all of
whom she heavily involves in her ministering of ‘the Word’.

Unique and personal experience track to literacy

Photographs presented unique and personal literacy experiences as roads to literacy (Goodman
1997). These treasured family records were displayed prominently in Jeanie’s and Esther’s
homes. The students I interviewed frequently brought in the same style of photos that is, those
taken at studios, mainly Pixi Photos which are a feature of many shopping malls - especially in
KMart stores. These photos are clearly valued by family members who discuss the people in them
frequently.
One unique literacy experience in Jeanie’s life was her weekly community radio program broadcast to the Torres Strait.

Jeanie played music and held interviews and generally engaged in typical radio chat. She had a radio name and her listeners knew her by this name. It was clearly visible that Jeanie knew all the appropriate radio language. Coupled with this was her non-visible understandings and knowledge of her audience. There were expectations from her audience that she would talk about certain events, advertise important dates and play locally produced music. This regulated her actions on the program. For example, she spoke directly, via her broadcast, to the families of the Islanders lost in the boating experience I have mentioned earlier. The social purpose was to show her support and grief and unite the Indigenous community in their mourning. Jeanie has a shared knowledge, that is not visible, of what is expected and what is typical practice as a radio announcer.

Music was an important part of Jeanie’s family life. Terry played the guitar and Jasmine was learning the electronic keyboard. She did not have formal lessons, but was encouraged by her parents to play songs she knew from church. She liked the lights and buttons and elaborate
effects she could get by experimenting with this instrument. Jeanie played her contemporary religious music very loudly and had received complaints from her neighbours.

Jeanie was very pleased to receive letters from a long time friend with whom she maintains a long distance friendship and has done for many years. What is not visible is the fact that Jeanie maintains contact with many people who have been part of her past. This is very important to her and includes both family and friends. It is worth noting that since the completion of the data collection phase, I have kept in contact with Jeanie. She moved interstate due to some family problems but she and Terry brought themselves a computer and Jeanie emails me every few days. Sometimes her emails are a quick hello and at other times she sends extended messages.

Popular culture track to literacy

To Goodman’s framework I have added, the popular culture road to literacy. Both Jeanie’s and Esther’s families could recognise and read words such as ‘Barbie’ ‘Bratz’ ‘Action man’ ‘Winnie the Pooh’ (in fact all the Disney cartoon character names and movies). This is not only evident in the home domain but also at school. The boys I teach wear ‘Rasta’ hats and T-shirts and recognise the colours and words associated with this. The girls collect, swap and play with
BRATZ dolls. Children love their 'X boxes' (almost everyone has one or at least access to one) and 'KFC' and McDonalds are favourites that frequently appear in writing activities.

Another aspect of literacy as popular culture is the use of body art and clothing and accessories. These images include sponsors names, brand names writing as patterns on clothing and hats, tattoos and messages written on the body. It could also include badges and work related identification badges that people wear. The children in the study usually wore school uniforms that had school logos on them. Most of the clothes they wear have print.
The students also carry wallets and purses, play with balls, use note pads and pencils, pencil cases and school bags. Many of these items display written text and/or clearly identifiable symbols.

Some students came to school with messages written by family members on their hands. This one was to remind a student who to go home with, and uses both writing and a small symbol of legs walking. Students are also adept at decorating their own bodies with images and writing. The meaning of the words and symbols they use are situated within the context of daily living. In the case of the above hand message, it was the symbol which was so salient for this student. This brings me to the next track to literacy, which I have called the semiotic road. Goodman has not delineated this as a distinct pathway to literacy.
The semiotic track to literacy

Semiotics refers to reading signs and symbols. These signs and symbols include images, artefacts, and diagrams but Gee (2003) suggests that semiotics goes far beyond images to include sounds, music, movement, bodily sensations and smells. These often contemporary symbols, are inextricably meshed with popular culture. Meaning is transferred without written language but is sometimes mixed with words. This is clearly observable in the Indigenous students I have taught and teach. Very recently I was showing one of my students a photo of an Arnhem Land man (in fact it was Gali whom I wrote about in chapter three). In the photo Gali had just prepared a kangaroo for the fire. My student looked closely at the photo then he smelt it. "Smells like fire .....and turtle," he said. When I have clothes lying around the classroom at the end of the day, some of my students smell them and can usually identify the owner this way.

One aspect of semiotics is the ability to interpret signs and symbols in the natural world. I believe this is a critical aspect of literacy. The Indigenous students I have worked with have been adept at this reading. This has been closely linked with spirituality in all communities I have been involved with. In the desert, signs and symbols for "yakanu" (devil) abounded, These were anything from an aroma, a bodily sensation or a visual sign or image such as the flickering of a shiny light as when the sun hits metal. Children were adept at reading the signs of the seasons.
Walking along a beach in Arnhem Land with a group of Indigenous students, one says to me "Stingrays fat Miss." "How do you know?" I ask. "Red flower," he says pointing with his lips. The Miyarrawa is flowering and the local community know it is good stingray hunting season. My students read so many signs in their environment, all connected to different social and cultural practices.

I hear students talk about reading 'track markers.' These are visible signs on trees that indicate old tracks used by their Indigenous ancestors. For example, the branches of the trees might grow in the shape of a 'dog leg' which shows that people have passed this way, evidenced in the once broken branch. The branch has managed to repair itself, but the tell-tale shape remains. A student said to me recently "Gonna rain after maths." It did. It's not hard to tell in the monsoonal season when it is going to rain, but what intrigued me was the specific time frame that the student could identify. Ernie Grant, whose framework I mentioned in Chapter Five, uses the term 'Naturalist Intelligence.' (2004 Education Queensland PD with Ernie Grant.) Naturalist Intelligence contains four abilities as identified by Grant. These are: The ability to use sensory input from nature to interpret one's environment, the ability to categorise, observe, adapt and use natural phenomena, the ability to observe changes, cycles, and relationships on the natural world and finally, the ability to understand that signs, signals and habits mean certain things in nature.
I have heard many Indigenous students talk about spirits they see in the environment. These can be seen physically wandering around or they come in the form of dreams. For example one student said "When we get sick, my grampa shows up." He explained this was to "look out" for them. There is talk about seeing an old lady in dreams with red eyes. "Green eyes good one," they say. "Red eyes are bad spirit." Discussions about bad spirits and in what forms they might appear are common. "If you see a curlew sing out, this mean something bad gonna happen in your family." And "If you see a horseman four time, is bad." 'If you see' is a common sentence beginning such as, If you see a big light, or a hairy man, a black roo, a tall man, short man, big footprint, two forks (trees). All of these sightings or bodily sensations that are felt when a spirit is close by indicate spirit presence and are accompanied with distinctive ways of acting. What is invisible in all these situations is that the students can recognise the distinctive ways of knowing, feeling and valuing. The students are able to read these signs in different situations and contexts. They write about their dreams and experiences. As their teacher I can read all the words in the writing piece, however, I cannot read the work with the same understanding of my students. I do not know the accompanying invisible signs and symbols (such as smell) or the cultural and historical way of reading them.

Sounds, music and movement are part of the semiotics of dance. The music of ceremony and popular music has patterns within its technical structure. If these are understood by the listener, they are associated with particular behaviours and emotional meaning. (Ellis 1985 p.24) Jeanie, Esther and the students I teach enjoy music and identify with both traditional Indigenous musical arrangements and contemporary artists- especially Indigenous artists. My students frequently bring from home, locally produced CDs featuring personally known artists, and CDs of internationally famous African American musicians. They know the music very well and screen out any lyrics that are inappropriate or too obscene for the classroom. They mimic the dance routines they see on music video clips. What is visible is their
identification with these music artists and rappers and the local Indigenous artists they know.

These students frequently ‘paint up’ and dance for the class. The stylised designs they wear are known to each student and they can verbalise the significance of each, weaving this knowledge into the meaning of the whole dance experience.

My students frequently give this hand sign to each other. It demonstrates a common identity, a camaraderie and solidarity that defines their Indigenous roots and culture. Conquergood (1997) believes this is a powerful pedagogy that engages the body in a deep way of knowing. McLaren (1995) sees these signs as emotional acts, which contrast to the rationalism of the classroom. (cited by Conquergood 1997)
The students I teach often decorate their work with the Aboriginal flag and colour things black, yellow and red. They can easily articulate the meaning of each colour and draw or paint the image wherever they can. The flag symbolically expresses an alliance and unification amongst Aboriginal peoples which is encouraged and valued by families and community members. This flag stands for opposition to anything which belittles or vilifies Indigenous people.

(Big foot refers to a spirit being.)

In addition to painting and drawing flags, they often draw symbols (or pictograms) in their writing especially if they are unsure how to spell a word as the following student sample illustrates. The student has clearly demonstrated that she can communicate her message using a combination of words and symbols.
The heart symbol has what Lotman (1990) suggests is a 'syncretic verbal-visual existence'.
(1990 p.83) By syncretic I am referring to the combining of different cultures or schools of thought. In this example we can see the heart, which is a design not traditionally belonging to this Indigenous community, has been taken from her knowledge of popular youth culture and used with her cultural knowledge that symbols are commonly used in place of words. This exemplifies the notion of hybridity.
This example from a Year 2 student once again shows the symbolic expression of spirit beings who are often in the stories told by adults to children. (I wrote the accompanying words.) The symbols have a spatial structure in the pattern and a temporal one in that they are both part of the past and the present which in fact many Indigenous stories are. Visibility rests in the knowledge of these different spirit beings. Invisible is the relationships that individuals and groups have with the spirits and their accompanying mystic powers and dimensions.
As I discussed in the previous chapter, Jeanie and her family had access to painters and paintings from her homeland. What is visible in these paintings is the aesthetic and perhaps romantic appeal in terms that they are a historical tradition. These paintings were for the tourist market in town.

What is invisible is the ritual significance for the painter and the Indigenous audience. In Arnhem Land these designs embody the power of the spirits and supernatural beings - "they are intended to be sensed more than viewed." (Caruana, 1993 p.60) Also in Arnhem Land each clan has its own patterns and designs that are read and recognised by all members and actively taught to young children.

Messaris (1994) notes "there can be no question regarding the existence of significant cultural differences in the area of visual literacy." (Messaris, 1994 p.169) Messaris is referring to exposure to specific visual subject matter and implicit connotations of the image. In different cultural contexts children are exposed to certain visual experiences. It is not unreasonable to assume that their perception of visual media will be influenced by this exposure. This however, is a difficult subject to write about. We are trying to put into words that which can only be perceived, sometimes very subtly. Individual experience and its necessarily subjective expression is very personal. It is not appropriate to try and interpret other people’s perceptions when our world views are so vastly different. We cannot know if Picasso really saw the world as a "cubist jumble of fractured planes" (Messaris 1994 p.175)
can only gain glimpses of my students perceptions of how they see, feel and hear the world around them. What is critical however, is that we as teachers support students in their understanding of semiotic meaning so they can recognise other cultural meanings. How we do this is a question that little has been written about. This notion is discussed further in chapters seven and eight.

**The spiritual track to literacy**

Another addition to Goodman’s framework I would make, is the Spiritual road to literacy. Goodman puts reading the Bible at home or in church as part of the family literacy tradition road. But spirituality is more than simply reading the Bible which is why I have chosen to afford it a separate section. Spirituality permeates all aspects of life for many of the Indigenous people I have worked, lived and shared experiences with. Harris (1990) notes that the Aboriginal world is characterised by religious rather than scientific attitudes. Religion is layered in that there are religious stories that are told and rituals that are performed. There are metaphors within stories and symbolic references. In this sense spirituality is entwined with the semiotic road to literacy. There is talk in Jeanie’s life about "the Coming of the light", death and mortuary rituals and beliefs about the soul. Esther has also talked about "the coming of the light."
Jeanie prepared Sunday school lessons each week. This involved a great deal of interpretation of the readings she was instructed to study with her class. She then had to put them in words that would make it more accessible for her students. These lessons appeared to become ‘warning’ stories indicating that she was influenced by traditional stories from her culture.

Spirituality also encompasses magic of which I have heard much talk - especially love magic and black magic. Songs are part of magic rituals and I have often heard stories of people being ‘sung’. This was a strong tradition in Arnhem Land. The students I taught explained it was a curse. Being ‘sung’ meant someone had put a curse on you - a very terrifying experience for the recipients who reportedly became very sick and often died. There were many signs that a person had been sung, often the onset of sickness, or unexplained naturally occurring events. There is an integral relationship with the spirit world in which the reading of signs and symbols is critical. Traditional healers and magic men are omnipresent in the lives of Indigenous people I have spent time with, and their powers are very real and strong enough to influence external events. What is not visible is that the threat of spirits serves to regulate or facilitate actions. In Western schooling, there has traditionally been little space for spirituality. Valued cultural practices and knowledge continue to be very narrow. The students I teach, and Jeanie's and Esther's families, have created learning environments in which they combine their religions, cultures and ways of viewing the world into spaces that define their identities. They are able to reconcile the different worlds of which they are part and merge the literacy practices of each. All this happens as they attempt to make their way in systems that are not always responsive to the varying literate lives they lead.
Conclusions

In this chapter I have highlighted the many ways people become literate. The changes in our world have created new literacies and new forms of learning. Indigenous families provide a rich array of literacy experiences for their children in their everyday lives. The children in the study learnt skills and knowledge from the adult members of their families and they then practiced these skills amongst themselves in play situations. These children then, begin school with multiple literacy experiences that emerge from their home and community environments.

Against a backdrop of students’ situated experiences and culture we see that the implications for schools and teachers are to recognise home and community-based learning and allow these tracks to literacy to have their own status. We can no longer exclude the acknowledgement of these literacies from educational policies and practices.

In chapter seven I set out to interpret the material that I have collected in the course of this study. I uncover the situatedness of learning. We see that learning is shaped by our environment. Lave’s (1997) apprenticeship model of learning is observed as we see the learner becoming enculturated in the accepted knowledge and practices of the community from which they are part. Multiliterate practices from the children’s life worlds, and evidence of hybridity can be seen to be interwoven inside and outside the classroom. Indigenous literacies as observed in the homes of participants are shown to be integral to the development of identity. Finally I utilise the section headings used in chapter two to analyse the lived literacy experiences not often recognised, understood or valued in schools. These are: promoting home/school partnerships; the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage; acknowledging and valuing diversity, pedagogy and understanding Indigenous youth.
Chapter 7: Situated literacies and the disconnection with school.

Through the stories of the families involved in this study I uncover the situatedness of learning. Learning is shaped by our environment. The children in this study learnt skills and knowledge from older siblings and adult members of their families and were then observed practicing these skills amongst themselves in play situations. They begin school with multiple literacy experiences that emerge from their home and community environments. Lave’s (1997) apprenticeship model of learning is observed as we see the learner becoming socialised in the accepted knowledge and practices of the community of which they are part. The connections between what is learnt in the home and community, and everyday experience is strong.

Multiliterate practices and evidence of hybridity are observed. These cultural and linguistic practices are interwoven inside and outside the classroom and will be discussed in this chapter. In the family contexts observed it was clear that education was about being independent and equal, while knowing respect and place and engaging in personal relationships within the family and group structure. Learning was about preparing to be a useful and responsible member of the family group. Caring for others was modeled and valued. In these ways chronological boundaries of age are not important. (MCEETYA 2001) There are links between culture and learning styles.

In the first section of this chapter I will talk briefly and very generally about what schools are using in their literacy teaching and learning programs. Much of the data gleaned is from departmental documents and a good deal is from observations and experience. Information has also been obtained from the teacher interviews. This brief section is intended to provide a general overview of the way literacy is taught in the school where some of the data for this study was collected. A full-scale analysis of literacy teaching practices in Australian schools
exceeds the scope of this thesis. It can be noted however, that in the schools where I have taught and in which my colleagues have taught, covering all states and territories in Australia, there is a consistency of methodology that teachers appear to be using in their teaching of literacy.

In the following sections I will discuss what I have observed happening in the home and community with regard to literacy practices. This includes uncovering the situatedness of learning and literacy, multiliteracies and hybridity. Indigenous literacies as observed in the homes of participants are discussed and their integral relationship with identity. I noted in Chapter Four, that qualitative researchers are committed to emic approaches in which attention is paid to local issues and the specifics of particular cases. It is not appropriate to assume these two families are representative of all families that attend Westville. What this data attempts to do is provide rich descriptions of two families literacy practices. Finally I utilise the previous section headings under the banner of predicates to school success or failure. Embedded in this discussion is a comparison with school literacy practices.

**Literacy teaching in schools.**

**Policies and programs**

In my experience, working across three states and the Northern Territory and with a variety of demographic differences, there appears to be little difference in terms of pedagogical practices between schools. Hill et.al. (1998) report a similar finding. It has been observed that "the literacy curricula in Australia are devised and controlled by city-based personnel of a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon culture, often drawing on the findings of tertiary educators and reports written by people of similar backgrounds. Schools are then left in the position where they are committed on the one hand to following a system-devised English curriculum, and on the other hand to meeting the needs of their local community." (Bull and Anstey 1997 p.12) Many of the teachers interviewed noted the metro-centric nature of our curriculums with
some regret. "We are stuck between a rock and a hard place. We have to teach the prescribed curriculum and assess it in prescribed ways, but this is sometimes in conflict with what our kids need."

Westville school promotes Walking Talking Texts (Murray 1998) as a model for literacy teaching. This is new to many of the early childhood teachers in the school but is actively promoted by the principal. Walking Talking Texts promotes the shared book model of literacy instruction. This is a literature-based model which focuses on a range of text types and textual practices. The bulk of school learning is orientated around written texts. With this in mind, Walking Talking Texts "concentrates on introducing children to the purposes and uses of written language." (Murray, 1998 p. vi) Walking Talking Texts acknowledges that where Aboriginal languages are used in literate forms, the purposes often differ in form and function to those used in English. Walking Talking Texts methodology follows a series of predictable learning events. Comber and Barnett (2003) note the importance of regular and predictable activities as a literacy learning support for children in low socio-economic communities. Walking Talking Texts scaffolds learners in both oral and written English by deconstructing the information in and structure of written texts within a school context. Without this explicit deconstruction, English as a Second Language Learners may experience difficulty learning in, through and about English. This, in turn, has a significant negative impact on outcomes. Teachers reported that the most common strategies they used to teach literacy in their classrooms were modelling and scaffolding strategies. The first two hours of the school day is the designated time for literacy. This is common in many of the schools in which I have taught.

In grade three, five, seven and nine, the New Basics Project operates. (See Chapter Five.) Queensland Education claims that the New Basics Project is about improving learning outcomes for students. It deals with new student identities, new economies and workplaces, new technologies, diverse communities and complex cultures. The project began in 2003 and is still in trial in schools. Westville school chose to implement and trial the project. New Basics refers
to four clusters of practices that Education Queensland deem essential for students to survive in the world when they leave school. These clusters incorporate the following concepts: active citizenship, multiliteracies and communications media, life pathways and social futures and environments and technologies. The notion of productive pedagogies is crucial to the implementation of New Basics. Productive pedagogies are classroom strategies that teachers are required to use to focus instruction and improve student outcomes. They include higher order thinking, deep knowledge, deep understanding, metalanguage, connectedness to the world, problem-based curriculum, social support, engagement, substantive conversation, student control, explicit criteria, self regulation, cultural knowledges, inclusivity, narrative, group identity and citizenship. The New Basics program necessitates the adoption of productive pedagogies and the Rich Tasks drive key elements of these pedagogies.

All states and Territories must complete Year three, five and seven testing. These national benchmarks are indicators which represent only the essential elements of literacy and numeracy and not the full range of the curriculum at the particular year level. (2004 Department of Education, Science and Training) The National Literacy and Numeracy Plan called for a coordinated approach by the Australian Government, States and Territories to improve literacy and numeracy standards for all students in Australia. National Benchmarks are an important part of the literacy and numeracy plan. The Department of Education, Science and Training report that Benchmarks have a strong equity dimension. Assessment programs to obtain data for benchmark reporting are state and territory based. Data derived from these results is reported for years three, five and seven in the National Report on Schooling in Australia. This data is comprehensive but questions about appropriateness for students from diverse backgrounds have been consistently raised. Assessment of this type often tests the background of students rather than the quality of their education. Recently in my own grade three class I was doing the mandatory testing preparation. We knew that the writing task involved students writing a letter to argue a case for or against a chosen issue. I gave each student a visual image and asked a 'should this be allowed' question requiring them to decide yes or no and back up
their decision. One of my Indigenous students chose to respond to a picture of graffiti on a tree. The question posed was, "should people be allowed to write on things in nature?" Her response was as follows. "Dear Editor, I don't think people should write on trees because gwengen (Quinkin spirits) will come for you and ener (annoy) you when you sleep." Clearly her world view and home background have influenced her response. I gave the same paper to a non-Indigenous student the next day who answered "Dear Editor, I think people shouldn't write on beautiful things because it will make it agle (ugly) and if they draw on the trees the trees will die and we won't be able to breathe and then we will die to." I applauded both answers but wondered if they were sent in to examiners who were unaware of the Indigenous student's background and the culture of spirits (gwengen), how they would interpret and indeed score this insightful response.

In addition to this issue, simply aiming for improved and higher standards of achievement will not prepare students for life beyond school. Benchmarks are a continuing source of contention amongst teachers in this current educational climate. Berlach (2004) is critical of our Australian system of education whereby outcomes-based education is coupled with Benchmarking or chronologically-based testing. He suggests that there is no evidence that a process whereby 'league tables' (Berlach 2004 p.10), are created is advantageous to students learning, or a country's education system. Berlach draws on the work of Healy (2004) who says, "Experience in other systems in attempting to compare like schools have found it fraught with danger. Schools are highly individual and no matter how much the Benchmarking and comparative data is refined, there will always be some comparing of apples with oranges." (Healy 2004 p14 cited by Berlach 2004 p.10) Berlach underscores the comparative notions of Benchmarking and extends his argument by positing the view that with such testing there results a 'death of knowledge'. In his argument Berlach raises the question of value. He suggests that in a regime where measurement provides the evidence of outcomes achievement, certain outcomes become subordinate to others which are more easily observable and quantifiable. That which cannot be measured becomes of less value. In this situation "teachers
may be forced by bureaucratic expectations to maximise the measurable and minimise, or even ignore, the more affectively-freighted aspects of learning. The death of knowledge occurs."
(Berlach 2004 pp.10 -11) If there is a positive aspect to Benchmarking it is this; Benchmark results do have the capacity to identify the location of students who experience difficulty which can qualify these schools for additional funding. Of course funding alone does not mean improved outcomes which brings us back to the point of inclusivity and access for all students. This issue of inclusivity does not only encompass teaching and learning styles but also includes resources used by teachers in their programs.

Resources

It appears that the resources used and the teaching materials in the classrooms often exclude a variety of voices, ideologies, identities and values. Some of the teachers interviewed in this study have print-rich classrooms displaying examples of children’s work, signs and notice boards. Others kept their rooms sparse with few displays or literacy support resources. The presence or absence of certain discourses, curriculum content and teaching practices that are utilised in our literacy instruction and around its artefacts, allow students the resources they need for talking and thinking about cultural identity. Yet many teachers still operate within their classrooms in systems that are exclusive and narrow. This does not allow spaces for cultural identity to be constructed or contested by students.

In addition to classrooms and the resources within them there are also special purpose rooms where specialised teachers operate remedial learning programs. These programs include Reading Recovery, and general learning support. Children with special learning needs are catered for by these services which also support classroom teachers.

In the next section I will look at the data presented in Chapters Five and Six in order to uncover evidence that supports the notion of situated literacy as described in Chapter Two. This also considers evidence of multiliteracies and hybridity. The interviews conducted with
students and staff members and the data collected in the two participant homes are analysed in the light of research completed that determines school failure or success. These are discussed with reference to studies reported on in Chapter Two. Common threads emerged throughout these interviews and align with key themes used in Chapter Two. These are: Valuing parents and establishing partnerships; The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage; Acknowledging and valuing diversity, inclusivity and the nature of learning; and Understanding Indigenous youth.

The situatedness of learning

The situatedness of learning and the following sub-sections on multiliteracies and hybridity permeate the entire analysis of data, as does identity and its relationship to literacy. It has been extremely hard to compartmentalise these features which, true to my Western way of thinking is what I have wanted to do. I have not succeeded and these themes are visible throughout.

In both families observed throughout this study, learning and activity can be seen to be intermeshed with literacy. Learning activities occur in authentic, meaningful contexts and are socially, historically and spatially constructed. Learning can be seen to be the interaction between the persons acting and the settings in which their activity occurs. From this learning, literacy knowledge and competence are derived. This literacy knowledge and competence differs according to the social and cultural context in which it is learned. In Jeanie’s and Esther’s households we see that literacy takes many different forms. In addition to this we can see that there are a variety of ways of doing particular literacy activities.

In Chapter Three I discussed the notion that conceptualisation of what constitutes a text is changing. I asserted that Indigenous texts and genres are distinct forms that must be considered part of Indigenous students’ cultural capital. The ongoing debate about literacy has been fuelled by the impact of new technologies and the accompanying new literacies that have
emerged. The debate has also brought to light the range of knowledges that exist in diverse cultures that have been part of these cultures for centuries. Social and environmental literacies have been part of the multiple knowledge systems of Indigenous Australians for centuries. (Hanlen, 2002a) Taylor (1987) describes the importance of paintings to a Western Arnhem Land community. "....paintings continue to help Kunwinjku to understand the fundamental connection between individuals, and the social and ancestral order. Kunwinjku experience the worth of the knowledge revealed in paintings because it helps to structure so many aspects of their experience of the world in a way that makes such experience intelligible.....the experience of understanding the artistic system takes the revelations of the truth of knowledge relating to the ancestral beings. Paintings help to create the meaningful texture of their religious understanding." (Taylor 1987: 336-338 cited by Tierney 1997)

The participants in this study are clearly familiar with a wide range of literacies that are performed within the household and the wider community. In Jeanie’s house these include reading letter box advertising brochures, community newspapers, advertising information on food products, magazines, religious texts, cooking, writing notes, literacy activities associated with a sporting club (Jasmine’s soccer), regular attendance at church and associated literacy practices, visiting relatives, playing games, watching parents write letters and fill out forms, observing parents engaged in work activities at home such as tertiary study, preparation for Sunday school, frequent visits to the mechanics, communications with various Government departments such as the department of Transport, Family services, the Department of Housing, responding to solicitors' letters, planning and booking train, bus or plane tickets for holidays, watching television, playing musical instruments, in fact the list goes on and on. Jeanie is particularly adept at literacy events that surround Access Housing and the Tenants Union. She is familiar with the Laws which govern these bodies and her rights and responsibilities as a tenant. This is also true of Esther's household as can be seen in the following list.
In Esther’s household the range of literacy events the participants are engaged in include paying bills, studying at TAFE, reading catalogues and advertising brochures, photo albums and portraits, family celebrations, dealing with official school information, video and computer games, reading manuals and directions for putting a bicycle together, phone messages, shopping lists, school correspondence and literature, official school information and notes, medical correspondence including directions for giving medicine, income tax forms and other financial records, lists and reminder notes, notes on calendars, working out financial payments for specific items and services, keeping appointments, writing a resume, looking at price tags and reading labels, reading recipes, reading the Bible etc. I have attempted to list as many literacy events as I observed in both Esther’s and Jeanie’s households table 6.1 below.

Barton (1998) discusses the daily home literacy events of people by categorizing them into six areas of practice. I have employed Barton’s taxonomy to identify the home literacy practices that I observed in Jeanie’s and Esther’s households, however it has been necessary to make an addition. When I looked at the data and assigned literacy events to categories using Barton’s taxonomy I believed that in order to honour the data I needed to make an addition which I called spiritual/ naturalist. (The use of the term Naturalist’ has been adopted from Ernie Grant’s work (2004) see Chapter Six) As Barton points out literacy activities can have multiple and overlapping significance in people’s lives. Spiritual/naturalist literacy events could belong to ‘sense making’, ‘private’ or ‘social participation’ categories. These categories did not highlight the significance of spiritual/naturalist literacy events in the lives of the Indigenous families who participated in this study and the families and students I have interviewed. In this way the data was represented more accurately and Indigenous literacies were not reduced to a Western framework.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organising life</th>
<th>Private Leisure</th>
<th>Social Participation</th>
<th>Personal communication</th>
<th>Documenting life</th>
<th>Sense making</th>
<th>Spiritual/Naturalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paying rent and other bills (2)</td>
<td>Magazines (2)</td>
<td>Organising family celebrations and events (2)</td>
<td>Signs on people’s faces eg. hostility or friendliness (2)</td>
<td>Photo albums and portraits (2)</td>
<td>Telling stories from traditional paintings</td>
<td>Church functions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing Sunday school Lessons</td>
<td>Oral rhymes and raps (2)</td>
<td>General advertising flyers (2)</td>
<td>Local newspaper articles with family members or important events</td>
<td>Local newspaper articles with family members or important events</td>
<td>Pens and paper (2)</td>
<td>Cultural celebrations including the annual &quot;coming of the light&quot; (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booking and making travel arrangements on trains, buses, planes. (2)</td>
<td>Wordfind magazines and booklets (2)</td>
<td>Political flyers (2)</td>
<td>Calendars with dates for important personal events (2)</td>
<td>Symbols in the community eg. KFC (2)</td>
<td>Symbols on clothing (2)</td>
<td>Cultural performances (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to and from solicitors</td>
<td>Community newspapers (2)</td>
<td>Bible (2)</td>
<td>Notes left on refrigerator (2)</td>
<td>Church literature</td>
<td>Directions and manuals with toys eg for assembling them (2)</td>
<td>Symbols in nature eg weather patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying second hand goods (2)</td>
<td>TV. Guide (2)</td>
<td>Bible study groups</td>
<td>Mobile phones (2)</td>
<td>Bible study literature</td>
<td>Helping with homework (2)</td>
<td>Fruit and nuts on backyard trees (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official school information (2)</td>
<td>Letters to family back home (2)</td>
<td>Songs and Music (2)</td>
<td>Writing messages on body eg. reminders to do something</td>
<td>Poetry and songs written by friends</td>
<td>Medicine Directions (2)</td>
<td>Telling stories with sticks, artefacts such as sharpened feathers, stone and paper bark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to School (2)</td>
<td>Filling out mail order forms</td>
<td>Involvement in a volleyball team</td>
<td>Letters to and from family and friends (2)</td>
<td>Involved in a volleyball team</td>
<td>Written signs</td>
<td>Church functions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address books (2)</td>
<td>Body decorations such as tattoos (2)</td>
<td>Soccer club schedules and notes</td>
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<td>Shop fronts and businesses, road signs, billboards graffiti, shoe clothing, (2)</td>
<td>Cultural celebrations including the annual &quot;coming of the light&quot; (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone messages (2)</td>
<td>Jewellery and cosmetics hair accessories</td>
<td>Organising Holidays (2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Textbooks (2)</td>
<td>Cultural performances (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grocery lists (2)</td>
<td>Diaries</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Street signs and house number</td>
<td>Symbols in nature eg weather patterns</td>
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<td>Car registration</td>
<td>Television advertising (2)</td>
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<td>Catalogues (2)</td>
<td>Fruit and nuts on backyard trees (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Car servicing</td>
<td>Computer Television (2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Telephone Messages (2)</td>
<td>Telling stories with sticks, artefacts such as sharpened feathers, stone and paper bark</td>
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<td>and maintenance</td>
<td>Video (2)</td>
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<td>Correspondence from the Dept. family services (2)</td>
<td>DVD player X box</td>
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<td>Applications for concession cards and rental assistance</td>
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<td>Letters of default for non-payment of fines and bills</td>
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<td>Studying at TAFE including graduation notices (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Applications (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing a resume (2)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Medical bills and related literature such as immunization records and directions for giving medicine (2) Hospital forms Income tax form and other financial records (2) Working out financial payments for specific items and services (2) Birth and death Certificates Appointment and function reminder notes (2) Facts about law Notes on Calendar (2) Clocks Eating at fast food outlets (2) eg. cake (2) Stickers and cards for collecting (2) Price tags and labels (2) Newspaper advertising(2) Flyers delivered in the mail and junk mail (2) Notices of local events (2) Movie advertisements (2)

Table 6.1 Observed literacy practices in Jeanie’s and Esther’s household

The most salient feature that emerged from completing this activity was the very minimal activities associated with documenting life. In my time spent with Indigenous people I have frequently observed the differences between the documents and records I keep which they do not often keep. I believe this is a historically situated product of traditional lifestyles where transient living impacted on what was necessary to carry and keep for survival. There are also the practical difficulties of keeping documents, mostly papers in some very crowded living conditions. Photos appear to be significant to people. I have observed changes in attitudes to photos throughout my years working with Indigenous people. In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s
photos were not encouraged. Now I am frequently asked to take photos for people which are laminated and displayed in homes.

The two largest sections that were revealed in Barton's taxonomy were 'organising life' and 'sense making'. It is not unreasonable to have predicted that 'organising life' would be large for all active members of the community both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This is a feature of our lives today. We might have also expected 'sense making' to feature prominently given the astronomical amounts of environmental and consumer literacy present in our world. All of these activities emphasise the social nature of literacy learning. These practices can also be seen to be embedded in temporal contexts. In addition the local character of literacy activities has historical components that individuals bring to the event. These have been learned from previous situations. The power of place (spatial context) is also a crucial factor. Physical setting and the available tools and resources (or artefacts) are important dimensions of activity adding to the contextualisation of the learning. We can see that time, setting and activity make up the 'situation' in which the learning takes place. A clear example in Jeanie’s household were the paintings that Jeanie’s uncle had completed. At a superficial level they could be interpreted as trees, yams and traditional headgear worn by Torres Strait Islander men during ceremony. On a deeper level, very precise information can be conveyed. The reading of this visual literacy sees the paintings as symbols of ancestral power. Layered relationships to plants, cultural artefacts, and colour exist. It is historical in that it reaches back to the earliest times. ‘Place’ is meaningful and is depicted through the specific plants painted. Abstract relationships to land and people can be ‘read’ in the painting which enables generational connections. Children are taught to understand these abstractions and ancestral knowledge which are critical to sense making. (For further discussion on the notion of systems of knowledge and sense making see Watson 1989 *Singing the Land, Signing the Land.*)

Apprenticeship style learning (Lave, 1997) was observed in both Jeanie's and Esther's households. The children watched adults and then practiced amongst themselves in play
situations. In Jeanie’s family, the three young girls went to all church events and worshipped with their parents. They have come to know the rituals involved with this activity by participating in the whole event rather than being taught in decontextualised stages. At home they use the telephone book as though it were the large Bible they see their pastor reading from each week. This church ‘curriculum’ or stages in the church service can be viewed as a set of landmarks for learners rather than a specific procedure to be taught to them. (Lave 1997 p23) Teachers need to be able to move students from the apprenticeship style learning just described to apprenticeship learning within the classroom. This approach to learning can be incorporated into our pedagogy. This is further discussed in Chapter Nine.

In Esther’s household this apprenticeship style of teaching and learning is evident in the way Mathew and Rhys use technology in their play. Esther’s 18 year old brother has taught 9 year old Mathew how to play video games and Mathew, in turn, has taught 5 year old Rhys. All three participants have formed a ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger 1991) and engage in an activity system in which they share understandings. The apprentice watches the master until he thinks he knows how to play the games and then he tries out his skill. Although an apprentice may be skilled at some parts of the computer game more than others he is still able to go through the whole process from beginning to end. This includes plugging in and making connections to start the game, knowing all the stages and procedures as well as the language used in the game and finally logging off. He does not engage in parts of the process. Equal accomplishment is clearly an assumption of the master who never disallows or interrupts the apprentice. It is apparent there is collective learning in a shared domain.

**Multiliteracies and hybridity**

Clearly there is a multiplicity of literacy events observable in Jeanie’s and Esther’s households. These are summarised in tables 5.1 and 5.2 in Chapter Five. The interrelationship of cultures and the plurality of texts are continually interwoven as they go about their daily lives.
Jeanie and Terry, and Esther all tell many stories to the young members of their families that are clearly designed to have a teaching purpose. As noted in Chapter Five, this is reminiscent of the 'warning stories' that are traditionally told. For Jeanie and Terry these tend to be about God and how he comes and speaks to ordinary people. Church parables typically recount daily experiences common to people of the day. They end in condemnation of one or more of the stories characters and provide a warning for others. The message is that He must be obeyed without question. Esther uses stories in a similar way. I have already made a number of references to the three young children who were out in a boat with their mother father and baby brother. The seas were rough and the boat capsized. The three oldest children swam to safety but their parents and baby brother were never recovered. The boys listen intently to Esther. She warns them about going in boats in rough seas and knowing the land and how to survive.

In the same way two of the students I interviewed reported that whilst they did not have children’s books in their homes, their parents still occasionally read to them and their younger siblings. The siblings were as young as two and three years old. The students reported that their parents read from the local newspaper. I persisted. "Which parts did they read?" Both students answered, "About car crashes and stuff." I wondered about the interest level for two and three year olds in a newspaper. The students said that their mothers talked about the dangers of driving too fast or driving whilst under the influence of alcohol. This kind of story telling appears to be a hybrid form of the more traditional stories of legendary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heroes whose activities are the source of many important lessons. In the past, traditional stories were told that had a 'warning' value. (Kale 1995 and Waddy 2000) These were told to children at an early age. Local contemporary stories are now used in place of some of the more traditional stories. Hybrid language practices using Indigenous and Australian English varieties are present in Jeanie’s and Esther’s families.
The students I teach and interviewed have also displayed aspects of hybridity in their writing tasks. Jeanie noted that for many Indigenous people dreams and visions provide an important source of direction and information. The Indigenous children I teach write about their dreams. They have transferred this culturally specific notion of spiritual guidance through the form of dreams to their writing. They understand the dreams to be meaningful and important and treat them with a reverence and respect as well as containing an important message. There is clearly a struggle of translation and difference in the context of school where cultural and linguistic practices, histories and epistemologies collide. (Guteirrez et al. 2003). The students' Indigenous identity is central to this writing piece. We know that all children have dreams but they are not viewed as important sources of teaching or inspiration. Jeanie uses her dreams to make important decisions and to guide her in her everyday life. Hybrid language practices are evident on a daily basis and can be illustrated in the brief discussion on 'Show and Tell'. (See below) These language practices must be legitimised and can be utilised in formal learning contexts.

Guteirrez et al. (2003) suggest that the changing and shifting nature of learning communities can manifest in various learning activities as points of conflict and tension. Sometimes this tension leads to a transformation in the activity and the associated discourse practices; hybridity. Guteirrez et al. suggest that these transformations can lead to productive literacy learning.

**Indigenous Literacies**

Indigenous beliefs, values, identity and literacy practices could be seen to influence the literacy practices observed in the home. Within these literacy practices many pre-requisite skills for achieving academic success were evident. The differences noted are in line with Wilson's (2000) study in that the manner in which these are deployed, and frequency with which they occur, are different. The families value books but the day to day concerns centre on the
practical demands of family life and maintaining family ties and connections. There was a
variety of text types and literature in the homes but these varieties do not feature prominently
in mainstream classrooms, for example children’s picture books are generally visible in
classrooms. Jeanie and Esther do not have children’s picture books in their homes, nor in fact
did the homes of the children I interviewed. In the same way, many classrooms do not feature
materials such as magazines, advertising material and catalogues, familiar icons and logo’s,
paintings other than those done by students, local newsletters and newspapers from
organisations outside the school, notices for local events, manuals, lists, church literature,
forms - all of which feature prominently in the homes of the families involved in this study.

Importance of the family

Indigenous people have reported on the importance of family in daily life. (Fleer and Williams-
Kennedy, 2001, Hanlen 2002a 2002b 2002c) The importance of extended family cannot be over
emphasised for Indigenous people. This was observed many times in Jeanie’s and Esther’s
households and through the interviews with students and Indigenous teachers. Harris (1990)
and Harris and Malin (1994) note that Indigenous Australians often place different values on
the socialisation of children in that children are always part of the adult’s social life and as
such are involved in most activities. In contrast many parents from Western cultures put their
children in other rooms to sleep or play keeping them away from aspects of adult conversation
and activity.

Jeanie would often talk of the value of family for most social activities and as support when
needed. Family will always be there. During my time of data collection in Jeanie’s household
Jeanie came into contact with a brother whom she had not seen for many years. He identifies as
Aboriginal and resides in Darwin with his wife and daughter. Jeanie’s niece was experiencing
difficulty at school in Darwin and Jeanie was asked to allow her to stay and attend school at an
Indigenous campus north of Cairns. Jeanie was only too happy to oblige despite recurrent
difficulties with her niece’s behaviour both in and out of school. This girl was family and that
was all that was important. Jeanie also talked about the fact that she and Terry would one day take the girls to live with their PNG family. She said that they knew their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family here and they should know the "other side".

Jeanie extended the notion of her family to include all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. She 'took care' of children in the community whom she felt were 'at risk'. She admonished her community for their use of drugs and alcohol but had a strong sense of commitment and responsibility to the children who she felt were innocent victims of some of this behaviour. Jeanie’s own difficult childhood and youth in which abuse and brushes with the law were present, enables her to identify with people in her community. These activities illustrate the notion that Hanlen (2002a) discusses when she considered Western concepts of identity as "I" versus Indigenous notions as relating to "we". (See also Ladson-Billings 2000)

Esther was also very aware of the importance of her family and her obligation to the family. This in fact was an important part of her identity. Esther has a 'good daughter' identity. She is keen to do well in her study and return to work as a teacher in Torres Strait. She believes this will make her parents proud of her. Kale (1995) notes that Torres Strait Island girls are expected to do most of the home duties and look after people in the household. Esther does this. I have also observed this expectation in Indigenous communities across the Top End. During many school camps, I observed the girls preparing meals, cleaning, collecting wood and doing most other jobs around the camp whilst the boys played. Esther is also a good sister which is another part of her identity. It seems that some Indigenous families often designate representatives to take main responsibility for exchanges in the wider community that involve reading and writing. (Kale 1995). Esther is the designated representative in her family, as is evident in her responsibility for her younger brothers education and in fact daily life. She is frequently called in to 'champion' situations on behalf of family members when there is likely to be form filling, negotiating literature that may involve higher level literacy skills than they feel they have. Kale (1995) has also noted this practice. Mahiri and Godley (1998) cite an unpublished
paper by Cushman (1997). The author illustrated how "orality and literacy is used to negotiate highly asymmetrical power relations between those trying to gain access to institutional resources and the gatekeepers controlling access to institutional resources (Cushman 1997 p. 3 cited by Mahiri and Godley 1998 p. 431). These gatekeepers employed strategies such as 'assigning a proxy' to alleviate the subordinate position many people from minority backgrounds experience. Esther acts as this proxy. Jeanie also acts in this capacity both within and outside her community.

The notion of a proxy is often bestowed on a young child. Many of the students I interviewed carry this responsibility. They translate for their parents and negotiate between teachers, their parents and younger siblings. This clearly carries responsibility, but it is done with little fuss and the understanding that it is an expectation. Family responsibilities are part of Indigenous students lives. On a number of occasions I received notes from the parents of my students (usually written by the students on behalf of their parents) explaining absences. For my female students the absences were often due to their being required to stay home and look after younger siblings or to attend medical appointments to support adult family members. They did this with complete compliance. Proxies are clearly critical to many Indigenous families. This has implications for the students concerned. Teachers need to cater for those students who have absences as a result of performing proxy duties. In addition the school needs to ensure Indigenous staff are always available for families who require this support. It also makes clear the fact that the family is a vital network for many reasons including the negotiation of Western systems.

Clearly family and social relationships are regarded as crucial. Kinship classifications in Indigenous societies extend to the world of nature. The re-occurring patterns and cycles are used and understood by Indigenous students which allow an organising and explanatory framework for understanding all things. This is a difficult concept for non-Indigenous people to understand. The two cultures make sense of their universe in entirely different ways. Harris
(1990) and Watson (1989) have written much about Indigenous ‘world view”. Harris (1990) talks about key divergences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous world view. He does point out that these are arbitrary and the examples he provides are taken from the school system. Further, he is a non-Indigenous person writing about Indigenous culture. His work has been ratified by many years experience working and living with Indigenous people. I am convinced that these differences can support non-Indigenous teachers in their work with Indigenous students which is why I have included them here. Harris’s distinctions are as follows:

- Religious versus positivist thinking: that is characterised by spiritual rather than scientific attitudes.
- Relatedness versus compartmentalism: Land, kin, Law and religion are inextricably linked.
- Cyclic versus linear concepts of time: The cyclic time frame of past-continuous is a focus unlike the Western notion of a straight line cut into weeks, months, years and centuries.
- Being versus doing: Relationships are critical in an Aboriginal world view as different to Western culture which is transaction-orientated.
- Closed versus open society: Whereby prescribed systems dominate consciousness.
- Contrasting views of work and economics: In a Western view there is a causal link between land, labour and wealth. Provision of goods is seen by Indigenous Australians as having spiritual significance.
- Contrasting views of authority: In Aboriginal society, ordered egalitarianism is organised by religious authority and kinship obligations. In Western society the basis of authority is delegation from the people to governments.

These distinctions are a significant part of Indigenous identity which is discussed in relation to literacy in the following section.

**Literacy and identity**

Jeanie reports that literacy is not really important to her. Despite this, she uses it in so many ways on an almost daily basis. She has begun many TAFE courses and completed some. This involves not only the study but detailed enrolment and associated forms. In order to do this
study, Jeanie must negotiate child care for her two youngest children, transport to and from the TAFE college, and keep her household running at the same time. Much of the work I saw Jeanie complete during her time in the RATEP program involved tutorials via computer link ups. Video streaming is an innovative way for remote students to access tutors. However the technological understandings required to access and engage in these programs is advanced. This does not faze Jeanie. She identifies as a learner and takes new technology in her stride, mastering it with confidence and competence. She does note that she likes the teachers who are aware of the fact that their students are ESL learners. Some tutors, Jeanie reports, acknowledge this and take time to explain concepts and terms. Others don’t wait!

Esther identifies as a TAFE student but finds it difficult to see herself as a James Cook University student. She does not think she is up to the standard and believes she is not a good student. She is not confident in her abilities. Esther’s study world is one that is derived from notions that intellectual development and empowerment are powerfully connected to and reflected through reading and writing. (Mahiri and Godley 1998) She internalised these constructs of the value, functions and consequences of literacy through her family as they encouraged her to study. This internalisation is reflective of Indigenous social semiotics and textual practices whereby they are embedded within Esther’s cultural practices and work to "signal and shape values and well as transform, challenge and shape self and others - both socially and culturally." (Tierney 1997) The domain has shifted for Esther, but the practice remains. Esther’s family also sent her away from the islands as they believed she would obtain a ‘better’ education in an urban school than she would receive on the islands. Though her parents were not highly educated in western school systems and were not confident in their use of English reading and writing, they both believed strongly that an excellent education was the route to financial security and social success.

Jeanie sometimes distances herself from her culture. This was evident when she said she "only keep[s] the good bits. The decent bits." She is ashamed of some aspects of her culture,
especially some of the traditional stories that are used as teaching tools for young children. She prefers to align herself with church going people. On the other hand, Jeanie is concerned about carrying on her cultural heritage and attends ceremonies, cooks and tells stories from her past. Many of these activities have been hybridized as a result of enforced interculturality. She mediates between two cultures which is evidenced in these hybrid practices. She is what Matute-Bianchi calls a 'cultural switch hitter.' (1991 p.217) This adaptive strategy reflects a complex ability to negotiate the rules and activities of many communities. Yet there are implications in terms of identity. Jeanie equates a good education with a school where there are more children from non-Indigenous backgrounds and are more representative of mainstream Australian culture. Jasmine wants to be part of this too. This could ultimately mean that a process of acculturation occurs.

For Jeanie and Esther the 'cultural switch hitters' phenomenon serves them well. Their Indigenous heritage becomes less visible in the course of engaging in some activities such as study. By this I mean they tend not to call attention to themselves in culturally explicit ways. However, when they are at home and in the community, they participate in activities and events that are considered more Indigenous such as the 'coming of the light' celebrations. There is an identity within both these domains. This does not pose conflict to them. These women do not believe they have to choose between the two cultures. They function in and value both. This notion of cultural 'switch hitting' can also be seen in many of the students I interviewed. Yet at a younger age than either Jeanie or Esther, they have more difficulty coping with the 'switching' between cultures. This could be seen as evidence of being 'caught' in the process of hybridisation or a stage of cultural apprenticeship for mastering hybrid practices. At times there is an ambivalence or even non-commitment to aspects of their Indigenous cultures. For example one student’s father was a successful dancer at one of the Aboriginal tourist venues. She never talked about this saying she was "shamed" by the fact. Other students filled in the blanks for me saying that "it's old way Miss. We don’t do that one." Yet attitudes and behavioural orientations often exhibit an open defiance of the Western school culture, seen in
frequent non-compliant behaviour. Many of these students spend time mimicking young women in the Black American music scene. This mimesis is a recognised part of the hybridity process and also relates to identity acquisition.

The implications of the importance of identity in the learning process are highlighted by Falk (2005) who discusses equipping people with identity resources. Falk sees identity in terms of cognitive and affective attributes and resources such as self-confidence, norms, values and attitudes, vision, trust and commitment to community. The author draws on Lesser and Storck (2001) who suggests that "a sense of identity is important because it determines how an individual directs his or her attention. What one pays attention to is, in turn, a primary factor in learning. Therefore identity shapes the learning process." (Lesser and Storck 2001 p. 832 cited by Falk 2005 p.6) Falk notes that the qualities of identity resources are entirely situated but that they form the vital and 'missing' jigsaw pieces of learning. Falk’s discussion is on workplace learning but its application could extend to schools. Knowledge of, as well as being able to 'act out' the roles and social relations of the school environment are critical to learning for students. Students who are 'cultural switch hitters' can negotiate these identity resources to come up with 'right' answers or rather, responses. If we design learning engagements where a number of participants are involved, as opposed to simply letting them happen (Falk 2005), all participants in the process of learning are able to jointly construct their answers and responses. In this sense teaching is not the only role of the teacher. Purposeful learning activities can be organised with groups of students, between other adults and students (as in a mentor type program).

Goldenberg (2002) found that parents beliefs about literacy will influence how they use materials and engage in literacy interactions with children. Jeanie and Esther see learning literacy as a school activity. This is where children become literate and this is a teacher’s role. Hanlen (2002c) noted that parents in her study believed all family members played an important role in their children’s education and that they (the parents) were ill-equipped to provide their
children with the help they need. The *Bound for Success* discussion paper (2005) notes this point and further suggests that making informed decisions about educational pathways for their children is difficult for parents. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Jeanie and Esther feel ill-equipped to support their children's literacy learning and therefore entrust this role exclusively to teachers. For them, a parent's role is to supervise homework. During these homework sessions, I saw that both Jeanie and Esther equated learning to read with decoding and not the construction of meaning from written texts. When they read any kind of text to the children they treated the activity in the same way. The skills of reading were not a developmental process where the understandings slowly emerged—rather you could read or you couldn’t.

This was also observable with regard to writing. I observed Jeanie telling four year old Leticia to write a letter to her aunty in a new diary she had been given. When Leticia didn’t engage in this suggestion Jeanie looked at me and said, "She can't write." Leticia did not seem concerned by this comment. I have observed Indigenous mothers of young children in the classes I have taught go further than making comments such as Jeanie did and actually admonish their young children for not being able to properly spell words or form letters. As teachers of Indigenous students we often talk about our students unwillingness to 'have a go' at a school activity they might not be entirely familiar with. This is a common teaching strategy for early writing activities and teachers call it 'invented' spelling. The admonishing behaviour and the unwillingness to have a go, both parallel and contradict some of the discussion points in Chapter Two on Indigenous cultural practices and learning styles especially in the work of Hanlen, (2002a and 2002b). Parallels can be seen with learning styles in that Indigenous children spend a great deal of time learning through observation, then, when they are ready they will have a go. It is contradictory in that Hanlen reports Indigenous parents and families see children as central to the family and community’s world. The happiness of the child is central. Perhaps what is happening in my observations can be attributed to differences in sense making. Practicing through role play is not considered an important part of the learning process by Indigenous
adults who provide learning experiences in real life contexts. Having said this, underlying comments such as "She can't write," is the belief that she will soon be able to. The expectation is there, which aligns with notions of academically successful students and teachers with high expectations. This is discussed further in following sections of this chapter.

To return to the idea of role play, for Jeanie and Esther it was clearly not important to have opportunities to role play reading or talk about books. It was more important to them during the infrequent reading times to remember the sounds of letters and to read conventionally. They both drilled the children with requests such as "Say after me....." Again they were not concerned about meaning. 'For many of the practices and precepts the church holds for language, a parallel ideal is expressed by parents." (Heath 1983 p. 143) This notion was supported in a discussion I had with an Indigenous grandmother who explained that her mother had made her recite passages from the Bible. She commented that she had no idea what she was saying but her mother insisted that she learn these texts. (Brim, Personal communication). Recitation is used in the Walking Talking Texts program. This context of a group oral presentation "requires students to use different language skills to those needed for casual conversation or group discussion." (Murray 1998 p.26)

Play with print and seeing reading as a source of entertainment were not evident. The families did not engage in the repetitious dialogue that surrounds book reading behaviour in many school-orientated and book orientated homes. (Wilson 2000) The learning of school literacy is clearly inconsistent with the use of literacy materials and the interactions with written texts in Jeanie’s and Esther’s homes. Critical to both the Walking Talking Texts model for literacy learning and more recently the Accelerated Literacy Project (Northern Territory Education Department) is the notion of making explicit aspects of the language in texts, in order for children to access these texts with meaning and understanding. Comber and Barnett (2003) also make the point that explicit teaching can have a positive effect on children’s literacy learning. Clay (1991/2004) suggests that discussing predictions, making elaborations and linking ideas to...
previous experiences is predictive of language and literacy outcomes. This kind of scaffolding and support that reflects a child’s reading developmental stage is not present in Jeanie’s and Esther’s homes. For many parents of the students I have taught over the years, the strategies to support reading development that teachers incorporate into their programs, are generally not made explicit as ways of enhancing the skills of young readers. One such program that is attempting to address this deficiency in our attempts to support families and their home literacy practices, is the 'Let’s Read' program.

I highlighted the 'Let’s Read' national program in Chapter Two. This program identifies the importance of reading to young children prior to school entry. This program, unlike many of its predecessors acknowledges that many parents may not know how to scaffold their children’s literacy development when it comes to homework or other literacy activities at home. This program has an accompanying DVD to support parents reading with their children. Jeanie and Esther negotiate tertiary level texts for their studies which require certain literacy levels in order to complete assessment tasks for their course work. This reading is different to reading with children and such support materials could clearly be an advantage for people who do not have deep understandings of scaffolding and supportive strategies, that can accompany reading to children to enhance emerging literacy skills.

As a result of my Western heritage, my own children have had a great deal of text-based literacy experiences and opportunities at home. They know nursery rhymes and have played simple language games. Goswami (2002) notes that there is ample evidence to suggest that early awareness of rhyme facilitates literacy acquisition. She suggests that children whose caretakers promote linguistic activities such as language games and nursery rhymes will spend more time implicitly comparing and contrasting the sounds of words than do children whose caretakers do not promote these kinds of activities. Many Indigenous students I have taught have found rhyme a difficult concept to grasp. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the early language experiences they have, utilize different language features other than rhyme.
My children have begun school having played at writing with school-orientated artefacts and know some letters. They have strong understandings about the concepts of print. Their knowledge of school literacy has begun. Many of the children I interviewed did not have books (either child-orientated or adult-orientated), paper or writing implements in their homes. Esther had some and Jeanie had few. Jeanie drew in the sand with sticks for her children and sometimes wrote on paperbark. One student I spoke to said her father wrote on paperbark for her and sharpened feathers and drew in the dirt with these. Informal writing and drawing do occur in the homes, however attention to different aspects of reading and writing that teachers make, does not occur in Jeanie’s and Esther’s homes. Pellogrini (2002) illustrated that there were instances where children and mothers were literate in one area, but experienced an uneasiness with school-based texts. The example Pellogrini provides is taken from an earlier research project he was involved in whereby lower socio-economic mothers and their children were found to be competent at reading and talking about newspaper advertisements but not at reading an alphabet book. The author suggests that the newspaper advertisements which are read frequently in the home, and alphabet books which are used in the school, and the subsequent differences of these two text types, are in part responsible for children’s difficulty with school reading. The author concludes that the degree of similarity between home and school literacy events predicts success in school-based literacy. In short, Pellogrini suggests literacy is something that must be taught either implicitly or explicitly. It is not acquired.

Many of the texts the participants were exposed to in their homes such as magazines, advertising material and catalogues, familiar icons and logos, paintings, photos, local newsletters and newspapers, biblical texts, C Ds, video and DVD covers, computer games and artefacts from popular culture, are multimedia forms that utilise multiple symbol systems other than those traditionally viewed in literacy learning. There is a dynamic multilayering of image and print that often includes sound as well. These texts are clearly more pictorial and present other ways of
knowing that have not been traditionally recognised in schools - although this is changing. These
texts and literacy events are part of a 'consumer' identity so prevalent in society today.

Consumers are able to read the semiotic images and sounds associated with advertising and
Western cultural conditioning. Whilst this study did not set out to focus on a study of cross-
cultural semiotics, it is becoming increasingly clear that the learning of semiotic categories
shows considerable cross-cultural variability. Complex interactions are occurring as children
have been engaged in a wide range of experiences with visual images, such as watching videos
DVDs, television programs and commercials, looking at pictures in catalogues and viewing images
on a range of product labels. The way children are socialised, taught to view the world and their
prior experiences must frame the way images are internalised and interpreted. Lotman (1990)
notes that "symbols are important mechanisms of cultural memory......[they] serve very largely
as unifying mechanisms.....a reminder of the ancient (or eternal) foundations of that culture."
(1990 p.104) Classrooms have historically accessed a limited range of media and not considered
the learning about semiotics and symbols as important. Students need to have opportunities to
explore their world via multiple symbol systems and not just the symbol system of print.
Symbols contain a kind of 'semantic flexibility' (Lotman 1990 p. 84) that institutions such as
schools do not handle well. Teachers can be preoccupied with the student 'product' which
usually means teaching formulas that get the 'right' or preferred answers. Yet within the
reading of symbols there are many hidden possibilities for interpretation. There is a basic
meaning of the symbol but the translation or deconstruction is personal and somewhat fluid.
Symbol systems are closely linked with spirituality in that certain symbols that are seen, heard,
felt or even at times smelt, often indicate the presence of spirit beings.

**Literacy and Spirituality**

In Jeanie’s and Esther’s households there is a strong sense of spirituality which is also an
important part of both women’s identity. Jeanie openly displays this with her bible texts on the
walls and a Bible clearly evident in her lounge room. She sometimes reads from the Bible at
night to the girls before bed. This is perhaps for Jeanie the most important part of her life. It determines everything she does and defines who she is. For Jeanie, God makes everything happen. She would correct me if I talked about a 'lucky situation'. It was not luck, according to Jeanie, but God’s will. Church commitments took up a great deal of her time and family time. Terry was equally observant of their church ministry. As I have already mentioned, the 'coming of the light' celebrations are a significant event in the Torres Strait Islander calendar. But this indicated when the missionaries came to the islands and spread the word of God. Jeanie, is very attached to the Bible as a sacred doctrine. Traditionally the belief systems of her ancestors would have been defined by certain rituals and ceremonies. It is interesting to note, that Gardner (1984), whose work on multiple intelligences in the 1980’s had a profound impact for many teachers on education practices, more recently speculated about spiritual intelligence, as a possible addition to his original seven. Gardner however, regards the inclusion of spiritual intelligence with caution preferring to include spiritual and religious matters as a variety of existential intelligence. Empirical evidence is sparse and Gardner has chosen not to add this intelligence to his list as yet. (Smith 2002)

Spiritual beliefs have evolved to incorporate written literacy. A discussion on the consequences of this exceed the scope of this study however Heath (1983) notes in her study, preaching, singing and praying have their background in written sources and have increasingly come to include formal reading and writing skills "which co-exist with a wide range of types of oral performance." (Heath, 1983 p.202)

Esther did not talk about God and her beliefs about his guidance. Her family back on Yorke Island went to their local church regularly. She grew up with the Anglican church but claims there are now four churches on the small island of Yorke. Her father and mother back on Yorke Island are involved with the Uniting Pentecostal church.
Spirituality is more than just going to church and believing in God. It goes deeper in that there is an acceptance of a higher force. This force is omnipresent and permeates all of life. It is in harmony with nature. In Chapter Three I related the story of Gali and the painting of his mother country. This could be easily read by the Aboriginal teachers who came into my classroom and looked at the painting on the back wall but only because of their knowledge of the songs and the features sung in them. These songs have a huge spiritual significance. They explain how the ancestors traveled the country and formed the features and everything natural as we know it. Bruce Chatwin (1987) talks in his book 'Songlines' of the spirit ancestors who scattered trails of words and musical notes along the lines of their footprints. These Dreaming tracks lay over the land as ways of communication between tribes separated by great distances. They were, and continue to be, literacies that have been read by Indigenous Australians for centuries. This literacy remains strong in many parts of Australia. The Dreaming tracks weave in and out of the land tying the people to their country. This is critical to Indigenous identity and provides an overarching sense of profound well-being often in spite of other elements in people’s lives that would indicate dislocation and dysfunction.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the students I teach, and have taught in the past, frequently paint or draw symbols on their school work. Sometimes these are in place of words such as the student who drew a heart in her explanation of why people shouldn’t smoke, when she was unable to spell the word. (Chapter Six) Mostly I have observed that these symbols are connected with the spiritual world as could be seen in the student who painted the symbols for Quinkin, hairy man, prowler and dubul also in Chapter Six. These are all spiritual beings who are talked about in the community. Sometimes they have a simple message and at other times there are more complex stories related to them. Some personify good and others evil. My students are very clear about the qualities of these beings but there is still an essence of mystery that surrounds them. They are a part of their identity as children belonging to an Indigenous culture. Once again we see identity as interwoven with the knowledge and understanding of these symbols.
Literacy practices, language and identity

The amount of child-orientated literature apparent in the homes of the participants and evident through the student interviews is minimal. This observation pervades my work with Indigenous students. Many people believe that home literacy and family literacy is about reading to children at home. In educational institutions we have come to know that it is much more than this. However, reading with and to children at home has been correlated with subsequent reading success. Heath (1982a) notes that reading books to children in their pre-school years prepares children for participation in settings involving formal literacy. "In some communities these ways of schools and institutions are very similar to the ways learned at homes; in other communities the ways of school are merely an overlay on the home-taught ways and may be in conflict with them." (Heath 1982a p. 50) Importantly for Heath, her conclusions prevailed upon schools to match home practices with those of school.

One of my colleagues who works in Reading Recovery commented that children need to hear more than 1000 stories before they begin to understand concepts of print in books. These concepts are crucial to learning to read and include directionality, word-by-word matching, letters versus words, understandings of 'first' and 'last' as they relate to words, sentences and whole texts. (Bullen 2005, personal communication) Whilst these statistics have not been thoroughly examined, Kale (1995) makes the observation that her young Indigenous subject during a book reading session appeared quite uncomfortable with the accompanying picture discussions and questioning procedures. Kale suggested that this was the result of an unfamiliarity with children's books. She had listened to stories on the radio and stories as told by her grandmother. This being the case, many of our young Indigenous students could feel similarly uncomfortable with a process that is so crucial to early childhood programs and that is the reading of picture books.
Cultural conventions also mean that people actually view and perceive pictures differently. This was highlighted by Watson (1989) who noted the difference with which a non-Indigenous student and an Indigenous student described what they saw in a picture that was presented to each. This discussion points to notions of conflict between understanding different sets of cultural conventions that lead to the skillful negotiation of different cultural worlds and hybrid practices. In addition we can link these observations to identity development which is integral to the different cultural worlds of the home and school. The cross-cultural encounters and negotiations of these two worlds are often characterised "by contradictory elements arising out of disparities of power." (Gregory, Long and Volk, 2004, p.4) Contemporary researchers such as Solsken, J., Willett, J. and Wilson-Keenan, J. (2000) have explored the challenges and conflicts that are often created when resources from the home culture and popular culture are placed side by side with those from school. 'Thirdspaces' are created. In these spaces, children can have input into their school learning which challenges established power relationships and creates more equitable practices for students who incorporate the language and speech act resources from their home and community environments. The analysis of speech acts is a valuable approach for language teaching. However, I have decided not to adopt this approach as it is beyond the resources of this project which is primarily dealing with literacy.

All of the Indigenous students and teachers involved in this present study were first language Aboriginal English speakers or speakers of Torres Strait Islander Creole. Washington (2001) has researched low literacy levels in African American students. Like Australian Indigenous languages, African-American English is a rule-governed dialect that impacts nearly every speech and language domain, including morphology, syntax, phonology and pragmatics. Washington (2001) notes that for younger African-American children entering preschool the mismatch between the language forms and language use of the homes and classroom are suspected to significantly influence transition to school. In addition to this, studies have found that the interactions of African-American mothers and their children differ significantly from those of white middle-income mothers. Wilson (2000) and Kale (1995) note this distinction in their Australian studies.
In book reading for example, the African-American mothers did not use any of the question-answer format used overwhelmingly in classroom book reading.

Jeanie’s and Esther’s style of interaction with books and other reading material is indicative of what Harris (1984) asserts to be differences in learning styles. When Jeanie read to her children, she simply read the words. She was teaching them about God and the Bible and did this by making the activity context specific. She did not try to break the learning down into a phonetic analysis of words or syntax, but expected that the children would watch and listen and then imitate. The various aspects of language skill required for fluent reading are related to storybook experiences. Bus (2002) hypothesises that children’s active participation in storybook reading and learning strongly depend on the parental ability to bridge the discrepancy between the child’s world and the world of the book. This is achieved as the parent asks questions, adds information, and prompts the child to increase the sophistication of discussions and descriptions of material in the picture book. In this sense, according to Bus, the parent bridges the gap between the book and the child.

The frequency with which parents teach their young children about literacy according to Senechal and LeFervre (2001) is a key factor in understanding the developmental and individual differences in children’s emergent literacy. As previously mentioned, when I observed Jeanie read to her girls, she read the text in its entirety. It was not mediated with questions or comments and the girls listened passively. I am not suggesting that this is in any way inferior to the way a teacher may read a text to a class, merely that it is different. Senechal and LeFervre (2001) found that children who actively participated during storybook reading both comprehended and produced more words than children who passively listened to the story. I have observed this difference with Indigenous parents reading to their children in other contexts. Esther, who did not frequently read books to her young family, values oral story telling ability - which occurs in Creole -through social interaction with family members. Mathew and Rhys can recount factual events and the events and characters from traditional stories. To
enhance literacy development they will need to be taught the explicit skills of taking meaning from books.

Discourse styles between Jeanie and her children, Esther and the young children she cares for and teaches in classrooms provide a source of inconsistency. Hicks (2003) notes that in classroom discourse the Initiation-Response-Evaluation paradigm dominates, which is inconsistent with what many Indigenous children experience at home. The teacher initiates a phrase, perhaps from a book, or during a discussion, and the students fill in the gaps left by the teacher’s pause. In many early childhood classes, the teacher usually provides positive reinforcement for the response, that is evaluative in nature but does not label it as right or wrong, good or bad. (Hicks 2003) Jeanie and Esther did not engage in this style of discourse during book reading sessions. They did not use the oral cloze technique, elaborate on the text or ask questions to check for understanding. Jeanie would say, “I’m going to read you girls a story.” (from the Bible) At the conclusion she would ask if they enjoyed it. Consequently the compatibility with what the children have encountered at school may be minimal.

Discourse styles reflect the language practices, values and beliefs of different communities. It is not an easy task for a young child entering school to master the vast array of discourses relevant to each activity and setting. Hicks (2003) notes that each classroom activity has a specific set of ‘participant structures’ associated with it. As most classroom activities are language based, and language practices are fundamentally social processes, the broader social context of time, place, background knowledge as well as kinship organization for many Indigenous students, are all important factors for teachers to consider when children enter school. If the participants within class activities are to be successful they must orientate themselves to one another and to the activity on both social and linguistic levels.

In line with Hicks, (2003), Cairney and Ruge (1997) also noted that students who were the most academically successful were those whose home discourse practices reproduced school
discourse practices. The authors considered discourse styles and literacy practices identifying five interactional structures or scripts that referred to the patterned ways of participating in literacy-related events in homes or classrooms. The scripts were exposition, recitation, elicitation, responsive and collaborative. School discourse patterns emphasised authoritarian interactional patterns. Jeanie is authoritative in her child-rearing practices. She describes herself this way. "I'm very strict with my girls … children need that." She challenges anyone who criticises her for this. She believes this is beneficial for her children's futures as independent adults. At the same time she is very affectionate and showers the girls with cuddles and attention. Jasmine, as reported by her teacher, is achieving Benchmark standards at school. Jeanie said that Jasmine’s teacher has shown her that Jasmine’s reading age is in fact above that expected for a Year four student. I have not observed the teaching style of Jasmine’s class but it is not unreasonable to suggest that Jeanie’s interactional style aligns with the teaching style assumed by Jasmine’s teacher. The church is a significant part of Jeanie and her family’s out of school and school lives. The texts and discourses the teacher uses are what Jasmine is familiar with in her home life making home and school congruency an important contributor to her success. Hill et al. (1998) report the showing of affection and enforced discipline to keep children task-orientated, were effective strategies for supporting children’s learning. Jeanie displays these strategies.

Hicks (2003) uses the work of Michaels (1981) and her study on 'Sharing Time' with African Americans and White American children noting differences in discourse styles. This can be illustrated during the daily 'show and tell' sessions in my own classroom. The narratives of non-Indigenous children follow the more 'essayist' paradigm. Hicks draws on the work of Scollon and Scollon (1981) who use the term 'essayist literacy' to describe the distant relationship between speaker and hearer that characterises much classroom talk especially around written fiction and scientific texts. A single event is recounted and connected events are related in linear order. For example, "I went to the movies and I saw 'Charlie and Chocolate Factory'. We had lunch at McDonalds and played at the park. We came home." From my observations, Indigenous
children connect events through their relationships with other people in the story. For example, "I bin go with my uncle, an’ my cousin brother." Their destination is not as important as who they travel with. In addition, both Standard Australian English and Aboriginal languages foreground different things. Watson (1989) notes that in the English language, the universe is seen as a "collection of detached objects." (1989 p.16) In many Aboriginal languages everything is in "a state of relatedness." (1989 p. 16) Watson notes that in English, objects are spoken about as though the subject of the sentence is separate to the predicate. In an Aboriginal language with which she was familiar, (Yolngu matha) the subject of a sentence both names the thing and points to its relatedness to the predicate. In this way, the speakers of Yolngu matha view the world as a related whole and the construction of sentences focuses on particular relations. Watson’s example is as follows,

\[ Rangi-ngura \quad nyeka \quad lipalipa. \]

Beach-on staying at a place canoe

*Rangi*, the subject of the sentence translates as beach. The suffix *ngura* is a spatial relation between elements of the world and refers to 'on' or 'at'. The term *nyeka* indicates staying at a place. So we are told something about the nature of the *ngura* which Watson refers to as its 'on-ness' or 'at-ness'. A translation of this Yolngu matha sentence is 'Beach-on staying canoe.' (Watson 1989 p 14-15.) In this example, Watson shows the reader that with the Yolngu matha subject of a sentence, a type of relation between named elements of the world exists.

Such differing forms of narrative and language use may affect children’s ability to use Standard Australian English in classroom contexts. Students whose second language is English, may be socialised with different narrative structures such as the Watson example provides above. In the same way all of the students I interviewed speak Aboriginal English, creole or Torres Strait Creole as their first language. We know that the linguistic features of these languages differ to that of Standard Australian English. For example ‘bin’ is used for past tense or completive aspect marker (McRae 1994) as in, ‘e bin go’ (He went). A presence or
absence of some phonemes—‘olidays’ (holiday) and ‘eegs’ (egg) is also characteristic. Repetition is a feature of Aboriginal English narrative style, (McRae 1994) as in ‘dark, dark, dark blood.’ Another feature of Aboriginal English narrative style is parallelism which refers to the process of repeating something in a different way. (McRae 1994) For example, "Last night Aunty nose was bleedin. After that Tristan sawn Jimmy curtain got on fire an' we was scream, we scream with that fire curtain an' me Katie an' Ally we scream." All of the above examples are taken from my own teaching. Standard Australian English is a hidden prerequisite to academic success in our schools. Without this prerequisite teachers need to work very hard at making the features of home languages and standard Australian English explicit.

The 'essayist' paradigm that Hicks refers to means that the way "authors distance themselves from events by creating an authorial voice removed from moment-to-moment exchange with readers" (2003, p. 13) is a trademark of Western literacy. Without exception all Indigenous students interviewed, and from observations in Jeanie’s and Esther’s households, oral story telling remains an important aspect of the home and community culture. Although story telling is a basic narrative form, as Corson (2001) points out, surface features of each story vary from culture to culture. Corson continues noting that what the storyteller’s audience considers the proper norms for interaction can vary. In addition, when these oral stories have been written down by anthropologists and linguists, some interesting differences emerge between genre’s written within a Western framework and those written within an Indigenous framework. Watson (1989) provides an example that is worth mentioning. The author illustrates how Western views of the crocodile and those of North East Arnhem Land Aboriginal people are antithetical to each other. The Aboriginal man in Watson’s example reveres the crocodile and when he dies his spirit, and those of all his clansmen, will become a crocodile. His tribal lands were created and given to him by the crocodile with whom he has a reciprocal respect. Also, as the storyteller tells his story he becomes an active participant and not the distant agent that Hicks describes. Watson argues that this will never be considered a 'scientific text' because of the "error and irrelevance" (1989 p. 26) that scientific practitioners bestow upon such a text.
In the same way teachers may discount many Indigenous students vast knowledge and differing standpoints with regard to similar phenomenon. The following example from my own teaching illustrates this point. I was working on the genre of report writing in my class of grade two children. We talked about the important aspects of a report and I felt I modeled and scaffolded sufficiently and appropriately to enable students to write a report of an animal they knew. This would include where they lived, what they ate, how they moved and any notable specialities. Many of the non-Indigenous students produced 'the right' answer. One Indigenous student brought me his completed work. He had written: "My dad nearly bin get bit by a crocodile in riba. He really, really, really, really, really, really scary. He bin got dark, dark, dark, blood on his toe." The freshwater crocodile that inhabits this rainforest community is not considered a threat but children are warned not to provoke him. The point is that this student has written what he sees as being his relationship to the crocodile. This was his report. A true account of his relationship to the crocodile.

Once again we see that this student response defines his identity. His relationship to the environment is critical to how he sees himself. Gee (2000) has written about discourse and identity in a discussion on 'Kinds of 'I's'. This is a particularly illuminating discussion where Gee draws on interview data from two teenagers, that reflects their working-class background or upper-middle-class background. Gee’s discussion illuminates the differences between the girls and their identity and discourse patterns. Gee’s discussion alerted me to similar differences in my own classroom. This is especially apparent during our morning talk or 'show and tell' ritual. Indigenous students speak of 'I' talking about how they feel and what they want or desire. "I want a motorbike, my dad’s gonna buy me one" or "I'm bleedin' mad." When some non-Indigenous students use the term 'I' they use knower and claimer verbs such as 'know', 'think' and 'bet'. (Gee 2000) For example;
Student: I'm going to Cairns on the weekend for the cultural festival.
Teacher: Is that on this weekend?
Student: Yeah. ...It is, it is. I know.

In addition to using words such as 'know', strong emphasis is also used as there is no doubt in the students mind that he is correct. Differences can also be seen that reinforce these patterns. I hear Indigenous students talk about going out with family on the weekend, highlighting which particular family members are present. Frequently non-Indigenous students often talk about personal achievements and specialised activities. (Gee 2000) I discussed in Chapter Two Ladson-Billings' (2000) and Hanlen's (2002a) reference to the notion of 'we' as opposed to 'I'. The individual's existence and knowledge is dependent upon relationships with others. Watson (1989) points out that in Yolngu culture, ceremonies are conducted after a process of negotiation about roles occurs. The author suggests that negotiations over Yolngu text production are likely to also occur. I see this kind of negotiation frequently when the Indigenous students in my class engage in what they call "Djapugay dancing." This traditional dancing inspires much discussion and negotiation by participants, reflective of Watson's explication. She suggests that it is unlikely that Westerners would view scientific texts in this way. That is "Westerners do not expect the laws of physics to be decided by majority rule." (1989 p. 61)

The patterns I see emerging, reflect these students' developing identities and are reiterated in their responses to school activities. These differences in discourse patterns may be a source of misunderstanding on the part of the teachers as to the motivations and intentions of culturally diverse students. As these students create spaces for themselves in their school learning environments teachers must value and build on what children know and allow them to help shape their own learning.
In the next section I look at predicates to school success and failure. This information is gleaned from the data collected in the previous two chapters and attempts to highlight issues of importance to school success or otherwise. I also attempt to identify the major areas of contradiction which relate to differentials in power and subordination along cultural diversity and class lines.

**Predicates to school success or failure: What the data tell us.**

**The importance of school and home partnerships in alleviating cultural discontinuity**

Without exception all teachers interviewed, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, believed that for Indigenous students to achieve improved outcomes in school literacy, parent and school partnerships were crucial. Jeanie communicates frequently with Jasmine’s teacher. She speaks to her at least twice a week on the days she picks Jasmine up from school. The teacher talks about Jasmine’s progress. Jasmine spent the last day of one term at home as family members were visiting. Jeanie was very emphatic about letting the teacher know why Jasmine would not be there on the last day. In the year I collected data for this research, Esther’s brother Mathew was being taught by a Torres Strait Island teacher who reported that Esther frequently visited the classroom. In the following year, Mathew’s teacher was non-Indigenous and reported that Esther did not come to the classroom very often. The teacher had frequent calls to Esther related to Mathew’s non-compliant behaviour, but the teacher felt that Esther was "not interested". I would suggest Esther is interested in Mathew’s progress but that she is perhaps not comfortable with the teacher. When his teacher had been from the Torres Strait, Esther visited the classroom regularly.
This relates back to the power relationships schools and teachers maintain not only with Indigenous families but also non-indigenous families. Warren and Young (2002) suggested that the most critical barrier to collaborative parent-teacher partnerships is the style of communication between them. This pertains to the maintenance of unequal power relationships. Another barrier as suggested by Warren and Young is that parents don’t feel they have the necessary skills to deal with their children’s difficulties. Esther may have felt that Mathew’s behaviour and literacy difficulties were something she was unable to address. When I spoke to her about this, she said that time was a real problem and she was tired after her own study. When I saw Esther some time after the observations for this study were completed I asked her how Mathew was going. She was sad that he still struggled and that he was very aware of his own difficulties. She said he tried so hard but the homework was always way beyond his capabilities. She also said that one-to-one learning support had ceased for Mathew and she didn’t know why. She had not asked Mathew’s teacher. She offered as much help as she had time for with his homework.

Teachers in this study perceived the parents’ role as to listen to their children reading and help them with homework. They also believed that parents should take a more active role in their children’s reading, a view which contrasts sharply to what some parents believe is their role. Jeanie and Esther saw formal school-based learning to be the responsibility of the teachers. They also emphasise the functional nature of literacy. Teachers need to work with parents in order to help them understand that the literacy tasks their children are engaged in have important uses. On the flip side of this, teachers need to understand that literacy is not static, apolitical and acultural. (Bull and Anstey 1997) Literacy does change, it can be used to serve particular political purposes and reinforce power bases and not all cultures or societies have equal access to and value literacy equally.

These points of tension between teachers and parents may be the source of conflict that is evident in the parent’s absence from parent-teacher interviews and other meetings, and the
rarity of general interactions with the school and teachers. Many Non-Indigenous teachers reported their disappointment or sheer frustration with parents for not communicating with them. The parents of the students I interviewed almost never came in to the classroom. Some teachers perceive this to be a lack of interest in the future of their children. Hanlen (2002c) reported that the Indigenous participants in her study did want their children to do well at school and get good jobs. The non-Indigenous teachers clearly misunderstand Indigenous parents goals for their children which is further exacerbated by lack of communication between the school and home. Nistler and Maiers (2000) reported on a successful project that encouraged parents to come in and learn with their children. The most salient feature of the success of this program was the sense of community that was created within the classroom and the structured and predictable sessions that the parents and their children engaged in. Such routine and predictability is more likely to put parents at ease than a formal meeting about "why your child is not achieving at school!"

In my own work with Indigenous families I try to see parents and carers out in the community. These interactions occur in an environment that is perhaps more comfortable. These informal meetings always end up with the majority of the household involved. This illustrates the family support and fact that many people take responsibility for each child. I also experienced success with a program that brought locally made books and other literary artefacts into the homes. Barbour (1998) reports on the success of home reading bags in one community. The program I was involved in, encompassed four schools in the Arnhem Land region. A team of teachers and Indigenous school staff and community members worked together to produce high interest, consumable reading materials (both books and videos) to go into the homes. These materials were successful in that they were always made with photos of students and community members, so the interest level was high, they were a source of communication between the school and the community, and they made Western literature available in the homes. I would suggest that this communication with parents is successful as it allowed families to interact with the materials in a way that was culturally significant for them. The fact that the content
was about local school and activities and contained many pictures of family members was also significant.

The reproduction of privilege and disadvantage

As teachers, it is critical that we understand and come to terms with the racially-based power relations that exist in the wider community that filter into our schools. Curthoys (1997) suggests in order for this to happen we must understand the historical events that have led to the devastating and lasting effects of invasion, dispossession, segregation, exploitation and institutionalisation of Indigenous people. Historical information on our colonial past, Curthoys argues, has often been seriously lacking. Interestingly, on Australia Day 2006, The 7:30 Report aired a segment in which it revealed that Prime Minister John Howard is calling for what he believes to be a 'renewal' of the teaching of Australian history in schools. Howard suggests that history is too often taught as a "fragmented stew of themes and issues" and believes young Australians need to be taught the "central currents of our nation's development." It would be interesting to find out what Mr. Howard believes these central themes and currents to be and whose voices he would want heard in the telling of these histories. Curthoys (1997) reports on the race debate of 1996 which she suggests reminded us of the longevity and depth of anti-Aboriginal feeling in Australia. Notions of social equality in actual fact formed the basis for certain kinds of exclusionism. Aboriginal people came to be included in society as servants and marginal workers. In my current school, I work in a parent project with Indigenous community members who are critical to the running and success of the project. This is not reflected in their pay, employment conditions or opportunities for a career path. Long traditions of social and racial inequality impact on our students today, patterns of which can be seen internationally whereby culturally diverse communities are engulfed by conflict and barriers and are unable to pursue their own social, political and economic claims.

".....for a poor or working-class or even lower middle-class latino to be able to finish high school and go on to use all of his or her intellectual potential requires that the child overcome six
barriers: money, history, psychology, prophesy, language and the wall” - the thick wall of culture (Shorris p217 cited by Mahiri and Godley 1998 p. 431)

I am not talking about Latino students in this thesis, however, the similarities are clearly present in terms of barriers. As Vernon-Feagans et al. (2002) write, "Recent studies of the relationships between language and literacy among poor and often minority children have created more complex explanations that integrate cultural and language differences coupled with the pervasive racism and classism within our society." (2002 p. 195)

Schools are places where many dominant discourses are maintained and passed on. Hegemonic practices are repressive. They result in ownership remaining in the hands of the dominant culture. In addition to this, there are certain schools that become 'demonised' (Lucey and Reah 2002). Westville is one such school. Discourses of race and racism are prevalent in the wider community with regard to Westville. This polarises the school and gives it a negative identity. Westville school, like most government schools, aims to produce students who fit the standardised ideal. Lucey and Reah (2002) cite Schostak’s (2000) work in which the author suggests that in the 'purifying' process a waste product emerges which evolves into a politics of the 'left out'.

Directly opposite the gates of Westville school is a catholic school. Whilst I did not discuss this school, or others in my student interviews, in my daily interactions with them it became clear that they believed this school to be superior to Westville based on student performance. "E’s gonna go the catholic school soon," was a comment I heard more than once. When I asked why, the answers were usually because the school was "more better". This is a resonating scenario in the school in which I currently teach. The students are convinced the schools "down the hill" are superior, mainly based on their conceptions of student 'cleverness,' and frequently tell me of their aspirations to go. This feeling is not confined to students. Indeed many of my neighbours will not send their children to our local school. The non-Indigenous teachers at
Westville believed that their students were not performing academically or socially 'on par' with neighbouring schools. They accepted this with resignation and at times defeat. "These kids don't know anything…. What can you do?" The teachers were also keenly aware that the student population had changed over the years. "When I came twenty years ago it was a good school. Different kids. Mainly white. You could teach….the kids learnt." This kind of racially based comment epitomized what some teachers thought of the school they worked in and the students they taught. The majority of these teachers were from white middle-class backgrounds.

In Chapter Nine I pay detailed attention to a study completed in America with a group of students from white middle-class backgrounds. Much of what McIntyre (1997), the researcher, was saying, rang true as I read her study particularly after the process of interviewing non-Indigenous teachers for this study. McIntyre (1997) studied the notion of identity and 'whiteness'. Overall Mcintyre's students created a picture of white people as the ruling class in the hierarchy of racial order. Many students were unable to question how white people continue to dominate people of colour and keep the racial hierarchy in place. They were able to acknowledge white power but not critically examine how and why it continues to exist. This is well-illustrated in my study within the following transcription from an interview with a non-Indigenous teacher.

T: I don't think Aboriginal students are disadvantaged.....not...not any more...I mean in what way are they disadvantaged?....they get everything.......I: What sort of things do they get? T: Well... I...they get tutors. Unless you have black skin you can't have a tutor....that sounds bad...doesn't it....I mean I'm not racist or anything but I do think they get enough.....and let's not get into welfare. I: Welfare doesn't pay much T: I s'pose not but I I: What about history? T: What do you mean?
I: Well …… the history of contact
T: yeah that was bad …..but I….I …
I: Do you think that still effects people?
T: Um… maybe…..yeah I guess it does….there’s not many kids go onto uni. They’re always white. But like I said, it’s not like they don’t get any help at school.

In addition to idealizing the white race, the teachers in McIntyre’s study also felt that white people were the 'norm reference group'. They set the standards for everyone else. This was clear also in my own data with non-Indigenous teachers. One teacher said to me, "There are some good families in the school....you know like ours..." According to McIntyre, the lack of understanding about the history of white dominance results in a skewed understanding of what constitutes white power and privilege. "This uncritical acceptance of white power and privilege fosters the belief that white people are the keepers of/for democracy and, therefore, our power is legitimate. It’s a painful realisation for white people to admit that our history is fraught with the destruction of other peoples in the name of democracy, freedom and equal rights." (McIntyre 1997 p.89)

In accepting this power and privilege, we pass these feelings on to the minority students we teach. Very recently, in my class, I was listening to the local minister deliver his weekly religion lesson. He had a picture of the Queen up and asked the students, "If you met the Queen, what would you say?" After a short silence one nine year old Indigenous boy called out, "sorry?" What prompted him to say this? Maybe he had heard discussions of the reconciliation process and the relationships between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. My later thoughts about this were that entrenched powerlessness felt by Indigenous people, and, internalised racism and oppression that is reinforced by the non-Indigenous community, constantly sends messages to Indigenous people who accept that this is the way of interacting with those in power. When I related this story to some of my colleagues most talked about the inappropriateness of using an image of the Queen. We did not talk about the notion of power and privilege.
My present school has a school population of 200 students. Of these 86 identify as Indigenous. The surrounding land in this rainforest community is traditionally owned by the Djapugay people. At school I had heard about an Aboriginal massacre from one of my colleagues. This massacre occurred in a nearby community on land owned by the Djapugay people. The settlers there were farmers. We don’t talk about this massacre much and I know very little about it. One day a week I work in a team that operates family workshops and a playgroup in the surrounding communities of my current school. I work alongside a Djapugay woman running a program to try and create family learning teams as children enter pre-school, or as she puts it "give the kids a good start for school". (Brim, personal communication 2005) As we drove out to the old mission she told me how her mother grew up there. She was separated from her parents and was punished if she talked to them. She got up every morning when the bell rang at 5:00 am. and milked the cows. Then there was church and school, then more chores after school. She talked about her grandfather and how he had been shot in the massacre that I have just mentioned. I know about the brutality of massacres but they have been distant accounts in historical documents. This is more recent local history that affects the people of this land and their children and children’s children. These are the students in my class. There are many similar stories that have been erased or conveniently ignored by the wider community and schools. Also in my local community is the story of the white settlement of Atherton, a small town not far from my present school.

In attempting to settle what is now known as the Atherton Tablelands, Mr. Atherton tried to lure many people into helping him find the area as the tracks were not clearly distinguishable in this terrain that was unfamiliar to him. He found some willing local Aboriginal people promising them a couple of cattle for their trouble. These men showed him the way and upon finishing their task were told they would not be paid. The men were angry and organised to take what had been promised them. Upon doing so Atherton retaliated with police, guns and another massacre. It has been reported that there were only two survivors of this massacre; a grandmother and
her grandchild. What concerns me is that the history of Atherton is taught in local schools in the area. (Not the school in which I currently teach) The history is not the voice of the Indigenous people but that of the white settlers. My point is that we continually acknowledge only one history. We ignore the fact that the community in which we live and work is built on invasions and dispossession. We silence voices and render other knowledges invisible. By failing to see the origins of power people are unable to see the impact that it has had and continues to have on marginalised groups. The cycle of privilege and disadvantage is perpetuated.

When I watch the small Indigenous boys from my class dance for the tourists on a Sunday afternoon, I think about them in the Western school system. The school literacy skills of these boys are significantly below Benchmark, but they have a deep understanding of the stories behind their dances, and their relationships to the stories. Mathew, (Esther's brother) struggled with school literacy and numeracy. He was a member of the school cultural dance club learning both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dances. He once said to me "You know these dances tell a story." He told these stories to any interested listeners. Watson (1989) in ‘Singing the Land, Signing the Land’ says of early Europeans watching Aboriginal dancers in ceremony, "To Aboriginal people then (and now) it seems that though European people watch and listen, they cannot see or hear." (1989 p.11) As non-Indigenous people, we watch the dancers, listening to the rhythmic beat of the clapsticks and the hum of the didgeridoo. The boys I have just mentioned converse with each other, they engage in self and peer analysis, they observe, they look at videos and pictures of other dancers, they engage with their audience who are generally from Asian and Western cultures, they count and negotiate the spending of their earnings (from busking) and they recount and retell all the events surrounding their experiences on Monday morning at school. Schools are required to build on these existing knowledges and skills and provide all students with the tools they will need in the future.
We need to attend early to the school literacy needs of Indigenous students. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) found that 1st grade reading status predicts 3rd, 5th and 11th grade reading. It is apparent, according to Dickinson and Sprague (2002) that pre-school years are crucial to children’s long term literacy success. Washington (2001), previously mentioned, discussed in detail the mismatches between home and school literacy practices of young African-American children and the impact of poverty. The economic and social disadvantage of Indigenous Australians has been well documented by Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2004), (See also Australian Bureau of Statistics and The National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics.) Despite these hardships, Jeanie and Esther manage to provide literacy activities that support their families’ literacy needs. McNaughton (1995) illustrates how the literacy practices of Maori, Samoan and European families, all of whom were non-professional income earners, are situated in everyday life. Families have varied resources at their disposal but many are effective in supporting their children’s learning. This is evident in Jeanie’s family as we see the reading outcomes Jasmine has achieved.

The discussion in this section has centered on socio-political notions of power and privilege and how both historical and contemporary events influence the literacy outcomes of Indigenous students today. The question then arises, how do we incorporate these understandings into our teaching? One crucial way is to acknowledge and value the diversity that exists in our student populations. The next section considers this.

Acknowledging and valuing diversity

The non-Indigenous teachers at Westville School do very little to acknowledge the cultural diversity of their students. The school implements a culture program that is run by a Torres Strait Islander teacher but many of the non-Indigenous teachers do not value this program. Freire (1993) suggests the starting point for organising the program content for valuing diversity must be the present, existential, concrete situation that reflects the aspirations of
the people. It is not our role as teachers to speak to people about our view of the world or impose that view on them. Rather we should dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We also need to make sure that the school language we speak is accessible to the people we are talking to. Too often our talk becomes alienating word painting. Freire asserts that program content must be found in the reality. This he terms the people’s ‘thematic universe’ - the complex of their ‘generative themes’ - (p. 77) Dialogical education uncovers these generative themes through investigation of the people’s reality and their world view. Freire’s assertions reiterate the importance of authentic home-school partnerships. Added to this must be appropriate resources and pedagogical practices.

Whilst teachers attempt to implement the Walking Talking Texts program in their literacy teaching, the resources they choose are often not representative of their students. They do not contain Indigenous characters, and if they do the character’s way of living and talking does not often reflect the child’s culture. They are a kind of ‘every child.’ (Dyson 1993) Books used are generally not authored by Indigenous writers and often their content is difficult for students to relate to. This is not to say that Indigenous students should not be presented with materials or content that is unfamiliar to them. It does mean that students’ experiences and backgrounds should be a starting point for teachers. McLaren (1999) suggests schools and teachers often act as cultural ‘gatekeepers’, and exert a powerful collective influence that shapes much of societies contemporary life. The New Basics program in some Queensland schools dictates teaching content and appears to be caught up in the push for ‘excellence’ sparked by national debates over the decline in academic standards.

Criticisms of the New Basics program prompted two teachers to comment that the Rich Tasks program is so intensive that it leaves little time for explicit teaching. "The teaching of basic skills is almost non-existent". Students and teachers are pre-occupied with completing these tasks and hence the product becomes the focus of the learning experience. In a Queensland Education Website titled “Teachers Talking about New Basics” Karen Harris from Thursday
Island State School in the Torres Strait comments "Teachers didn’t feel they had enough time to spend on the "old basics" that students still needed." (Harris, 2004) Both the above programs are significant features of the teaching and learning programs at Westville but are clearly not meeting the needs of the students. The principal of the school disseminated some statistics to the staff that were provided in May 2005 by the Senior Information Officer for Performance and monitoring. Percentages of students below benchmark have been calculated and reveal the following results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading % below benchmark</th>
<th>Writing % below benchmark</th>
<th>Numeracy % below benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.1 Westville School's Benchmark results

On many occasions the Westville Indigenous teachers commented, "You don’t know our students." This sentiment resonates with Hanlen (2002c) and Penetito (2001). This notion is pivotal if we are to improve the literacy outcomes of Indigenous students. But how can we know our students better? One of the Indigenous teachers interviewed for this study implored non-indigenous teachers to get out in the community and really see the students, their families and where they come from. My own personal experience stresses also the importance of being in the community. In my current position, I work for two days a week (with the remaining three on class) in the home communities of my students. When I am able to report back that I met mum, or grandma or an uncle, they are delighted. They implore me to meet as many family members as I can, and are visibly disappointed when I return to the class and have not met someone from their household. At Westville, I never took the time to do this. I believe my teaching suffered as a result. I knew very little about the out of school lives of my students and I would suggest that they felt I cared very little about this aspect of their lives. In my defence, and that of my
colleagues, at the end of a school day all I really want to do is return to my own home and wind down. As I mentioned above, my current school allows me this meeting time during school hours. The principal pays relief teachers to take the classes of my colleagues who wish to accompany me and an Indigenous co-worker out into the community. Feelings of these experiences have been overwhelmingly positive. But it is not only the present we need to understand about our students. We also need to understand their histories. Hanlen (2002a) also asks teachers of Aboriginal students to be sensitive to the historical and social issues of children. This provides an avenue for connecting with our students.

Ladson-Billings (1994) analyses the practice of exemplary teachers of African-American students, "They [exemplary teachers] see themselves as part of the community. They also help students make connections between their local, national, racial, cultural and global identities... their relationships with students are fluid and equitable and extend beyond the classroom. They demonstrate a connectedness between students." (Ladson-Billings 1994 p. 25) Freire (1993) discusses the teacher-student relationship. He parallels this with the revolutionary leader as a teacher and the students being the oppressed. He considers the nature of teaching and the notion of 'banking' where the teacher 'fills' the students with contents, which are detached from reality and disconnected from any context. This is Freire's notion of the 'banking' concept of education. Literacy teaching is about scaffolding learning for and with students as the Walking Talking Text model promotes not filling them with unrelated content. In addition to this, Malin, (1991) Trouw (1999) and Hanlen (2000c) note the importance of certain personal teacher characteristics that can enhance Indigenous children's learning. These human qualities include kindness, patience, fairness and a sense of humour. The children I interviewed echoed these sentiments. They felt they learnt better when teachers were kind and understood their learning needs. They took time to explain things and shared jokes with their students. The students felt that they cared about them as individuals and that this caring attitude extended beyond classroom boundaries. Students are keenly aware of teachers who "give a shit" and those who don't. McCrindle (2004) talks about connectedness in his discussion on generation
'Y'. He asserts that students want to feel a humanness in their teachers, a caring, and understanding of them as individuals first.

Like many of the Indigenous teachers at Westville school, Penetito (2001) reports that teachers neither value or acknowledge the diversity of Maori students and should incorporate local knowledge into their teaching practice. In Australian schools we are bound by state and territory curriculum. This does not mean that we cannot incorporate local knowledge or culturally inclusive resources and pedagogies. However, some teachers simply do not feel confident or skilled enough to do this. The teachers at Westville reported that the New Basics Program was prescriptive and completing the suites of Rich Tasks left very little time for anything else. Incorporating Indigenous pedagogies and resources into our programs permeate all that we do.

Cultural accommodations to behaviour and interactional styles are important to students' academic engagement and participation. Non-Indigenous teachers reported that they employed small group organisation for literacy activities but felt these were only minimally successful because of the lack of teacher support for each group. Au and Jordan (1982) observed Hawaiian children in classroom interactions. They found that when a teacher engaged children in small-group discussions that were similar to the interactions these children experienced at home, they were more engaged and participated at a higher cognitive level. Hall (2003) also makes this observation. Children participated less and their contributions to the discussion were at a lower academic level when the teacher used a more controlled turn-taking style of discussion. Children were more comfortable with the free-flowing discussion style which, in turn, can support the development of oral language skills, a necessary requisite for school literacy development.

Teacher input is critical to the 'engagement' that Hall (2003) and Au and Jordan (1982) speak of. The Indigenous teachers reported they preferred to organise their students to work in small groups suggesting that this "suited the kids better". They were able to monitor the groups without teacher support by identifying a 'leader' to assume this role. Some Indigenous
teachers felt this was a successful strategy and it aligns with Falk’s (2005) notions of socially constructed and progressively negotiated learning that occurs when learners work together to find the 'right' answer. Participants bring their knowledge and identity resources to the situation and learning occurs in this social context.

Parents of children from different cultural groups socialize their children differently, have different behavioural expectations and interactional styles. These differences have the potential to impact negatively on children’s schooling experiences which in turn alienates them. (Penetito 2001) Penetito referred to the fact that significant numbers of Maori children are not enrolled in kindergarten or pre-school programs. The MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education compiled a discussion paper on Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous children 0 to 8 years (2001). This paper raises serious concerns about the low levels of Indigenous participation in pre-school facilities in terms of access and provision. The paper cites a survey completed in South Australia by DETE in 1998 which explored the reason why Indigenous parents sent their children to preschool and why they did not. Some Aboriginal parents felt that the restrictions that might be imposed in early childhood education services could well come later. 'Kids want to play not work"; "too many rules, too much structure". (MCEETYA 2001 p. 19) Hanlen (2000c) notes that participants believed that this period within the home setting is important in their child’s learning. These diverse practices should not be viewed in a negative light but our teaching and learning programs approached with flexibility.

In acknowledging diversity Solskin, Willett and Wilson-Keenan (2000) call for teachers to be sensitive to the notion of hybridity or syncretism. (Gregory and Williams 2003) Children create texts that work for them. They combine a rich use of cultural and school practices to form these new texts. I have already provided examples that illustrate hybridity in the students I teach and within the observations that I made in collecting data. A more detailed discussion on hybrid practices follows in Chapter Nine. Through reading about hybridity I have been able to
identify and value these practices within my own students' work. According to Adler (1979) a function of cultural development is "the acquisition of a set or sets of patterns of conduct which allows members of that culture to deal effectively with recurring problems." (1979, p.3) This means adaptation to the world that surrounds them. As a result, Adler continues, "different behavioural patterns must emerge as different subcultural groups develop the means to adapt their unique realities." (1979, p.3) Adler concludes that these patterns should then be analysed in terms of how successful the people are in providing the means to cope with problems. The hybrid practices are means of coping with Western schooling and Western literacy practices. this notion is crucial to understanding and valuing diversity.

This section has looked at acknowledging diversity through being sensitive to and understanding differences. In this way teachers validate all students cultural resources. By seeking to understand diversity, dialogic communities of practice can discover common links and enhance literacy development.

**Inclusive Pedagogies**

The heading for this section makes use of the term 'inclusive.' I am looking at the notion of inclusivity in the light of Freire and his discussions on dialogical action which create inclusion for diverse communities in areas where majority voices have dominated. I am also using this term as a way students from diverse cultures can access Western style schooling and how we can incorporate and address culturally determined learning styles. This section also considers inclusivity with regard to curriculum content noting the importance of teachers supporting students with resources and strategies that strengthen school learning and improve educational outcomes.
In Chapter Three I discussed Freire (1993) and his notions of a 'Pedagogy for the Oppressed'. In that discussion I noted that I have worked with many Indigenous educators who consider this to be an important text. Crucial to understandings of power and oppression Freire emphasises a pedagogy which he claims must be forged with, not for, the oppressed. The Indigenous teachers I interviewed engage in discussions that suggest partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders are critical. They value the parents input and see them as a vital component of education. The non-Indigenous teachers did not seem to view parental involvement as a necessary ritual, rather than a valued teaching source. In addition to this they do not see Indigenous students as having been deprived of their voice or unjustly dealt with which Freire believes to be a crucial ingredient for transformative practice. One teacher commented "I bend over backwards for these students but get nowhere." Teachers see their role as making decisions about all aspects of classroom activity and imposing these on students. Freire translates this as manipulation, depositing, regimentation and prescription. He analyses the theories of cultural action which develop from antidialogical and dialogical practices.

Antidialogical action means the dominant elite maintain power over diverse communities. In this case the Western education system whose actions can be seen as exclusionary. The fundamental characteristic of antidialogical action is cultural invasion whereby the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, impose their own view of the world and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression. Teachers' actions or in-actions sometimes display alignment with this notion. Freire offers us an opportunity to create dialogue and inclusion by meeting in cooperation through shared effort. Throughout my interviews it became clear that in many cases non-Indigenous teachers do not create spaces for dialogue. "I don't bother asking parents in any more. They never come." Cultural synthesis happens when individuals and communities of people are able to negotiate both worlds, select the best from these worlds and integrate these values into a personal identity system. (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2002) According to Freire, when cultural synthesis occurs, the culture of the dominant is confronted.
It is in confronting the culture of the dominant that we can support students in accessing Western style schooling. In this way we can also address culturally determined learning styles. Challenging the dominant educational discourses in which certain attitudes and values are unconsciously accepted as normal and even desired is a starting point. Students and their families should play a significant role in making decisions about what is taught and learnt and how. In my interviews some Indigenous teachers commented on the role of mentoring for students and the fact that they believed this was a supportive strategy for learning. This also relates to Lave and Wenger's (1991) apprenticeship learning and extends to Wenger's (2005) community of learners. A collaborative approach to learning whereby students believe their knowledge and skills are valued and at the same time have opportunities to further develop these skills is essential.

Some clear patterns of difference emerged between the non-Indigenous teachers' responses and those of Indigenous teachers'. One of these differences is important in a discussion on learning success. The Indigenous teachers clearly believed that their students could, would and were succeeding. On the other hand non-Indigenous teachers lamented the low literacy levels of their students. A number of researchers have noted the importance of teacher expectations and student success. (See Malin 1991, Ladson-Billings 1994 Hall 2003) This observation illustrates a philosophy of teaching and learning that acknowledges the importance of validating home practices and expecting that all children can achieve school success. It also points to teacher/student relationships whereby teachers are responsive to students from diverse populations. High performance expectations embody advocacy and empowerment of students (Gay 2000) both of which are contingent upon understanding and acting on the cultural influences of students. Cultural influences affect what is learnt in the home environment which is mediated by culturally specific learning styles.
The following discussion considers issues of content (what is learnt in the homes) in the light of parallels to school content and the specific learning styles that are visible. Most of this discussion centres on the differences in text types that children have in their homes and those of school. A Bible was almost without exception, present in the homes of the students I interviewed.

I noted earlier that very little reading like that practiced in school-orientated homes occurred in the homes of the participants or the students interviewed. Washington (2001) observed African-American mothers reading environmental print in the homes. I also observed this in Jeanie’s and Esther’s families. Washington suggests that whilst this is valid it is quite different in structure to the reading materials that children encounter when they come to school. Jeanie and Esther both read from the Bible, Jeanie on a regular basis. Most of the students I interviewed reported that their parents or they themselves read from the Bible. Stories and bible readings tend to be in oral mode and at times use complicated grammatical structures, concepts and vocabulary. Kale (1995) notes that Bible stories don’t give the same kind of experience for children to go about writing their own fiction narrative.

The reading of Bible texts in the participants households did not occur in the same way teachers in early childhood classes read to their students. The patterns of discourse which organise this reading process are different. The Biblical stories are teaching stories that are read verbatim and powerful ideologies underpin them. The reading of long sections of texts was an observation made by Williams (1990 cited by Cairney 2003) of mothers from low income families. Jeanie read to her children in this way. Many teachers read texts to children for enjoyment and to teach knowledge and concepts about print. They break frequently during reading to check for understanding. The differences between these two patterns could be a source of difficulty for Indigenous students when they begin school. Also, at the earliest stages of learning to read, the pictures in the book often govern the child’s responses. (Hill et.al. 1998) Adult Bibles usually do not have pictures in them to provide cues for the children or
for points of discussion. Labelling and talking about the action that is occurring in the picture are what early childhood teachers often talk about when they read picture books. Nikolajeva (2003) suggests that picture books embrace such pictorial elements as shape, line, edge, colour, proportion, detail, and space. Visual literacy is a relatively new area of pedagogy. If we take into account the differing world views that Indigenous children bring to class it is not unrealistic to suggest that their interpretations of these visual images may be entirely different to what we look at as teachers. In assessing children’s understanding of illustrated texts it is crucial to realise that not only words, but pictures may carry different meanings.

There is an art in listening to a Bible story and indeed understanding it. Apart from the difficulties of word meanings, grammar and of the often unfamiliar historical and cultural contexts, there are subtle clues within the stories and in order to grasp their meanings it is necessary often to read between the lines. As McWilliams (2005) notes, the Bible is sparse in giving descriptions but offers other important clues throughout the stories. In child-orientated literature much attention is paid to character development. Characters are often endowed with rich descriptions which help children situate this figure in place, time and social setting. Descriptions of appearance are rare in the Bible. Social status is important but often an assumed reader knowledge of this is demanded. In many Bible stories, dialogue is used to reveal character traits. Scenes are important in narrative structure. Scene change "is often signaled by a significant shift in Time, such as a gap ("and it came to pass"), a shift to a previous time ("meanwhile"), or a flashback ("Now it happened that...")); or in the pacing of the story: when the "action" speeds up or slows down; or the "focus" of the writer draws in closer on the details, or out to the broader perspective; or there is a shift of place (or of a persons environment - such as shifts from day and night) or a change of character is made." (McWilliams 2005 p. 2)

There are significant requisites to understanding many Bible stories and are not the way that classroom teachers emphasise the structure of narrative. The 'big picture' is crucial to the Bible. It would not be read in one sitting or in chronological order. In the classroom, when we
teach the genre of narrative we generally discuss notions of story sequence, that is the beginning orientation when characters, time and setting are presented, followed by events that may lead to a problem and finally a solution to the problem and conclusion. This above discussion points yet again to the fact that understanding of school literacy concepts may be a source of difficulty for some students. Students need their teachers to make connections between the ways different cultures engage in literacy activities. The notion of inclusivity includes making explicit the differences between the two world views.

Writerly devices are handled in child-orientated stories in ways that children can easily grasp. In turn, as teachers we deconstruct these devices in the classroom in order that children can access the story and in time produce a similar story of their own. It is important to note here that Jasmine is achieving age appropriate reading levels in her class. She attends a Christian college which displays Biblical texts, prayers and written messages of faith and hope. These are evident in Jeanie’s home. Jasmine is familiar with these texts as she attends many out of school Bible study meetings with her family, she is read the Bible at home and surrounded by prayers and scripture readings in the home. I am suggesting that her familiarity with these texts and the Bible genre are facilitating her school learning. Most state schools do not display Biblical texts, class teachers do not read from the Bible, have prayer meetings and discussions or even talk about God.

The children I interviewed had access to Bibles in their homes, went to church services and meetings and their parents talked about their faith. They do not engage in these texts at school. Fox (2003) notes that "sociologists and ethnographers have demonstrated that narratives are deeply culturally embedded, suggesting that universal structures for stories are subject to local variation in different social groups." (2003 p. 189. See also Corson 2001) Hanlen (2002c) has noted that Indigenous songs and song cycles, many of which are still practiced by the children I teach, do not have narrative structures like those in many of the texts we use in school making it difficult to draw similarities between them and European folk ballads.
McWilliams (2005) identifies some literary devices that are used in Biblical narratives. He notes that imagery is often significant. The sights, sounds, smells, touchings and flavours contribute to the context. The interactional patterns, discourses and practices that surround home and community texts differ to those we use at school. Differences have also been observed between Indigenous notions of numeracy and Western understandings. School literacy and numeracy activities are inextricably linked. I have observed that the literate behaviours that surround numeracy concepts can also be a source of difficulty for Indigenous students. The following brief discussion reveals some of these differences as areas of potential confusion for Indigenous students when they enter school.

Watson (1989) notes that Western children learn to count first as parents talk to them about numbers and sing rhymes. For example, ‘1 little 2 little 3 little Indians, 4 little, 5 little, 6 little Indians…’ There are so many of these rhymes and songs that most Western children grow up with. Next, according to Watson, Western children learn to measure and give numeric value to parts of things. The notion of 'size' is thus attributed qualities such as length, width, area and volume. These can be counted and compared. The language and accompanying conceptual tools we have developed for talking about these phenomenon are critical when a child comes to school. Our curriculum dictates that we teach superlatives. Teachers must explain what these qualities mean. During one of my visits to Esther’s house Rhys and Mathew were playing with my video camera. We took the small tape out and Esther tried to explain that it was in fact a video tape not unlike those the boys frequently watch. She proceeded to give a 'lesson' on size asking questions about the qualities of the two tapes in relation to their comparative size. Both Rhys and Mathew appeared to find it difficult to understand what Esther was trying to teach them and the language she was trying to elicit from them. The descriptive language of the qualities remained elusive and mysterious and Esther resorted to teaching them by rote. "This one is wider than that one."
Counting and discussions about measurement follow naturally from talking in our Western world. In an Indigenous world this is often not the case. Watson (1989) provides a variety of examples that may cause confusion for Indigenous students in Western school systems. Once again they are connected to frameworks of knowledge and reveal to me as a teacher, how the integration of numbers, counting and measuring may be a source of difficulty to Indigenous students. These concepts and associated language require explicit teaching. On one visit to Esther’s house Rhys was playing with a fifty dollar note. Esther allowed him to play with it while we were chatting but then wanted him to hand it over to her. He refused. Esther said "Come on…that big one. Too big for you”. The value of he money was described as 'big'. At school when we teach about money, we talk about 'which one is worth the most, the least etc. As I have already mentioned, Jasmine is achieving age appropriate reading levels. I suggested that this was in part due to a familiarity with the texts that feature prominently in the home and at school. Jasmine says she hates maths and Jeanie reports that her teacher says she is experiencing difficulty. Throughout my observations of Jeanie and her family, discussions surrounding Western numeracy concepts were not evident. The purchasing of a computer may change this with many popular games involving concepts such as space and number.

All students in this study have access to computers at school, some at home and in the community also. Hanlen (2000c) reports a similar finding. Most of the students I interviewed used them to play games such as Smackdown, Hulk - Ultimate Destruction and Halo, to name a few. Marsh and Thompson (2001) suggest that computer games may orientate children toward printed texts. There is no doubt that schools are writing the use of ICT technology into their policies, however, the actual incorporation of them into teaching programs is still very much left up to the individual teacher. We cannot ignore the implications of the use of technology for literacy practices. Technology has influenced, shaped and transformed out literacy practices. Snyder (2003) asserts that with this new technology and multimedia systems such as the Web, a new "symbolic environment is created." (2003 p. 266) Just as Indigenous cultures traditionally used visual patterns and images to communicate meaning, the use of these multimodal forms of
technology are being used in similar ways. It may be appropriate to suggest that the use of these technologies have been used by Indigenous children to transform a traditional style of communication such as ceremonial dance, where words, images and sound interact to produce meaning, to multimodal communication.

From my experience I have observed that Indigenous children from a very early age are taught to interpret signs and symbols in the natural world. I believe this is a critical aspect of literacy. For teachers it means supporting students in their understanding of semiotic meaning so they can read their culture back to themselves and recognise other cultural meanings. How we do this is a question that little has been written about. Most recently I have had success with engaging Indigenous students through use of multimedia technology. The school I am currently working in has some 'state of the art' technological resources thanks to a very enlightened ICT teacher/librarian. Using these, coupled with focussed teaching on notions of symbolism and pattern that permeates all areas of the curriculum is, I hope, working towards notions of bringing semiotic readings into the classroom. An understanding of semiotics and learning to search for patterns in the environment is an important aspect of many Indigenous children's socialisation. It should be basic to our school curriculum as a process that frames children's previous experiences. In Chapter Five I reported a comment made by an Indigenous teacher who talked about the importance of Indigenous students being taught phonics. She said that children need to see the patterns of language and further that "They know about patterns. We should do more of this in school to bring what they know from outside school....the way they see things." I mentioned earlier in this chapter that kinship classifications in Indigenous societies emphasise the re-occurring patterns and cycles which allow an organising and explanatory framework for understanding all things. This helped to give students a sense of security and also makes a connection between how these students are taught to view the world and school learning. This unifying characteristic of the curriculum could be used as a source of connection between home and school literacy practices. Other connections could be the use of popular media which I have observed is prevalent in the homes of many Indigenous students I teach.
Marsh and Thompson (2001) suggest that popular media is important in home literacy practices and as such should be incorporated into school teaching and learning programs. Marsh (2003) cites a study by Dyson (1997) who showed that popular culture provided important material for children's writing and social relationships within the classroom. It also bridged the literacy practices of the children's home life with those of school. A form of hybrid texts was observed by Dyson who saw children interweave superhero stories with teacher introduced Greek myths. I provided examples of this from my own students writing with the Bratz doll phenomenon.

All the students interviewed and the families observed use popular media making it clear that popular cultural texts are integral to the literacy environments of many homes. Makin et al. (1999) found that many homes embedded literacy practices within technology and popular culture but this is not reflected in the programs of many early childhood settings. In Makin’s study 71% of parents said technology and popular culture were important in their child’s literacy development whilst only 13% of staff acknowledged that these practices were significant to the children’s home life even expressing concerns about such literacy events. Motivation is important to any learning and literacy learning is no exception. Popular culture within class programs has the potential to involve some children in class literacy activities that may have otherwise been excluded. Some teachers cringe at the thought of television as a valid form of literacy in the home yet this is part of many children’s daily environment. Robinson and Mackey (2003) note that much research into children and television assumes a deficit model. In this model television interferes with other more ‘valuable’ activities. Robinson and Mackey employ the use of Tyner’s term ‘asset model’ which assumes that mass media and popular culture content can be an asset to children’s literacy development in that it enriches the repertoires which children bring to bear on their encounters with print. From my own experience it provides a shared understanding and a point of commonality between myself and the children I teach. “Did you watch ______ on TV last night? is a common question we ask each other. A discussion follows.
This discussion leads to the importance of flexibility and diversity in our teaching and learning programs. Buckskin (2000) noted that successful Northern Territory programs for Indigenous students needed to provide choice and diversity in their infrastructure, curriculum teaching and learning practices and assessment and reporting strategies. These features help support a program that is inclusive of all students. Dyson (1993) considers a permeable curriculum whereby students bring both home and school resources to literacy learning. Teachers need to approach knowledge and skills as non-static, non-fixed entities building bridges from the students prior knowledge to new skills and knowledge. It also points to the importance of understanding hybrid practices. Such practices are omnipresent when minority students negotiate Western schooling. Creating spaces for such practices is one of our most critical roles as teachers. Rich learning environments need to be created that align with the textual practices of Indigenous students.

Understanding Indigenous youth

Foucault makes a point that while we think we know what a child or an adolescent is, in fact these categories are always in the process of being transformed. (It is clear from my own teaching and through student interviews that the youth of today are bombarded and targeted unscrupulously by multinational companies as markets in advertising texts. The 'irrepressible drive of capitalism' (Danaher, Schirato and Webb. 2000) has meant that youth culture has become saturated with images of desirable ways to be. This creates uncertainty and dislocation for young people (McCrindle 2004). These features of our modern world make it difficult for us to understand young people today. This sounds banal, but a very real example lies in the information, communication and technology field which has saturated this present population of young people. The access and range of pocket technologies alone is astounding. The
sophistication and complexities of which many of us could never have imagined. Students have changed, but are we changing with them?

The students I teach and have taught in the past as well as those interviewed clearly see themselves as consumers. Advertising and the mass media provide narrow stereotypes that limit views of certain groups in our culture and ensure that myths about groups and their identity by gender, race, or association with the products of consumer culture, are perpetuated. I have observed many female students dance, dress, sing songs, wear clothes and make up, generally associated with the Black American music industry. The boys wear all the gear associated with Black American gangster rap or the sporting industry. Their clothes, hats, footballs, basketball and wallets, make reference to these cultures. They are conditioned by these external images to be part of a collective in the same way their Indigenous roots ensure they are part of the culture of the Indigenous community. The sheer magnitude of mass media images and technology has clearly influenced these young students. Mass media plays a huge role in their lives. The focus of mass media is not only on words but on the visual, symbolic and experiential. Mass media advertises products relying on colour and symbols with minimal text. But theories on oppositional culture with undertones of resistance may account, in part, for the consumption of these goods.

Cowlishaw (1993) Dawes (1998) and Kale (1995) have identified oppositional cultures based on white norms still enshrined in our school culture today which fail to recognise and value Indigenous cultural knowledge, beliefs and understandings. Hargreaves (1994:51) cites the example of an Aboriginal run school in Manitoba, Canada. Teaching and curriculum at the Children of the Earth school are organised around the Native Indian “Medicine Way”. Truthfulness, guilelessness, courage, compassion, humility and anger at injustice are promoted as important goals for teachers and the school to address. This genuine Aboriginalisation of a school is yet to be truly felt in Australian Indigenous contexts although efforts have and continue to be made. Students’ identity is very much entwined with the notions of oppositional
culture. The MYCEETYA discussion paper (2001) suggests involuntary minority groups maintain cultural differences, with undertones of resistance, as an expression of identity. The Indigenous students I teach spend as much time as they can drawing the Aboriginal flag. Every time they have the opportunity to colour anything they use red, yellow and black. They draw flags on their work and in their books, they wear the colours, and point out any environmental print that even marginally resembles these colours. They chant "red, yellow, black" as a kind of mantra. The flag and these colours are clearly very important to them symbolising their common heritage.

Consumer culture, technoculture, markets, the previously mentioned information 'superhighway', computer networks, global communications all interact to drive economic, social and cultural change today. Our students are caught up in this change. Knobel and Lankshear (2004) note that young people’s out-of-school practices are increasingly mediated by wearable communication and information technologies. Many of the students I have been involved with including those I interviewed have limited school literacy skills but are adept at computer and other technological operations. Increasingly I have felt a growing gap between my own experiences and those of my students with regard to microelectronic technologies. In Esther’s household, the X Box and computer games were important features of home literacy practices. I would like to point out to readers here that this interest or even fanaticism is not specific to Indigenous youth. The concern I have relates to how video games are used and what benefits they can bestow on their users in terms of literacy development. The fact that vast amounts of energy are invested into these technologies makes it important for schools and teachers to understand how they can be integrated into the classroom. Loftus and Loftus (1983) assert that video games are fundamentally different from any other games that children have played in the past because of the computer technology that underlies them. Playing a video game requires intricately tuned skills. According to Loftus and Loftus (1983) video games combine two ingredients. They are intrinsic motivation and computer-based interaction. There are three conceptual ingredients: 1)
sound and fury – flashing lights and loud noises. 2) death and destruction – points awarded for destruction and 3) computer control – everything is electronic.

Loftus and Loftus suggest children become so obsessed with playing computer games because of the immediate reinforcement they receive. From my observations it was clear that Mathew and Rhys were obsessed with their X Box. When they came in from school, they would throw their bags on the ground and fight their way to the room where their X Box lay in wait. They would play and fight until dinner time then return again after dinner. My students clamber to get to the computer in class begging to stay in at lunchtimes and play. We know that any behaviour that is followed by reinforcement will increase the frequency of the behaviour. Loftus and Loftus (1983) pointed their readers to the rat in the Skinner box asking if this was the same as the child in front of the computer? The rat gets food rewards and the child gets higher scores. In addition, computer games utilise partial reinforcement. Loftus and Loftus suggest this is a powerful way of hooking kids in. They keep playing hoping another reinforcement is just around the corner. In addition to this, as a player, feedback is given all the time. As we watch a movie or read a book, we are only passive observers in the fantasy. In a game we are active in that fantasy. Three main ingredients that are ideal vehicles for learning are challenge, fantasy and curiosity. Computer games generally possess all these ingredients. In addition to this they allow the player to be in the position of power. This is often not the case for Indigenous students in their school lives.

McCrindle suggests this generation is post-partitioned, by which he means, non-linear approaches to life and living. In the past people completed their education, went out and got a job which many stayed with until they retired. McCrindle asserts this generation is disconnected with their differing backgrounds and subsequent needs. He further suggests they carry a great deal of baggage and many feel hurt and let down by systems which they see as victimising them and portraying them as problematic. According to Freire,(1993) people who are oppressed often internalise the opinion their oppressors have of them. They become convinced
that they are unproductive and incapable of learning anything. A teacher I work with recently
told me that she was dividing her class into groups for a language activity. One Indigenous
student called out, "You're only picking the white kids." (Bullen personal communication)
Negative interactions in the playground are sometimes reported by teachers as being
accompanied by similar sentiments. Such comments suggest that Indigenous students do feel
victimised in school. As Penetito (2001) suggests Maori students have become alienated in a
system that does not value or acknowledge diversity. Hanlen (2002c) notes that Indigenous
parents believe it is much more difficult for their children to get jobs in the current social and
economic climate. Noel Pearson has identified the cycle of dysfunction that he has observed in
many Queensland Northern Cape Indigenous communities. (Keynote speech Cairns TAFE college
September 2004) It is very difficult for young people to break out of a cycle of social and
economic hardship that is so familiar to them. Their only channels for a voice are that of
resistance.

Resistance may be played out overtly or covertly. There are many staffroom stories of the
overt oppositional behaviours such as very dramatic confrontational acts towards teachers and
other students, especially clenching fists, or the vandalising of property. But there are also the
covert acts such as obstructing lessons with passive resistance to a task or request, casual but
disruptive performances of slapstick comedy and incessant but subliminal chatter with peers.
All are prevalent in the classrooms of the teachers that I interviewed and indeed my own.
Whilst it was not my intention to talk about these issues, some teachers made reference to the
behaviour of students in their interviews. McLaren (1999) distinguishes between organised
resistance which he aligns with students of the 'ruling class', and resistances among the
disenfranchised who are "resisting the distinction between the 'lived' informal culture of the
streets and the formal, dominant culture of the classroom." (McLaren 1999 p.147) McLaren
continues his discussion saying that whatever identity was stripped from these students during
class time "was returned through the torn seams, fissures and eruptions of the resistant and
liminal self." (McLaren 1999 p. 147) I could go on with an endless list of behaviours I have both
observed and experienced that may indicate student resistance. What is important here is the motives for such behaviour. One motive is the sense of identity that the perpetrators maintain with each other. This combines with clothing, language use, music that is listened to, hand gestures and signs that are displayed, fighting in class, to name a few. I have already said that schools are sites of cultural hegemony. McLaren suggests that breaching the rules is a logical response to oppressive conditions.

Dawes (1998) draws on an unpublished paper by Keeffe (1986) who employs the terms Aboriginality-as-persistence and Aboriginality-as-resistance to discuss the location of Aboriginal identity. Keeffe viewed Aboriginality-as-resistance as being less susceptible to incorporation by the dominant culture where participants "engaged in the conscious production of new cultural forms and drawing creatively from the resources of the dominant society and from Aboriginal traditions..." (Dawes 1989 p. 19) A form of hybridity if you like. Whilst this resistance may challenge white power structures within schools there are material, ideological and cultural constraints imposed by the dominant society. (Dawes 1989) Schools and teachers need to examine these dimensions of Indigenous youth identity by actively disrupting their own teacher practice to enable all students access to improved educational outcomes which can translate to improved prospects and increased opportunity.

Conclusions.

Throughout this chapter we see that school and existing home literacy practices can be incompatible leading to 'cultural discontinuity'. (Cairney and Ruge 1997) However through the stories of the families involved in this study we observe the situatedness of learning and how people draw on diverse resources and multiliterate practices that evolve into forms of hybridity. Learning is shaped by our environment. The children in the study learnt skills and knowledge from different members of their families. Literate practices are constructed within a social environment and as such literacy has been endowed with a social meaning that gives it a
standing in the community. Viewing literacy as a social construct considers other important aspects within the family such as socio-economic status, values, beliefs and knowledge and cultural differences. Multiple forms of literacy must be taken into account when teaching children and at the same time literacy learning must involve participation in meaningful activities. Children begin school with multiple literacy experiences that emerge from their home and community environments. It is clear that Lave's (1997) apprenticeship model of learning enculturates the learner in the accepted knowledge and practices of each community from which they are part. The connections between what is learnt in the home and community, and everyday experience is strong.

Within the family environment we saw that education was about being independent and equal. It was also about children being able to shape their own learning style and at the same time knowing respect and place and engaging in personal relationships within the family and community both of which are of critical importance. The links are clear between culture and learning styles. Indigenous literacies as observed in the homes of participants are integral to the development of identity.

Indigenous families provide a rich array of literacy experiences for their children in their everyday lives. There are differences in the way families use these experiences and we can clearly see that culture is not static as people participate in multiple communities, mesh ideas from a variety of cultural traditions and new traditions emerge. Naturally occurring literacy practices within families and communities provide important information for teachers that should be used as links for school practices. The walls of traditional classrooms must become permeable as teachers utilise family and community experiences in order to enhance school success for Indigenous students.
In the next chapter I present a photo essay that exemplifies my own literacy teaching and learning practices. The diversity of my students background conditions and the school literacy difficulties experienced by many of these students have been visible to me on a daily basis. The mismatch between the literacy patterns of school and those of the home has denied many children opportunities to become effective school literacy learners. The differential competencies in the literate culture of the school develop early. The consequences of these observations are reflected in my teaching as I continually strive to present opportunities for students to engage meaningfully with resources and provide explicit instruction in the context of rich language experiences. I seek to capitalize on students existing skills and experiences and construct a literacy learning environment that is both interactive and presents opportunities for collaborative learning.
Chapter 8: My Literacy Teaching practice

Educational underachievement for Indigenous students is one of our dominant social concerns which is the impetus behind this study. In this chapter I will briefly clarify aspects of my own teaching which I have interpreted in the light of research completed throughout this study. I present this as a photo essay in order to illustrate my pedagogical practices. This chapter has been included as my teaching practice has been subjected to much change as a result of this research. In response to my studies and observations of persistent underperformance by Indigenous students I have focused my attention on the broader notions of literacy and its changing demands that have resulted from rapid and deep technological advances in our society. In addition, explicit teaching of the foundational features of literacy is also an essential goal in my teaching. I am attempting to infuse life-long learning frameworks into my pedagogy in order that the occupational and educational opportunities of marginalized students are enhanced. My task as a teacher is to make learning opportunities more accessible for students from diverse backgrounds. Ethos and culture, norms and standards, pedagogy and curriculum, organisation and messages which infuse our education systems are critically important.

My classroom practice

In the following photo essay I will clarify aspects of my own classroom practice highlighting my preferred teaching style through a variety of examples that illustrate my principles and beliefs. My current practice has of course been very much influenced by my research and observations as I have worked as a teacher throughout this study. I have been able to reflect on my past and present practice as I have read and researched, observed and taught. I have come to see the variant responses learning
communities bring to literacy activities. It has become difficult in fact to remember my teaching practice as it was before I began this study. My understanding of hybridity has been perhaps the most profound change in my teaching. Where I once considered Indigenous students to be making mistakes I now see an interweaving of children's life worlds inside and outside the classroom. In addition the overarching framework under which I work has become that of socially critical teaching and learning. In this pedagogy students are encouraged to take control over their own learning. In my classroom this means student choice of topics, student participation in assessment (including self assessment) and student orientated learning which is achieved through group and paired organizational strategies. I have also employed self-paced leaning where students work with a contract determining their own pace and activity order. In this system the teacher is seen as a resource person providing support when necessary. I attempt to design units of work and individual lessons that are problem posing (Freire 1993) and inclusive of all students in order to meet this critical teaching and learning principle. Dialogue is critical to this process. (Freire 1993) This includes dialogue not only with students but also with their families and caregivers. The classroom is open at all times for families to come in. When I have the opportunity to meet my students families I talk about their children's achievements, difficulties, needs and potential directions.

Formal invitations are frequently given especially when a unit of work has been completed and a culminating event is being planned. In this photo families have just shared an international lunch made by students and are looking at photos of some of the activities involved in this unit.
Genuine partnerships between schools and families can support the improvement of learning outcomes for Indigenous students. (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy 2002 and The 'What Works? Explorations in Improving outcomes for Indigenous students' Report 2000.) I am fortunate that in the community project I work in I have opportunities to talk with families about school issues. The 'Families As First Teachers' program, (See Epilogue Chapter 8) allows myself and an Indigenous co-worker to go into the communities two days a week (three days a week in the classroom) with prepared workshops for families of pre-school aged children that provide them with activities and resources to use with their children that promote school literacy and numeracy development. In this program teachers, and families are envisaged as equal participants in the learning process where the boundaries between learning in and out of school are increasingly blurred. (Comber and Barnett 2003) We operate in the four communities around this district having between 30 and 60 participants each week. Barbour (1998) suggests that families are unwilling or unable to participate in school-based programs, either because they are physically or culturally isolated or because they are consumed by providing basic needs for their families (See also Wilson 2000) which is why we take our program out into the community. Participants do not have to go far to attend workshops.

We are very explicit about the kind of language early childhood teachers use in the classroom and about some of the essential outcomes we are trying to achieve at school. Many parents have not had confidence in their own Western literacy skills (Hanlen 2002c). In this way they have not felt they can support their children's school learning. Our program addresses this issue by engaging families in literacy and numeracy activities that extend their own knowledge and understandings. School aged siblings frequently attend these workshops and are keen to make the literacy and numeracy resources to use them with young family members. Older siblings are an important literacy source who can be seen to scaffold their young family members literacy activities as was evident throughout my research and observations. When I return to class I have stories and anecdotes for my students about their family members. This has proved a very successful way of extending my relationship with students beyond the classroom. (Ladson-
Prior to working in this program I would make sure I attended community events and was visible in and around the community.

In conjunction with the creation of productive home/school partnerships I work to make my classroom pedagogies inclusive of all students. Buckskin (2000) asserts that evidence collected from more than 80 Strategic Results Projects over two years operating in Northern Territory schools, has demonstrated that learning outcomes for Indigenous students can be significantly improved through goals of cultural inclusivity. In my classroom this is done via a number of channels which are presented in the dot points below:

- A positive classroom environment,
- The inclusion of mass media and popular culture and ICT's,
- recognition of the diverse skills and knowledge that students bring to school including the hybrid practices that see a blending of home and school literacy events
- A broad definition of what counts as literarily worthy which is reflected in the resources I use.
- Connecting students with the world outside school using contextualized teaching activities.
- Opportunities for students to play
- Reflective practices

These practices are exemplified in the photo essay which follows.

I try to maintain a very positive classroom environment with open and honest discussions and regular feedback for students as to their progress and achievements. Creating positive learning environments is crucial to understanding diversity. (Makin 2003) My classroom is organized to allow students to engage in small group work using a system I describe in the following paragraphs. In this system students negotiate a leader for the set activity. Verbal
contracts are sought to help ensure compliance and engagement by all. I have also used this strategy in cross aged situations whereby older and younger students are participants in a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) All participants have shared understandings about the activity systems in which they engage. Younger students watch older students until they think they know how to complete the activity and then they try out their skills. Although an apprentice may only be skilled at some parts of the activity they are able to go through the whole process from beginning to end.

Some of the pedagogical implications of this organization within our classroom include a view of knowledge as socially constructed, democratic decision making between students and myself as the teacher, for the planning, conduct and assessment of learning tasks, a problem-posing, enquiry based teaching style and an emphasis on learning in the community.

This teaching activity posed a problem of building the tallest tower with very specific materials. The negotiation and discussion that took place in this teaching activity, and others like it, helps provide students with knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand social realities and unequal power relations with a view of improving them now and in their future lives. Students are engaged in social themes such as empathy, cooperation, trust, and communication and are provided with experiences to develop them.

Students here had identified their leader and were in the process of designing a bridge using specified resources. They were all active in the problem solving process with all members being equal and engaging in a process of democratic participation.
This organizational strategy utilizes what I have observed to be common features of traditional Indigenous social and learning activities, that is a sharing of leadership role, negotiation and the importance of consensus in determining rules, strategies and goals.

Before the dance is performed, and in fact throughout the performance, there is discussion and negotiation. There are opportunities to understand roles and responsibilities, power and control, relationships and interdependence.

This system also utilizes apprenticeship style teaching (Lave and Wenger 1991) whereby the learning is situated within a social practice. The students bring historical components of their skills and knowledge to the learning situation which have been learned from previous situations.

At a whole school event, younger students from my class listen to the directions given by an older student before they perform. Accepting leadership in this way is part of the cultural knowledge of the children and is clearly transferred to classroom activities. Knowing, thinking and understanding are generated in practice. (Lave 1997)

The physical space of my classroom is ordered, safe, predictable, and some would say sparse.
I believe my students are bombarded in their out of school lives with multimedia and multi-sensory experiences. The high levels of screen time many experience (McCrindle 2004) and my observations that technology is integral to home and community literacy environments especially television which is an important source of literacy for many families (Hanlen 2000c) has forced me to embed ICT’s into my pedagogical practices.

In this activity students were working together using a program called ‘storymaker’. A series of class photos are sequenced to make a story. Students were required to write captions. This computer is connected to a data projector so on completion the work can be shown as a movie to the entire class.

In the 1990’s 80% of students have been identified as visual and kinesthetic learners. Previously the majority of students were auditory learners. (McCrindle 2004) Mass media plays a huge role in students lives today. The focus of mass media is not only on words but on the visual, symbolic and experiential. Mass media outlets utilize colour and symbols often containing minimal written text. Interpretation of these symbols is foregrounded in my teaching.

I am not a technology wiz and have had to seek a great deal of support. This allowed me to learn with my students and in fact for them to teach me. One unit of work we recently completed was entirely technology driven whereby we ‘sent’ a travel buddy around the world. The librarian (or rather the travel buddy) emailed us everyday from a new city.

We were sent a variety of interesting links which we explored as a class using a data projector and mimio tools. (The mimio turns whiteboards into interactive devices. In
conjunction with a data projector the mimio stylus is able to be used like a cordless mouse to drag, drop, right click and click computer applications directly from the whiteboard. See photo below.) Students enjoyed browsing websites on the internet, navigating interactive instructional programs and CD's and controlling their own documents directly at the board. In this way all students could engage constructively with different cultural knowledges and active participation of all students was achieved.

A student uses the mimio tool and interactive whiteboard. This work with the mimio lead to much discussion about reading signs and symbols. The smaller poster in the above display was a visual representation of the signs and symbols we read. They included the natural environment, symbols on clothing and signs and symbols in the community. Following on from this was discussion about where we find stories hence the next poster.

I took photos of the many signs and symbols in the community and students reflected on and interpreted these.
The resources I utilize are first and foremost my students themselves. Recognizing the diverse skills and knowledge that children bring to school increases productive learning opportunities. (Comber and Barnett 2003.) My students strengths, experiences, skills, knowledge and accomplishments are utilised as resources for teaching and learning.

In utilizing these resources I can acknowledge and value the hybrid practices that students create when they complete formal school literacy tasks. The merging of literate practices from home and community with those of school transform these practices into Borderland Discourses (Gee 1996). Textual hybridization (Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan 2000) occurs when narrative styles, conversational styles and code-switching and genres and ideologies from popular media are blended. With this in mind I create classroom spaces (referred to as Thirdspace by Kostogritz 2002) where my students absorb knowledge and texts from the school curriculum through the hybridization process. I have highlighted some examples of hybrid practices in this thesis that I have observed in my own students.

"I went amphitheatre. It was [indecipherable] lots, lots, lots, lots kids. 100 infinity people".

"Last night I saw a feather foot. When I bin saw the feather foot I shivered."

"My dad bin throw that sharp spear at that whale. It was big, big whale."
The first of these work samples exemplifies some of the different understandings about number I have observed in Indigenous students. According to Watson (1989) Western children learn to measure and give numeric value to parts of things. Counting and discussion about measurement are not generally part of Indigenous language practices. It is clear that all of this student’s linguistic repertoires have become tools in the completion of the activity. His way of sharing his knowledge and expertise with innovation and a combination of codes has lead to learning. Also in the first example, “ls, ls, ls, ls,” [lots, lots, lots, lots] shows repetition, a feature of Aboriginal English (McRae 1994) designed to exemplify in this case the amount of people, has been brought to school and incorporated into the writing activity. In the second piece of work the student refers to seeing feather foot. This reveals the cultural knowledge of spirits and the associated meaning, that is to instill fear, interwoven with a formal journal writing task. Many discussions with students centre around the spirits they see and the warning stories they are told about. This is evidence of hybrid practices interwoven with classroom conversational styles, in most cases ‘morning talk’. Also in this example we see code switching between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English with the use of the word ‘bin’. I believe code-switching is a viable practice for meaning making and therefore a tool for learning. The third example involved writing a report about sea creatures. Again I draw on the work of Watson (1989) and her explications of Aboriginal knowledge systems to illustrate the differences in information texts. In Arnhem Land Indigenous cultures the storyteller is an active participant in the story. In this case the father is the active participant. In a Western information text the storyteller is more commonly a distant agent. Non-Indigenous students in my class writing their reports did not write themselves into their texts by revealing their relationships to the animal. They were removed from the subject and wrote accordingly.

Understanding home language and literacies is critical to this process. In order to do this I work closely with Indigenous staff and ask for clarification and interpretation. My work also involves much explicit teaching with an emphasis on basic skill development and language differences. This involves highlighting differences between home language and school language and learning. One way I have worked to achieving an understanding of the differences in home and school language and literacy events is described in the following paragraph.
At the beginning of each year I complete an activity with students that involves making a small cardboard cut-out of a person. This is dressed and a photo glued in place of the individual's face. I make small fabric school bags for each person and after much discussion these are filled with strips of paper. On each piece of paper students write (or I scribe) a skill or knowledge that the student has. For example, 'I can play the didj.' 'I know about the story waters.' 'I can speak Djaru.' 'I can rap dance.' This concrete version of Thompson's (2002) Virtual Schoolbag is added to throughout the year. Visitor's to the class are voluntarily shown the figures and most students show a great deal of pride in their mini self. This is also an excellent way for me to get to know my students.

Knowing my students is one of the most critical components of my teaching. I meet with families regularly in the community project described above. I know siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents. I know who is living with whom, who is in hospital with pneumonia, who has just had a baby, who plays for the Ivanhoes. In this way I can assist students in making connections between community events and learning, and the activities and learning that occurs in school. This also supports a less fragmented approach to teaching and learning.

The physical resources I use are those I have seen in the homes of Indigenous families and those that are readily available in the community such as shops, environmental print, the health clinic and community notice boards. (See Cairney et.al. 1996) I utilize catalogues, flyers and other advertising materials, information brochures, local newspapers and TV guides, and photos I frame specific literacy and numeracy around these resources and also have them available for reading, drawing on and playing with. Heath (1982a) maintains that students from communities whose literacy practices differ vastly to those from school "need to have the mainstream or school habits presented in familiar activities with explanations related to their own habits of taking meaning from the environment." (1982a p. 73) This takes into account the 'survival track' to literacy as students are required to interpret forms, signs, pamphlets and catalogues which
helps them engage in more authentic literacy learning activities and legitimizes real life experiences to make them part of the 'official' curriculum. (Ladson-Billings 1994)

Using this local information brochure students were required to extract information from it and use this to help mock tourists find their way around town.

This dependence on students experiences ensures that a broad conception of literacy and literature is achieved. These resources also allow me to connect students with local, national, cultural and global knowledge and issues as well as contextualizing learning activities. (See Ladson-Billings 1994 and Hanlen 2002a)

These learning activities attempt to orientate students to think critically about consumerism and popular culture. I am attempting to orientate students towards an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the formal education of school and that of the community (local and global).
Students have access to a wide range of books and authors, text types and paper and writing implements. As noted earlier, this is informed by my students external environment in an attempt to replicate the print-saturated environment of the world outside. I also make much use of visual images, charts, maps, graphic organisers, and sounds in order to capitalise on the semiotic track to literacy.

In addition to the environmental resources I utilize aspects of popular culture. I try to combine this with my everyday practice as I believe this is a powerful learning tool for my students. (See Marsh and Thompson 2001) I consider the outcomes we are working towards with students and try to embed aspects of popular culture into my program. For example we used ‘The Ant Bully’ (a children's DVD) with a unit of work title ‘Insects Friends or Foe?’ I take students familiarity with this media and use it to teach new concepts. Popular culture has motivated my students and united Indigenous and non Indigenous students by giving them a lingua franca that previously they did not have.

I believe the teaching of literacy and numeracy are my ‘core business’ and infuse this notion into all that we do. I make this very visible to my students and their families. Many classroom events are recorded visually and these are displayed for discussion and reference. Family members who visit the classroom are drawn to such display and they promote much discussion and reinforce the notion that literacy is a broad concept.
I also produced a colour version of the above charts presenting it in book form and encouraged students to take it home and share it with their families and caregivers. The book was titled ‘Pathways to literacy’. One side showed a full page colour photo of students engaged in a classroom activity. The other side stated some of the teaching points that the particular activity promoted. During my visits to the community I take this book as a tool for helping connect families to school and showing them how some activities are based around readily available and free environmental print texts.

Our ‘Pathways’ book that was taken home by students. I also take this out into the community to show families.

Pages from the ‘Pathways’ book show the use of everyday items being used in literacy and numeracy activities serving the ‘environmental track’ to literacy. It also exemplifies the graphic texts and literacies involved dance performances such as story telling.
I create resources and opportunities for play and discovery learning. The 'playing at literacy' track is a significant component of my teaching. Positive environments are created through play. (Makin 2003) Play is an important part of literacy learning. (Hall and Robinson 2000. Spreadbury (2002) notes Vygotsky’s emphasis on imaginative play which is prominent in his learning theories. Sometimes carefully planned activities with specific resources are supplied and at other times there is space for students to choose their play partners. I have observed that there is much positive cross-cultural interaction and learning during these times.

These two signs are part of my students free play activity time. 'no girls aloud in boys club' and 'Beauty Shop' Formal literacy activities are frequently engaged in during these times, in fact some of the reluctant writers, write more at these times than any other time.

In all my work I maintain high expectations of my students with both their attitudes to learning and school behaviour. High teacher expectations are critical to student performance. (Malin 1991 Washington 2001 Ladson Billings 1994))
encourage flexibility and different ways of ‘doing’. In Chapter Six I included a work sample from a student who had drawn a heart in place of the word as part of a written response. I applauded her problem solving skills (I knew she was having difficulty writing the word) and try to cultivate this in all students. I believe being flexible and having problem solving abilities promotes resilience, an important life skill.

Finally I believe that as a teacher I am constantly evolving. I try not to routinise my way of thinking by showing students that I am participating in learning experiences with them - especially where ICT’s are concerned! Our classroom is a place where we have opportunities to experiment with ideas and where we all make mistakes. Frequently used words in our class are courage, compassion, respect, and learn. We talk optimistically about possibilities, take time to reflect and concentrate on teaching and learning. Understanding Indigenous literacies and the situatedness of learning is critical to my own reflective practice. My commitment to uncovering the family and community literacies that are often unrecognized in the dominant discourses of the school (and broader community) leads me to the final chapter of this thesis.

In the final chapter I reflect on the findings of this study addressing the relationships between home and community literacies and the more formal learning of literacy in schools. Utilising the data from chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight I present an analysis that attempts to draw together and examine the implications through the key themes that were first presented in Chapter Two. These are: Promoting home/school partnerships, Implications for the subversion of privilege and disadvantage, Implications for the acknowledgement and valuing of diversity, Pedagogical implications, Implications for understanding Indigenous youth. I have connected this discussion with my own experiences and observations to draw conclusions and make recommendations.
Chapter 9: Conclusions

In this final chapter I discuss the implications of cultural discontinuity as this has far reaching effects for Indigenous children’s participation in the classroom, especially exclusion and poor school outcomes. Students who develop effective formal school literacy skills are provided with access to, and competent, comfortable functioning in the cultural systems of mainstream society. Being able to access mainstream opportunities then becomes a possibility for these exiting students. It is therefore the responsibility of schools, and the teachers core business to effectively transfer to all students understandings of the literacy practices of the mainstream community. This has the potential to provide Indigenous students who have traditionally been marginalized, with an avenue for enrichment and enhancing of life opportunities. Improved formal literacy skills is fundamental for attaining control over these wider cultures. Chapter Nine offers a synthesis of data collected throughout this study, during my teaching years and includes the vignettes presented in chapter five. Through these I am attempting to make explicit some necessary actions that can lead to the achievement of school literacy competence for Indigenous students. Fundamental to this is the notion that literacy can be theorised in the widest sense and considered to be a repertoire of capabilities. Also, the rich repertoire of home and community literacies should be validated by schools.

Indigenous literacies and the situatedness of learning

This study illustrates how Indigenous students bring with them important ways of learning and teaching that are often not acknowledged, understood or valued in our school system. The rich and diverse practices reveal how children are able to participate in multiple communities. Many
of the students in this study do not demonstrate literacy in school-sanctioned ways. The vignettes attempt to show how teachers do not value the visible and often invisible cultural knowledge that many Indigenous students bring with them to school. The learning activities of these students have occurred in authentic, meaningful contexts and are socially, historically, spatially and culturally constructed. At home and in the community they demonstrate metacognitive understandings of language and literacies and engage skillfully in these early literacy activities and events. Learning takes place via the interaction between the persons acting and the settings in which their activity occurs. From this learning, literacy knowledge and competence are derived. Through the participants in this study, we see that literacy takes many forms.

The literacy activities observed emphasise the social nature of learning and literacy. They also emphasise the notion of apprenticeship style learning. These are rich experiences whereby participants engage in an activity system in which they share understandings. The apprentice watches the master until he/she thinks he knows what to do and then he tries out his skill. This style of teaching and learning is utilised by the families in the vignettes. In the first vignette, the mother has sent a note for her daughter Sharnie’s absence. The reason Sharnie was called on to stay home while her mother attended to personal matters, was to take care of her younger siblings. Sharnie is becoming very adept at caring for younger family members in this real life context. In the home situation she is an important teacher to the younger children and has had this teaching and learning cycle demonstrated by older family members many times. Both Esther and Jeanie allow the young children in their families to engage authentically and meaningfully in the activity at hand. I observed both families engaged in supervised cooking activities. Jeanie’s and Esther’s children are afforded a great deal of freedom with cooking implements and machinery. There is an underlying expectation that these implements will be managed with care. Jeanie focuses on teaching and demonstrating for her oldest daughter who, in turn, is expected to supervise and teach the younger siblings. Important cultural knowledge is gained through this process, which is sometimes not visible. What is invisible to the teachers in
the first vignette is the fact that this young girl is learning a great deal about child rearing practices and accompanying responsibilities as she stays home to look after her younger siblings.

The complex networks that mediate learning in the homes of the families include siblings, cousins, uncles and aunties, mothers, fathers and grandparents. The jointly constructed literacy events participants engage in are multigenerational. Our Western education system confines this learning to the cultural margins which often undermines other knowledges, literacy events and the network of 'teachers' that are involved. The families involved in this study and the students interviewed, acknowledge family as perhaps the single most important aspect of their lives. Commitment to family members, roles and responsibilities clearly transcends most other aspects of daily living. This is confirmed by the Indigenous teachers interviewed. In the second vignette, the assistant teacher is absent (and probably some students), due to family commitments. In my experience this is not an uncommon phenomenon. During these times of absence students are learning many life lessons. This fundamental belief of family importance should drive our school organisation. Within our school systems it is crucial that we promote flexibility. We can, and should consider different school structures and frameworks that take into account families as a basis for organisation. This will involve teachers changing the way we view knowledge. A starting point is Freire’s (1993) notion of student voice and dialogue between all stakeholders. Dialogue about curriculum, all aspects of school organisation and pedagogical practices. I participated in a program in an Arnhem Land school that used family/clan groups as its organisational structure. The distribution of power was shared amongst older students (and teachers) replicating the organisational structure of the community. The social context was integral to all learning activities and apprenticeship style learning was utilised. The demonstration track to literacy was an important learning framework.

Learning styles should be reflected in school programs. Many Indigenous students engage in apprenticeship learning in their homes and communities. As I mentioned in the opening of the
previous paragraph, this was apparent throughout my observations of Jeanie’s and Esther’s practices. It also dominates my reflections on students learning throughout my years of working in Indigenous communities. Despite the vast differences between these communities in both location and histories of contact, this learning process appears consistently. I am relatively new to the rainforest community in which I currently live and work, but again I see this system operating. I mentioned in chapter seven, the young boys who dance for the tourists to earn pocket money. Their uncle works with them on these occasions giving directions and encouragement as though they were preparing for ceremony like the students I watched in remote parts of Arnhem Land and the Pilbara.

This enduring apprenticeship learning style would indeed be complimented by an approach in our schools such as Accelerated Literacy provides. The Northern Territory has introduced a widely successful Accelerated Literacy Program. Gray and Cowey (2005) are emphatic about all students in a class, regardless of ability level, working together on the same high level texts which challenge more successful age peers. Their rationale is that the language structures and vocabulary used in simple texts confines learners and leads to more serious difficulties such as restricted memorising activities and limited attention to decoding. These students cannot hope to catch up with their more successful peers falling further and further behind. But it is within the Accelerated Literacy framework that more successful students can mentor others in a ‘community of learners’ where support is provided for all. Lankshear (1997) presents a text analysis exercise that is not unlike aspects of Accelerated Literacy. Teachers use a newspaper story and photo titled “The face of starving Africa” about the Somalia drought. The English teacher is encouraged to talk about author intention, reader positioning, exclusions, whose interests are served, lexical and syntactic text construction. But Lankshear extends the teaching and learning process to incorporate further text deconstruction using different foci with the teacher-librarian, geography teacher, modern history teacher, social education and environmental studies teachers. These strategies utilise features of the mentoring process in that teachers demonstrate text deconstruction then students are given opportunities to
complete similar tasks. The students are then coached by the mentor (or teacher) "as they engage in group activities that simulate "real-world" applications, and eventually "fades" to encourage the students to work more independently." (Behrman 2002 p.28) Students are given opportunities to have input into planning, decision making and problem-solving within the structure of the school curriculum.

Apprenticeship style learning and mentoring processes intersect. Lankshear appeared to be moving beyond the teaching community of adults simply reproducing itself by structuring and limiting resources for learning, to students participating more in the process of learning critical literacy strategies and less in simply learning the rituals of school. (McLaren 1999) In the Lankshear model, learning communities, that is teachers from different disciplines, and students, "have different interests, make diverse contributions to an activity, and hold varied viewpoints." (Lave and Wenger (1991 p. 98) What is also important is the networking between teachers who work together to make connections for students in order that they learn about literacy through the key learning areas. This discussion points to the way teachers are attempting to move students from the home and community apprenticeships described in previous chapters to apprenticeship style learning in the classroom. These 'conceptual bridges' (Lave and Wenger 1991) find ways to exploit the background experiences of students and at the same time consider issues of position, privilege and authority within the classroom. (Behrman 2002)

This mentoring process or apprenticeship learning opens up a vast array of literacies for students in the home and community. The participants in this study are clearly familiar with a wide range of literacies that are performed within the household and the wider community. We can see that there are a variety of ways of doing particular literacy activities and a range of activities that traditionally have not been considered literate activities.
Multiliteracies and hybridity

Multiliterate practices are evident in both Jeanie’s and Esther’s households. They are also evident in the first vignette (Chapter five) and displayed by the students in the second vignette (also chapter five). The student (Kain) in the first vignette has meshed the home literacy practice of talking with adults about the spirit world and learning the signs that indicate these spirits are present with the school task of journal writing. This results in a hybrid text that brings his home literacy practices and school literacy practices together. Hybridity is also evident in the sample of work produced in the second vignette. The student has displayed evidence of repetition in his description of the coconut, that is ‘big, big, big’ and parallelism when he restates something in a different way that is ‘my grandmother cook a fish, she cook a fish my grandmother.’ These two features of Aboriginal English (McRae 1994) have been brought to school and used in the journal writing activity. Both teachers are unaware of their significance. This is a familiar story. Teachers are often not aware that their students are meshing their knowledge and understanding of two cultures and two, or more languages.

The students in the first vignette are accused by their teachers of having limited and pointless interests in African-American music, video games and violent or horror DVDs and videos such as ‘Chucky’. The popular culture road to literacy is omnipresent and powerful. It has a stronghold on so many aspects of our students’ lives. Technology is integral to home and community literacy environments. This trend shapes how students see themselves. They are "cultural switch hitters" (Matute-Bianchi 1991) who identify with technology and consumer worlds, but also with their Indigenous roots. My current students have always performed traditional dances in the classroom. Traditionally male and female take turns to perform sometimes within the same dance. At home they replicate the dances they see on T.V usually featuring African Americans but these have come into the school. An Indigenous teacher I work with noted how contemporary dances the students imitate have incorporated the turn taking style typical of traditional Djapugay dances but contain the moves from the video clips they see on TV. In the same way students often weave media texts that are encountered in the home and community
with school literacy as can be seen in Chapter Six, illuminated by the popular culture road to literacy. This is a significant aspect of identity and can be a valid source of literature for classroom use.

In our classrooms we can build on students media and popular culture backgrounds and embed these into the curriculum. Teachers should not view this form of literacy as inferior to other literacy practices and resources. For example there are popular DVDs and other digital material that children watch and are familiar with (and that are G rated). Removing the often negative tarnish that some teachers have with regard to popular culture, we can in fact use this form of literacy and embed new concepts and understandings into a discourse that is familiar to our students. (See Marsh and Thompson 2001 below.) These popular culture and technology roads to literacy have sign and symbol systems that are not just visual but also include words, sounds and body language. Tierney (1997) draws on the work of Seigel (1984) who suggests that "children have the potential to use symbol systems in concert with one another." (Tierney 1997 p. 292) In this way combining symbol systems invite invention or hybrid practices. Tierney employs Derrida’s term ‘logophobia’ to illustrate the point that print has an authority over other media to the exclusion of other symbol systems. This extends to the classroom where we "stress the written text over and apart from other media." (Tierney 1997 p. 292) When teachers emphasise the learning of written language, meaning and signification, as is taught in the Accelerated literacy program, should be integral.

In Chapter Seven I devoted time to unpacking some structural aspects of the Bible. Symbol systems abound. Students potentially face difficulties of word meanings, grammar, and the often unfamiliar historical and cultural contexts. It is often necessary to read between the lines as little attention is paid to descriptions of place or character. Teaching students how to deconstruct texts in the resources we use in schools is required. This should be fundamental to our pedagogical practices. With regard to religious texts, I also noted in chapter seven that spirituality is more than going to church and believing in God. Omnipresent higher forces
permeate all of life which is in harmony with nature. Non-Indigenous teachers need to understand the importance of spirituality for many Indigenous communities and that this is an important track to literacy. The messages and stories that relate to spirit beings are part of the identity of our students. Whilst this may not be overt or talked about, it is our role to acknowledge significant cultural practices and beliefs. The teacher in the first vignette does not do this when she warns a student not to write about 'ghosts and gremlins'.

In the same way, acknowledgement of different ways of participating in and learning literacy, should be valued as part of our normal classroom activity. This means classrooms need to be flexible and open to student learning behaviours that in the past teachers may have considered inappropriate. (Guteirrez et al.) Teachers must actively work towards, and teach the skills of acceptance and respect of language, social practices and beliefs of the classroom community and the individual members. No single language or culture should be privileged over another. All activities and resources should be multi-voiced by taking into account student backgrounds. Diversity can be used as a tool for productive learning as hybridity can also be seen as a new learning tool.

Many of the students I teach, including those that were involved in the interviews, do not see themselves as literate individuals. This occurs despite the fact that all families engage in literacy events at home. The difference being that they utilise resources not often seen in classrooms. An awareness of the unique and personal literacy experiences as well as environmental print as roads to literacy is required and these must be infused into classroom practices. This has the potential to alleviate uneasiness with traditional school based texts that students could have or feelings that what they are doing at home is not 'real' reading and writing. Heath (1982a) articulated vast differences in the literacy practices of three communities. Rather than seeing families who do not read stories to their children as a deficit, she noted how home practices can be specifically built on at school through the learned skills that children have gained through home practices. Fundamental to this is the notion of teachers
really knowing their students. Students from communities whose literacy practices differ vastly to those from school "need to have the mainstream or school habits presented in familiar activities with explanations related to their own habits of taking meaning from the environment." (Heath 1982a p. 73)

Many teachers view the reading of children's stories as critical to a child's reading development. The reality is that many of the families I have worked with do not have children's books in the home. I have recently commenced a project in my current school titled 'Families as First Teachers' (See epilogue, this chapter). The librarian has been culling books from the vast school collection and asked if the project could use these books. I stored them for a brief time in my classroom until they could be taken out to participating communities who had requested this service. Many of the Indigenous students I teach loved rummaging through these books particularly the Dreamtime stories from a Percy Tresize series. I told a few students they could take these home with them. "For ever?" they asked excitedly. "You can keep them" I replied. This sparked a plethora of Indigenous students coming at intervals to our class requesting books to take home. No non-Indigenous students made this request. Similarly when we took the books out to the community, handfuls were enthusiastically taken back to the homes. I suggest that families and children want to see this kind of literature in their homes. The difficulty of keeping books safe and in one piece as required by school and council libraries is a very real difficulty in often crowded homes with many small children. It was this very same situation that prompted a project I was involved in, in Arnhem Land a few of years ago. We purchased a colour photocopier, made many books using photos of students and community members and printed multiple copies. The books were seen as consumables and master copies kept in storage. Critical to the success of this project was the local nature of content and community members as the subjects and the understanding that they did not need to be returned to school. The New Zealand 'Books in Homes' project is a model whereby sponsors and schools form partnerships to purchase books for students from 'bookless' homes.
The term 'bookless' is used in the sense of school sanctioned books, such as picture books and youth fiction. The students I interviewed and Jeanie and Esther had Bibles. Students have access to other literature sources such as junk mail, DVD and video covers, occasionally library books from school, a plethora of forms and sometimes picture books that are brought for them. It is important that as teachers we remember that unfamiliarity with picture books, differences in home and school book reading styles, classroom discourse where Standard Australian English predominates in all texts (and instruction), oral story telling styles which are significant in the lives of Indigenous families as contrasted with the written genres of school, are aspects of literacy that contribute to the difficulties Indigenous students have negotiating school literacy.

Indigenous students bring diversity to literacy events that show skill and resourcefulness and result in hybrid and multiliterate practices. In accommodating all students, we cannot wait for the revolutionary new 'package' that will change academic outcomes for Indigenous students. We must change our immediate class structures and organising principles, curriculum and pedagogical practices to encompass the home and community practices of our students. In the following sections the vignettes continue to illuminate areas of contradiction which relate to differentials in power and subordination along cultural diversity and class lines. (Smith 2000)

**Promoting home/school partnerships**

In the past, and in some cases still today, parents have been silenced by an inability to successfully negotiate school systems. This has resulted in disempowerment not to mention the loss of untapped resources for many schools. It would be difficult to list all the projects reporting the crucial nature of home/school partnerships. All teachers interviewed for this study reported on the value of regular interactions with parents and some highlighted this as a means of better understanding their beliefs, attitudes, daily challenges and perceptions of the roles they play in literacy development. Hurst (1998) suggests "there is wide variation in
understanding the role of the family in the child's early literacy activities, in the
understanding of emergent literacy and of the benefits of home school collaboration." (1998
p. 10) Hurst proposes that this has implications for the role of the school in reaching out to
parents and for policy and practice. "If parents are empowered and their skills as teachers
acknowledged........., some schools may need to change their attitudes to acknowledge both the
willingness of parents to be involved and the value of their contribution to children's literacy
development." (1998 p. 10)

In the first vignette we meet Mr. Peters who is lamenting what he observes as a change in the
attitudes and values of parents. Firstly he sees the parents role as merely to support the
teachers and secondly, he makes the assumption that the parents and families don’t care
about their children’s school learning. He has 'given-up' in his attempts to collaborate or
communicate with parents which is not an uncommon story in my experience. Similarly in the
second vignette the school principal comments that "parents don’t value school learning like
we do." And later the teacher in the staffroom claims she is "sick of parents who don’t give a
shit." In Chapter Two I discussed the work of Warren and Young (2002) who report that
collaborative learning communities are significant in supporting students and adults as life-
long learners and in promoting continuity of learning and improving educational outcomes. In a
learning community, teachers, administrators and parents are envisaged as equal participants
in the dialogue where the boundaries between learning in and out of school are increasingly
blurred.

Warren and Young suggest that there are barriers to be overcome and communication issues
to be addressed before 'real partnerships' between parents and schools can be forged. One of
these barriers is the constantly changing demographics of families and children being served
by the school as in the case of the first vignette. Another is the entrenched culture that
dictates the way things are done in schools and these cultures do not support the inclusion of
parents. The teachers who have been at the school for many years in the first vignette are
unable to see that the change in the demographics of their student population calls for changes in the way they work with families. Warren and Young further suggest that some parents may lack the necessary skills to assist their children in the primary school years. For Warren and Young the most critical barrier to collaborative relationships between the home and the school is the style of communication between schools and parents. This is perhaps best summed up in the following quote. “The dialogic exchanges currently evident in many schools frequently do more to maintain unequal relationships between families and teachers than promote equity.” (Warren and Young 2002 p. 218) Acknowledging the valuable tracks to literacy that many families provide for their children is a way our schools can work towards building positive relationships.

In uncovering the 'tracks to literacy' of the participants in this study we see that it is not only the parents that support children’s literacy. There are siblings, grandparents and other members of the extended family. Kelly, Gregory and Williams (2002) also make this point. Through the student interviews it became clear that older children 'play' with younger ones writing and drawing for them, reading shop catalogues with them and naming items, taking them to shopping centres, the annual agricultural show and church. This was clear in Jeanie's and Esther's families. What is invisible to the staff in the vignettes, is the crucial role that grandparents and other extended family members play in a child’s education. Elderly people have traditionally played an important role in teaching Indigenous children and there are many lessons to be learnt when young children are exposed to their wisdom. (Olmedo 2004) The vignettes highlight a static view of cultures. Approaching other family members is the way of forging home/school partnerships. What is crucial is the way we approach families and community members. It is not as simple as inviting parents to a cultural day or to come up and collect the end of year report. In addition, in my experience, many of the times we contact families are for negative events that have occurred with their children. The principal of my current school is very proactive in contacting parents about positive events in their children’s school lives. This has the effect of raising parents awareness of school activities, promoting
feelings of pride in their children’s achievements and helping the parents understand that the school values the huge contribution they make to their children’s learning.

In a report by Mullen (2000) teachers at the school where the following study was conducted wanted to demonstrate that they valued community knowledge and practices and to use this as a foundation for planning literacy teaching across the school. Mullen commented that not only was the exchanging of information between the home and school crucial for successful student learning but it also had the reciprocal effect of helping teachers to construct a more appropriate curriculum that explicitly built on existing knowledge and learning styles. Parents involved in the program began to understand the schools definition of literacy which Mullen suggested had the potential to empower them and in turn support their children’s learning. Mullen argues that a whole school approach is essential as it creates a sense of togetherness and builds collegiality and teamwork. In this environment people feel they are supported.

In the initial stages of the program teachers challenged their own values and considered their own literacy practices. They explored the literacy skills and experiences that the students brought to school. Information was gathered about out-of-school literacy activities via a questionnaire and this information was then used to gain a basis for teaching programs. Each night a different family took home a disposable camera and photos were taken of family members engaged in literacy activities. The photos were captioned and displayed. The teaching and learning program was reviewed to complement and develop home literacy practices and to introduce home literacy elements into student learning that were missing. Activities included letter recognition in magazines and junk mail, uncovering different genres, discussions about literature to engage students in talk about books, and oral language activities that would promote focussed discussions. Other explicit classroom activities were employed including making posters about reading, writing and talking done at home, using play as an integral part of the program, and journal writing.
Once again the reciprocal or rather cyclical nature of such a program is illuminated by Mullen who suggested that the program was not only valuable for parents and students but it also provided valuable professional development opportunities for teachers. The teachers clearly took onboard the 'tracks to literacy' that the families engaged in and utilised these in their teaching programs. This program generated discussion between the home and school and helped families become enthusiastic about their out-of-school achievements. This project embodies what I believe schools should be working towards. Crucial to this project is its localised nature with parents and community members being actively involved in decisions about all aspects of the school. (See What Works? Report) Also critical is the ongoing nature of the programs rather than single and isolated days to invite families into the school. Projects of this type can also adopt an intergenerational aspect so important in Indigenous communities. What is vital is the ongoing dialogue between schools and communities. Schools must be characterised by policies that reflect their commitment to engaging the views of all members of the school population.

Jeanie makes a conscious effort to have constant dialogue with her daughter's teacher. As noted Jasmine is achieving reading standards beyond her age level. From statistical data this is more an exception than a common occurrence. There is no point laying blame to the prevalence of this situation but it is important that teachers make, and continue to make, concerted efforts to work closely with families. A Freirean framework includes the voice of Indigenous people in education, without which a lack of confidence in the people’s ability to think and to know could be implied. The notion that parents are not interested in their children’s education as highlighted by the vignettes, is simply a misinterpretation of the situation. We do not know the stories of our parents. We do not know what injustices and even indignities they have faced in their own education. We do know that if we are to use the common metaphor of a bridge (Fleer and Williams-Kennedy 2002) to understand how family and school partnerships can promote successful academic achievement, then we must make concerted efforts to do just that and build bridges.
Implications for the subversion of privilege and disadvantage

It would be easy if the following discussion could become a simple cause and effect proposition. This is not possible. An Indigenous respondent interviewed noted that the students at Westville come from families that have lived through two to three generations of dysfunction coupled with welfare dependency. Institutionalisation becomes a part of life and this is entrenched in the children’s beliefs, values and attitudes. It is a very difficult cycle to alter. Issues of privilege and disadvantage are a complex web of social, political, historical economic and personal factors. Much of this section discusses a study completed by McIntyre (1997) on 'whiteness'. I apologise to readers who think I have afforded too much attention to McIntyre, but I am convinced her study is critical to understandings of power relationships based on race that permeate our schools and the wider community.

Hanlen (2002a) notes that the central driving force behind the deliberate social inequity, disadvantage and marginalisation of Indigenous Australians today stems from the early settlers problematising of their lack of 'capital value' in a growing capitalist society. The Protection and Assimilation policies that were implemented, attempted to force Indigenous people to abandon their beliefs, values and social practices in order that absolute control was achieved by the colonisers. These policies and practices set the scenes for what largely exists today in the form of social inequity for Indigenous Australians. (Hanlen 2002a) Luke (1994) asserts that literacy education is directly related to the power relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Historically the Western education Indigenous people received was sub-standard (Hanlen 2002a) designed to produce a domestic labour market through assimilation practices. Hanlen argues that the systematic removal of lighter skinned Indigenous children from their families had far reaching effects which are still felt by many Indigenous Australians today. The disadvantage has led to dysfunction and welfare dependency for some Indigenous people. I
have heard Noel Pearson comment on more than one occasion (7:30 Report ABC television March 2005 and Keynote speech Cairns TAFE college September 2004 ) that many Indigenous people are living with institutionalism in dysfunctional communities.

In the first vignette the teachers callously disregard the difficult circumstances that some students faced within their out of school lives. The Indigenous Home Liaison Officer I interviewed during this study said that (apart from issues of confidentiality) she could not even begin to describe some of the social problems that are occurring in the homes of the students we teach. Jeanie confirmed this, noting that substance and sexual abuse were major problems of the families she knew. In the second vignette students report absences that result from classmates who do not have clothes to wear or have not eaten. These are very real issues for the students I have taught in the past and still teach and are not exclusive to Indigenous students.

In an article titled "Inside Australia’s third world" (The Age Thursday September 15th 2005) author Lindsay Murdoch uncovers issues of poverty, distress and social breakdown in Aboriginal communities in Australia. Murdoch reports on new research (unsourced) that shows a population explosion coupled with 30 years of under-funding in education, health and infrastructure has led to the creation of a social-time bomb in communities. Murdoch is speaking about remote communities. However, the fact is that some urban communities are dealing with similar problems of poor housing, education that is ill-equipped to cater for needs and sub-standard infrastructures. I see the effects of this on a daily basis. Bob Beadman, a high ranking former public servant is quoted in the article as suggesting the failure is a result of Aboriginal people being locked out of having an effective role in making decisions about their own lives. Tacit acceptance by the majority of the population must be challenged. John Taylor of the Australian National University’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research is also quoted in this article claiming that communities and their problems have "remained largely out of sight of mainstream Australia which for many years has managed to avert its glance." Urban communities
are also challenged by social and economic conditions that become barriers to equal access and achievement.

The socio-economic, cultural and geographical barriers often intersect to produce barriers for children to access resources. Hall (2003) cites the work of Duke (2000). In an article titled "For the rich it's richer: print experiences and environments offered to children in very low and very high socioeconomic first grade classrooms" Duke uses the term semiotic capital in analysing literacy practices in classrooms with children from different socio-economic backgrounds. Findings indicated that children from low socio-economic backgrounds had access in their classrooms to less semiotic capital than children from high socio-economic backgrounds. They encountered less print, were exposed to less extended forms of text, had fewer opportunities for choice, lower degrees of authorship smaller class libraries and less time to use them. The nature of print activities was very different. Children were read to less, spent more time on copying and completing worksheets rather than engaging in more authentic literacy learning activities such as genre work.

With these differences between Indigenous and mainstream lifestyles in mind, teachers have a responsibility to provide opportunities that connect cultural and social home and community patterns with the culture of school. As teachers we need to further our understandings of Indigenous students diverse backgrounds and study our own efforts as educators in order to implement teaching and learning programs that do not alienate non-mainstream students. Giving time and place to family literacy practices within the daily activities of school is important as well as acknowledging the strengths that already exist. Teachers need to help students become culturally competent, but this is not an easy task within the framework of school. McIntyre (1997) whose work I mentioned in Chapter Seven alluded to the notion of cultural competence in her own work with student teachers. The author asserts that teachers must be aware of their own identity and culture in order to support their students becoming culturally competent in the Western school system.
McIntyre (1997) studied the notion of identity and 'whiteness' framing these notions around three interlocking themes: 1) whites as living a fairy tale, 2) whites as keepers of the American dream, and 3) whites as dualistic. She suggests these are mutually interacting descriptions that illustrate conflict for white people trying to make sense of their racial identity. McIntyre worked with middle class white student teachers who believed white people could be represented on a continuum ranging from those who were ideal, the norm, to those who were bad and racist. The participants described white people as powerful and dominating and wanting to 'rescue' people of color whom many saw as less fortunate than themselves.

According to McIntyre, the life histories of her student teachers played a crucial role in how they viewed white people as the 'norm' or 'ideal'. Geographical location whilst growing up, education, class backgrounds, opportunities and interactions with people of colour interacted in a powerful way to create their idealised notions of what it means to be white. The Indigenous teachers interviewed for this study call for non-Indigenous teachers to get out into the communities and really get to know the students we teach. This is reinforced by much of the current literature on multicultural education. Olmedo (2004) notes that some multicultural curriculum models highlight the need for teachers to broaden their understandings of the cultures of their students and families. This provides us with authentic understandings about our students and not static, stereotyped portrayals. Olmedo (2004) highlights the work of Banks and Banks (1997) who call for a move beyond the heroes and holidays approaches to culture and truly integrate this knowledge into all content areas where students are engaged in enquiry-based projects and themselves construct the knowledge rather than depend on the 'banking' concept that Freire so adamantly opposes.

The structural inequalities that exist in our society are reproduced in our schools. This can be seen in simple numbers with a clear predominance of non-Indigenous teachers in many schools with high Indigenous student populations. McIntyre (1997) considers the predominance of white
people in all areas of society serves a dual purpose. She suggests that it reinforces the status of white people and sends messages to people of colour that they are excluded, marginalised and do not represent the norm. Many of the non-Indigenous teachers in this study did not expect their students to achieve Benchmarks. The knowledge and skills that the students brought with them were not valued and differential expectations ensued. This can be seen in both vignettes.

The teachers in the first vignette make jokes about their students’ interests and skills, dismissing them as unimportant. The classroom teacher sarcastically makes reference to weekend events of hunting and attending church. These are the most likely stories when she calls for morning talk. Not only is she completely unaware of the field of knowledge and skills that the students are immersed in when engaged in these activities and the accompanying communities of learners and tracks to literacy, but her attitude makes it clear to the students that these experiences are what she expects from Indigenous students. The inference is that the experiences of non-Indigenous students would be more diverse, rich and consequently valued by the teacher. Hence hunting and church stories may be the norm for the Indigenous students she teaches, but they are not the norm for the mainstream community. The teacher warns a student that stories about ‘ghosts and gremlins’ are not appropriate. We cannot see what has prompted her to say this but we can assume that the student has written such stories before. The Indigenous students I have taught do not see stories of spirits as fictive make believe ‘ghosts and gremlins’ as is suggested by the teacher in the first vignette. The presence of spirits is very real and a significant part of cultural beliefs as I have mentioned earlier. This is an important track to literacy that has been clearly evident in all Indigenous communities in which I have worked. Talk of spirits is very serious and meaningful to the students. The spirits they talk of are omnipresent and can be seen, felt, heard or even smelt. In the second vignette, one student talks about stingray being ‘good an’ fat’. This student has offered important knowledge and the skill of being able to ‘read’ aspects of his environment- a semiotic track to literacy. The teacher is completely unaware of this. The second teacher questions a student she
has not seen before, disregarding his time at the outstation. Her terse questioning reveals that what is important to her are correct channels of enrollment. Her Western view demands immediate power over the student who must adhere to the system rules. Yes, enrollment is important but the situation she has created is likely to have made the student feel powerless and ashamed.

Teachers are often unaware of how our Western race continues to dominate Indigenous people. We are taught not to recognise white privilege. We create an idealised view of Western culture as the 'norm' against which all other groups are compared. Just before completing this thesis, I attended a PD session on oral language assessment for young Indigenous students. In our small discussion groups we analysed language samples. One non-Indigenous teacher presented her data. She said, "I did a normal child first." There were Indigenous teachers in our discussion group. The teachers portrayed in both vignettes constantly engage in these comparisons. Teachers need to understand that racism is more than simply individual behaviour. It permeates systems and maintains power relationships. McIntyre (1997) refers to the notion of 'zero-sum' thinking in which whiteness and racism are framed within a limited, uncritical 'we/them' paradigm which keeps whites from decentering power and privilege. In the case of Indigenous Australians this power was achieved through a violent history of domination. Without this acknowledgement teachers maintain a skewed understanding of what constitutes white power and privilege. In the first vignette, the teacher Mr. Peters makes the comment that "they get enough with all this extra tutoring support." In the second vignette the teacher comments that she is not going to provide breakfast for students who have not eaten because the parents get 'heaps of government handouts' which they should use to feed their kids. In my experience this is a common belief amongst many teachers. Teachers and society at large are unaware that the history of contact still has a significant and often negative effect on the lives of Indigenous people today.
McIntyre (1997) reports that her student teachers felt they could use their power in their classrooms to influence their students in positive ways. If they gave their students power they could "do whatever they want to do." In both the first and the second vignettes, the teachers talk about the importance of school learning as though this is the only valuable learning. They infer that without the knowledge and skills that can be gleaned from school, success is unlikely. McIntyre recognises this as a "fallacy in many educational contexts where success is mediated by classroom materials, teacher expectations, access to resources, ability to take advantage of opportunities" (p. 90) all of this within a society increasingly affected by the problems of poverty, unemployment, community dislocations, and racial division. In the student teachers' eyes, they were not misusing their power, only tapping into it to improve the lives of others. Societal racism was too big an issue for students to tackle hence they chose to deal with it in the classroom where they would "share" their power and privilege. McIntyre concludes that the students' considered their construction of power as asymmetrical, and believed advantaging one group over another to be legitimate as long as whites didn't abuse it.

Non-Indigenous people continue to legitimise their power through the belief that they are the keepers of democracy. For many teachers, the safest way to validate their power is in their roles as teachers. (McIntyre 1997) This can be used in positive ways to support students by empowering them. 'Empowerment' is a word I often hear in school. "We must empower our students." Indeed we must, but this must be done genuinely. Many teachers believe they are using their power to help those 'less fortunate' than themselves which to them is a legitimate use. The message of "work hard at school, act responsibly and get a good job" allows many teachers to believe they are doing all they can for their students. This was indeed a belief of many of the non-Indigenous teachers I interviewed. They felt that they were 'bending over backwards' for their students and not getting anywhere. Some teachers even adopt a 'victim' mentality suggesting that benefits and affirmative action policies disadvantage non-Indigenous people.
Students put whites on a continuum. At one end people were conceptualised as rednecks with a Ku Klux Klan mentality. When being a member of the white race required the student teachers to reflect on the history of white racism and the consequences of this for people of colour, they separated themselves from “those whites”. At the other end they were open-minded, better educated and trying to be better people. There were other whites who were somewhere in between. According to McIntyre these categorisations reflected a uni-dimensional perspective of racism. Situating racism within the individual and perceiving them as unrelated to societal, institutional and cultural factors effectively lets ‘good whites’ off the hook in taking any responsibility for the maintenance of white privilege and advantage and places the blame on the ‘bad whites’. In the first vignette the teacher says "Yeah at least we’re doing something for these kids...... just trying to get them literate enough to fill out their dole forms." The teacher is satisfied that she is ‘doing her bit’ but her expectations of her students are low and all they really need literacy for is to fill out forms.

McIntyre suggests that the difficulties for teachers lie in the fact that we are “often simultaneously perpetrators and victims, with little control over planning time, class size, or broader school policies-and much less over the unemployment, hopelessness and other ‘savage inequalities’ that help shape our children’s lives” (Bigelow, et al., 1994, p.4 cited by McIntyre p. 105). She continues noting that these issues exist within a “conventional system of ‘top-down’ power structures.” (Kenway and Modra, 1992, p. 143 cited by McIntyre, p. 105) This framework of ‘top-down’ power structure does not allow schools to make critical decisions that will engage teachers in transformative practice. Earlier in this chapter I stressed the importance of localising school programs to suit school communities and ensure that parents and families are involved in decisions about all aspects of the school. Such collaboration can reshape the politics of difference that favours exclusionary dichotomies of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

To return to Freire (1993) who emphasises the importance of dialogue between educators and communities. It is through this dialogue that the traditional dominance-submission power
relationships can be challenged. Teachers need to gain understandings of power structures and how they privilege non-Indigenous people. Through this dialogue we should be presenting school communities with a number of propositions that include organisation, knowledge and pedagogy. We should ask school communities, what do you want us to know and what do you want us to teach?

For my own teaching in cross-cultural settings I have found it at times, an extremely difficult task to understand how we perpetuate the power structures in schools. We must, as McIntosh (1990) has done, identify the daily effects of white privilege on our lives. For example, as white teachers we can be oblivious to the language and culture of Indigenous Australians without feeling any penalty for such oblivion. Yet it must be incumbent on all of us to have an understanding of the language and culture of our students. Other daily effects of white privilege that are evident within our schools occur in infrastructure such as meetings. As a non-indigenous teacher I can go to most meetings and feel heard, considered, part of the majority group, but can my Indigenous colleagues have the same considerations? In the same way I can be fairly sure that my principal will be a person from my own culture and if I need to talk to other ‘persons in charge’, that they will be from my own race. In the first vignette a teacher is highly critical of her Indigenous colleague. Does this Indigenous teacher have a voice within the school and feel respected? If her culture program is questioned in any way, can she be sure that this is not because she is Indigenous? As a non-Indigenous teacher I have many options, social, political and professional. McIntosh (1990) notes the perspectives of people from other races who do not have the same options open to them can be conveniently ignored by members of the majority culture.

McIntyre has been instrumental in helping me to unpack the notion of power. The principles of Western teaching do not provide teachers with the tools that will allow us to analyse and understand culture, power, knowledge and privilege. Teachers therefore must take it upon themselves to engage in participatory learning with their students. In addition to understanding
Implications for the acknowledgment and valuing of diversity

Learning topics and pedagogies are usually determined by forces over which the student has little control. From my experience, much classroom activity is still essentially passive rather than inquisitive in nature with the aim for students to give the right answer or product. Work is both uniform and often competitive with most students spending their class time doing the same activity at the same time. The teacher’s role is to try and interest students in a predetermined curriculum usually designed by city-based staff which neither engages student interests or meets individual needs.

I realise that there are criticisms of valuing difference for its own sake (Walton 1993 p. 39) by those who suggest that this liberal position rationalises "benevolent inertia" (Walton 1993 p. 40) and limits social and academic options for people already disadvantaged by dominant systems. Indeed one of the Indigenous teachers I interviewed said she did not buy into the whole "Aboriginal learning styles thing". Nakata (1997 and 2003) suggests that the cultural diversity notions are a convenient explanation for student failure that exonerates teacher practice. My argument is that without acknowledgement of diversity, how can teachers really know their students? Also, without acknowledging diversity we alienate students from mainstream schools and are in danger of having low expectations of students skills and potential. Hanlen (2000c) acknowledges that social and cultural differences between home and school are so overwhelming that children may experience extreme difficulty establishing
connections. These children, Hanlen argues, pass through school on the margins and are excluded from the process of successful outcomes.

Hanlen (2002a) discusses Indigenous beliefs, values and social practices. Indigenous culture is holistic in nature. Notions of compartmentalisation are part of Western learning styles and indeed lifestyles. I have chosen to illustrate this point with the use of photos as it is difficult to do through the vignettes which involve only a limited time frame. The first two photographs (on the following page) were taken at a Dhapi (circumcision) ceremony in a North East Arnhem Land community in 1997. What is visible is the imitation, demonstration, hands-on guidance in a real life setting. The tracks to literacy include spiritual, semiotic and demonstration, family traditions, environmental, personal experiences and playing at literacy. In fact this learning encompasses so many tracks to literacy simultaneously. Apprenticeship style learning is observed where the master guides those less experienced. It begins at birth and involves all members of the family and community. (Harris 1990). What is not visible is the fact that education is considered, in Indigenous cultures, to be lifelong. This sounds rather like some of the education department policies of today. For some, it is simply rhetoric. Aboriginal people have mastered lifelong learning and teaching processes. There is a great deal of non-verbal interaction where a child observes and then joins in when they feel they are ready and want to. These small children came in and out of the dance cycle throughout the whole event. Participation was dependent on their desire at the time.
A dhapi ceremony in Arnhem Land. (Photos by J. Herrman.)
These young children come to school and we make divisions and fragmentise the education. We offer knowledge in installments when we consider our students ready for the next part. Traditionally schools have had a very narrow conception of knowledge which has been broken down into disciplines. It is assumed that if this knowledge is poured into an open receptacle, the parts will add up to a coherent whole. (See Freire 1993 and ‘banking’ education.) Twenty first century schools must replace fragmentation with wholeness and connectedness. (Stoll and Fink, 1995).

Standardised testing is a practice which mobilises this fragmentation by encouraging teachers to replace some knowledges with others that are easily measured, leaving the others in the wastebasket as ‘less valuable’. (See Chapter Seven) The teacher in the first vignette mentions Benchmarks. She comments that she has been teaching the Dolch words but the students are not learning them successfully. Benchmark testing or standardised testing has become a huge
part of our school culture in this new millennium. Mahony and Hextall (2000) cite the work of Miriam Henry who comments that:

"Preoccupation with so called literacy standards as a political response to unemployment is hardly new, but in the globalised economy has taken on an extra edge. Additionally in Australia literacy has become a kind of equity surrogate.....However, despite the rhetoric of providing "literacy for all" and assertions of the need for multi-skilled, adaptive and problem-solving workers in the new work order, current approaches to literacy tend to reflect a narrow outcomes-focus and an obsession with reductionist forms of standardised testing...."

(1999: 93 cited by Mahony and Hextall 2000:154)

Lotman (1990) uses the term "mental consumerism" (p.35) suggesting that a society that takes on this kind of lopsided orientation towards the acquisition of information runs a dangerous path. In such societies transmitters and receivers attempt to acquire truth in the form of pre-packaged information which can give rise to social passivity. Once again we see an alignment with Freire's banking concept of education which is targeted at reproducing power relations that dominate our society and maintain hegemonic ideologies and practices in schools.

It is easy to say to non-Indigenous teachers that we must make links and connect our students' cultural experiences with our teaching and learning programs and pedagogies, but how do we in fact do this? Creating positive learning environments is crucial to understanding diversity. (Makin 2003) This, Makin notes, is done through a number of channels. Very importantly promoting a play-based approach to literacy in early childhood settings creates a positive learning environment. Spreadbury (2002) notes Vygotsky's emphasis on imaginative play which is prominent in his learning theories. Hall and Robinson (2000) also identify play as an important part of literacy learning. In this way children can utilise the 'playing at literacy' track. This opportunity needs to be extended to older students who, in my experience, relish the
opportunities to engage in structured, discovery play. Skills, strategies, oral language development and understandings of connections between oral and written expression are some of the skills learnt through play activities. Both teachers in the vignettes have sole control of all activities and organisation within the classroom. In play situations students are able to assume some control of learning. These play situations can be formalised with activities set up that promote literacy role play and discovery. A café in my own class was a recent play centre that successfully enabled practice at a variety of literacy (and numeracy) activities.

Of course in addition to providing play opportunities, opportunities must be created to develop specific knowledge about language and literacy. This knowledge must be made explicit to students. For some teachers it is difficult to have dialogue about the explicit teaching of skills. These teachers tend to be content driven as opposed to skills driven and this is reinforced by some of our mandated testing and reporting systems. For example, in the vignettes the students use Aboriginal English or Creole in the classroom which is not only their first language but may also serve the purpose of signaling identification with the communities of which they are part. It is the role of the school to foster an understanding and access to both languages, that is Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English and Creole. Teachers must familiarise themselves with the languages of their students in order to be able to highlight differences and give students an 'in road' into the language of formal school and all other mainstream institutions. In many of the discussions about differences and possible areas of difficulty for Indigenous students, the word 'explicit' appears time and again which points to the importance of this notion and its contribution to a positive learning environment.

The Northern Territory Education Department has been instrumental in pursuing and implementing programs for low achieving Indigenous students that are based on the notion of 'explicit' teaching. (See National Accelerated Literacy Program Website 2007) This current 'buzz' word has, according to Wilkinson (2003) been around since the mid 1980's. Explicit teaching is crucial to secondary discourses which are learnt rather than acquired. (Wilkinson
Explicit teaching is "about making the hidden obvious; exposing and explaining what is taken-for-granted; demystifying mental processes; bringing embeddedness to the surface; letting children in on the information and strategies which will enable them to become powerful literacy users." (Wilkinson 2003, p. 1) Neither of the teachers in the vignettes make the outcomes of their lessons explicit. They tell the students what they don't want, but they do not make it clear what their expectations are. Highly scaffolded, explicit teaching, combined with a positive learning environment creates excellent conditions for children’s literacy acquisition and development.

Once again, in both vignettes we see teachers that are negative towards the students, their abilities and interests and their teaching environment. A positive environment is defined by Makin as one "that is rich in oral language, interactive reading and language play with opportunities for children to both observe and participate in the functions of literacy." (Makin 2003 p. 334). This is crucial to the notion of productive pedagogies in the New Basics framework as implemented in some Education Queensland schools. Access to good literacy resources is part of creating positive learning environments. Issues of access and use should be at the forefront of decisions. Access to a wide range of books and authors, text types and paper and writing implements should be provided. A starting point for teachers is to look at the external environment of the students and try to incorporate aspects of this into their classrooms in an attempt to replicate the print-saturated environment of the world outside. This also takes into consideration the environmental print and survival tracks to literacy. For my own classroom it means utilising catalogues, flyers and other advertising materials, information brochures, local newspapers and TV guides, paperbark, paints and photos, to name a few. This conceptualisation of what constitutes literate products and artefacts capitalises on difference and allows teachers to use this difference as a resource, as in hybrid theory.

In Australia Kostogritz (2002) conceptualises the notion of hybridity as crucial to understanding and valuing diversity. The author is critical of many ESL programs suggesting
that their role has been to reduce linguistic vitality of minority groups through the construction of 'homogenising cultural representations'. Conservative politicians are predisposed to follow an assimilationist agenda. Conversely some politicians celebrate the uniqueness of local cultures, minority and immigrant identities which has produced a one-dimensional, patronising notion of difference. (Kostogritz 2002) Language and literacy planning establishes the semiotic domination of those 'inside' and consolidates the cultural-linguistic deficit of the 'Other' which perpetuates inequality. Kostogritz asserts that what is needed are multiple semiotic locations for sociocultural minorities to feel secure. We need to look at our "pedagogical practice beyond the traditional static frameworks of culture and the transmission modes of language and literacy teaching to understand the turbulent patterns of language and literacy appropriation by minority students." (2002 p.8) The hybrid practices and new genres that are created should be validated in the classroom.

Barton (1994) notes, "it is very easy for teachers to become prescriptive and normative about such conventions [of genre], listing the properties of different genres..." (p.55) There are identifiable forms and patterns of written language. However teachers need to be aware that hybridity is a valid practice when it comes to literacy tasks for students from diverse backgrounds, which was not the case for the teacher in the second vignette when she looks at the product of her journal writing session from Aron. Gutierrez et al. (2003) provided a useful framework for identifying hybrid language and literacy practices. In this framework three spaces operate. The first is the formal learning context referred to as the 'official space'. In teaching this is the physical setting of the classroom. The informal learning context is another space referred to as the 'unofficial space'. This space includes the resources students bring with them to the learning activity. The 'thirdspace' is the transformation of the first two spaces when they collide. This produces a productive space that leads to learning. The authors propose that hybridity is a 'useful lens' for understanding the diversity of learning events as well as a principle for organizing learning.
Watson (1989) alludes to notions of hybridity in her discussion on knowledge systems. Acknowledging a gulf which exists between Aboriginal and European cultural traditions in contemporary Australia, her text highlights how within these vastly differing knowledge systems parallels can be drawn whereby seemingly disparate concepts can be found to play similar roles and a compatibility with both knowledge systems discovered. The underlying theory behind Watson’s study is that knowledge is socially constructed. Watson suggests that this social view of knowledge “becomes an enabling mechanism for relating ideas and concepts to worlds of experience and social action. Most importantly, in this act of accounting for all perceptions and ideas by reference to a cultural context, we need not privilege one culture to the disadvantage of another, but may treat each cosmos with tolerance and respect.” (1989 p. 7-8)

Watson offers a way of achieving this balance through the process of mediation. The author sums this up in the following extended quote which I think is well worth offering space for here. She presents a view of racial and cultural reconciliation that has the potential to engage school communities with students from diverse backgrounds particularly Indigenous students. Watson is speaking specifically of Yolngu knowledge and people. The Yolngu people are the Indigenous owners of much of north east Arnhem land.

"This process of mediation between the two ways of knowing inevitably involves transformation. We can say little about the way that those of a different knowledge world experience their lives; what is felt of Yolngu knowledge in the Western world might be far from the way Yolngu people experience their knowledge. And what is felt about Western knowledge in the Yolngu world might be far from the way that Western people experience their own understandings. What particular phenomena mean to particular practitioners within a knowledge system may seem remote from the transformed generalisations in an exercise of mediation, for when transformed to fit with another world, understandings can look and feel very different. Be that as it may, it should not deter us from
mediating between different worlds, after all in contemporary times it is the only hope that humankind has. The world is now too well connected to allow the luxury of alienation within one conceptual system."

(Watson, 1989 p. 8)

Solsken, Willett and Wilson-Keenan (2000) opened up discussion of new possibilities and understandings for me as a teacher with their research into hybrid practices. There are undoubtedly many times I dismissed a student’s efforts without recognising the situational appropriateness of their work as did the teacher in the second vignette. How often have I glanced over a student’s work or responses, misunderstanding their capabilities? This points to the need for teachers from dominant cultures to work more closely with teachers from diverse populations in order to be better informed and able to recognise student intention and potential. In the first vignette, the non-Indigenous teachers dismiss the work of the Indigenous teacher whose ‘culture’ lessons incorporate language and culture of the Torres Strait. The teacher’s valuable cultural knowledge and her teaching peers low expectations create yet another power dichotomy whereby her knowledge and strategies are not valued.

Teachers need to broaden their views of how students can meaningfully participate in learning activities and accept other teachers, students, parents and community members multiple ways of knowing and doing. Further discussion of hybridity occurs in the next section, Pedagogical Implications.

Non-Indigenous teachers not knowing their Indigenous students is a sentiment expressed widely in the interviews I conducted with Indigenous teachers. This notion surfaces time and again. Indigenous teachers firmly believe that greater educational outcomes would be achieved by Indigenous students if this were to occur. Penetito (2001) confirms this view. Teacher training is geared towards psychological and developmental understandings of students but not cultural understandings. Indigenous teachers have had to learn Western ways yet reciprocity on the part of non-Indigenous teachers to learn substantial and non-stereotypical cultural beliefs,
values and practices has not occurred. Authentic attempts to this will enable teachers to see
diversity as a resource.

This section has attempted to alert teachers to the importance of understanding and valuing
student diversity. Connecting students' cultural experiences with our teaching and learning
programs is the most arresting point. Notions of explicitness, opportunities to play and learn
through discovery, maintaining a positive environment where literacy events replicate that of
the outside world, high expectations and an understanding of hybrid learning practices help to
support Indigenous students with a view to improving educational outcomes. In the next section
I look at culturally responsive pedagogies as an important way of interrupting the current
achievement patterns we see in many Indigenous students in Western school systems.

Pedagogical implications

Inclusivity is a framework teachers can explore and build these understandings into their
pedagogical practices. In being inclusive, teachers need to have deep understandings of the
home culture of their students. Ladson-Billings in her seminal work *The Dreamkeepers* (1994)
wrote about exemplary teachers noting that:

"They see their teaching as an art rather than a technical skill. They believe
that all of their students can succeed rather than that failure is inevitable for
some.....They also help students make connections between their local, national,
racial, cultural and global identities.......They encourage a community of learners;
they encourage their students to learn collaboratively. Finally, such teachers
are identified by their notions of knowledge: They believe that knowledge is
continuously re-created, recycled and shared by teachers and students alike. They view the content of curriculum critically and are passionate about it."

( Ladson-Billings 1994 p.25)

Ladson-Billings’ account demands a great deal from teachers. The sentiments are echoed by researchers in culturally responsive pedagogies such as Gay (2000) and Hall (2003). The three most salient similarities are the notions of high teacher expectations, the importance of making connections between local, national, racial, cultural and global identities and the belief that students strengths, experiences and accomplishments are utilised as resources for teaching and learning.

The regard to the first feature, Gay (2000) suggests that without high expectations of students, teachers have a personal distance and disaffiliation from students. High expectations align with caring relationships. Teacher expectations are critical to student achievements. (Malin 1991 Washington 2001 Ladson Billings 1994) Without these expectations we are in danger of implementing an undemanding curriculum. Some teachers talk about curriculum that is ‘dumbed down’ for students from diverse backgrounds. This means that the texts and associated activities that are used are simplified or ‘compromised’. In a compromised education program or activity, the educational climate is often un-stimulating and educational resources are limited and inappropriate. In the first vignette the teacher tells the students to get on with their journal writing and then copy some work on capital cities from the board. Perhaps not the most engaging of activities and we do not know the intentions of the teacher, but I have heard teachers say they use these activities to help keep students ‘busy’. The teacher in the second vignette cannot see that the sparkling waters of the Arafura Sea are infinitely more inviting than the classroom. The lives of these young students allows them to make decisions about what they will do for that day. They choose the beach. I noted in Chapter Two, Hanlen (2002a) suggests that Indigenous parents generally want their children to be happy and that this priority may differ greatly to those of teachers. This affords children different choices
and independence as they go about their daily lives. It stands to reason that many students may not be orientated towards the desire for school success as daily activities take precedence.

The second feature considers ways of connecting students with the multiple communities of which they are part. In chapter seven I discussed Bible texts in some detail (and the differences in some mathematical conceptualisations.) Much of this discussion centred on the spiritual and semiotic tracks to literacy as I noted that all the students interviewed have Bibles in their homes and most attend church. Jasmine was achieving Benchmark standard in reading as she attended a Christian school that legitimised and utilised Biblical texts in the classroom, as Jeanie did at home. I have already noted on more than one occasion that the Northern Territories Accelerated Literacy Program deconstructs school texts allowing students to transfer these skills to other texts they encounter. I am convinced through researching the Accelerated Literacy program and talking to Northern Territory colleagues that this is a program that would benefit the north Queensland schools of which I am currently part. Also, using the Walking Talking Texts model as most of the teachers interviewed claimed to use for literacy teaching in their classrooms, skills instruction occurs within a contextualised setting, that is around a chosen text. Children are immersed in high quality literacy environments and the accompanying explicit skills teaching provides scaffolding and modelling of critical language and literacy features.

The third feature that is consistently part of discussions on culturally responsive pedagogies, is that of hybrid practices. Woven together with school knowledges as interlocking links, these practices become hybrid constructs of the students' different worlds. Students come to understand that no single version of literacy is total or permanent nor is there only one way of 'doing'. This recreation of knowledge is legitimised in the official and unofficial spaces of learning contexts.
This conception of hybridity and the consequent creation of ‘space’ has been omnipresent throughout this study. Kostogritz (2002) has been influential in positing views that a trilectic approach to pedagogy is needed where spaces are created where students from diverse backgrounds can create new forms of literate practice and use texts in different ways to compliment, adapt, assimilate with our own or expose existing ones. (Freire 1993) Kostogritz employs Soja’s (1996) trilectic approach to pedagogical construction. These are Firstspace, Secondspace and Thirdspace. These spaces align with Gutierrez et al (2003) discussed in the previous section. The first refers to the domain of classroom organisation. This “material-semiotic” space is organised through mediational cultural tools. Kostogritz suggests that sometimes classrooms are organised in ways that restrict students participation and restrain them from using their semiotic resources (including home and community resources). To create a rich learning environment, teaching needs to be realigned with the textual practices of all participants. Minority students’ primary resources can be incorporated into learning activities which will provide a connection between “classroom literacy learning and multiple cultural practices and funds of knowledge.” (p. 10)

In the Secondspace, productive literacy learning occurs when pedagogical practices consider the students’ prior sociocultural experiences as a starting point for further intellectual growth. The teacher provides cognitive scaffolds rather than simply passing on textual meaning to students creating rich learning tasks. These tasks push students to perform ‘above themselves’; the notion of high expectations emerges again. The pedagogic Thirdspace is conceived by Kostogritz as consisting of living dialogical events in literacy learning practices. Difference is valued, unlike the attitudes of the teachers in the vignettes, and used as a productive resource for learning and active participation of all students. Student diversity in meaning making is celebrated and conflict between uses and users of recognised textual practices is embraced becoming a tool for rich learning. “Thirdspace suggests a need to explore the forces that produce what cultures validate as knowledges.” (p. 10) Kostogritz asserts that these three pedagogic spaces in multicultural classrooms are dependent on each other and must be used
simultaneously to create a pedagogy of literacy inclusive of all students. In an earlier discussion on my teaching practice (this chapter) I illustrated the use of this framework in my teaching to facilitate learning across language and literacies as the following example illustrates.

My class is made up of twenty students twelve of whom identify as Indigenous. Of these students nine are below what Year 2 Diagnostic net testing expects in order to reach Benchmarks in Year three. In an attempt to improve their literacy levels I promoted a hybridised form of a learning style that utilised demonstration, spiritual, semiotic and unique and personal literacy experiences as 'tracks to literacy'. The firstspace is the classroom in which I provided necessary physical space, musical instruments and other dance resources. It was within this firstspace that the Indigenous students would practice traditional dances. Some students emerged during these sessions as leaders. We discussed this form of leadership as a class noting roles and responsibilities of all participants and the personality traits of a good leader. I asked the students if they were prepared to have these people lead them to ensure a commitment to the process.

In the secondspace productive learning occurred as the Indigenous dance leaders successfully encouraged and taught their non-Indigenous classmates the dances. Much of this initially occurred without teacher input. Traditionally male elders controlled aspects of personal relations, property, aspects of diet, localities and names, but public opinion probably played as an important a role as the elders, in everyday life. (Bottoms 1999) It is the public opinion aspect of tradition that I employed in this project. Public opinion had determined the leaders of 'corroborree.' (This is the term the boys in my class use.) Following the success of this strategy, I decided to apply it to other learning activities such as some writing activities where small groups worked together to produce a group negotiated product. So, the learning style of the corroborree remains the Firstspace, whereby the formal dances are introduced. The Secondspace encourages students to perform above themselves and lead or engage in dances. In
the Thirdspace, parallels have been drawn between this style of learning which is appropriate for cultural dances, and transferred to academic lessons, in this case writing and some maths lessons. One and sometimes two people assume the leader role. This is endorsed by the other participants. This organisation has had a positive effect on some students attitudes to learning. This is a simple example of how learning can be organised so that the cultural and linguistic resources of the children are combined to promote positive outcomes.

Hicks (2001) supports the notion of creating "hybrid pedagogical spaces". (2001 p. 226) If teachers are able to approach literacy teaching and learning as an evolving process that produces new and diverse products, the accompanying discourses will also become more accessible for students. This notion is in line with Freire (1993) who suggests that through dialogue teachers and students become jointly responsible for the learning process in which all grow. In this way our once static pedagogical practices grow.

Teachers frequently routinize their ways of thinking and find it hard to change as student populations have. Our students are clearly so inspired by visual literacy especially apparent in the recognition of familiar logos, popular culture and computer and video games utilising the technological and popular culture tracks to literacy. The staffroom discussion in the first vignettes illuminates the teachers' attitudes to popular culture, computer and video games and the students' technological track to literacy. They cannot see beyond the stereotypes traditionally associated with using these resources in classroom practice, that is in a negative light. These can be valuable learning opportunities. As well as taking students into the future with these resources, we are also addressing their past. Traditional learning styles and artefacts that have utilised visual resources, are prevalent in Indigenous historical and contemporary cultures. Hill and Broadhurst (2002) suggest a pedagogy for multiliteracies. This term embraces the interrelations between print, visual and audio texts of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. Semiotics is fundamental to the notion of multiliteracies in which the study of all sign and symbol systems occur and how meaning is communicated via
these systems. (Hill and Broadhurst 2002) Incorporating diverse visual and audio texts into our programs takes into consideration the semiotic road to literacy.

As I have just noted, the idea of inclusivity incorporates visual and electronic literacies and the literacies of popular culture. By the time many young children begin formal schooling they have probably had many experiences involving digital forms of communication. Even if they don’t possess these technologies personally, they will usually have access to them. The students in this study were keenly connected to visual and electronic literacies. These include seeing people use computerised interactive devices, in shops and banks, Play stations, X Boxes, mobile phones, and Gameboys. Electronic literacy, mostly in the form of video games, requires children to learn and think in ways that adult teachers must also become adept in.

Teachers are beginning to use visual and electronic games and resources as a new form of learning and thinking. Multinational companies promote consumerism and thereby increase and ensure markets for products. (Sullivan and Fernandez 2000) This is true for the video and computer game industry. In fact, the video game industry makes as much or more money each year than the film industry. (Gee 2003) Teachers can take advantage of this interest by attending to a whole range of communication practices mirroring those we use with technologies and multiliterate practices. Words, images, charts, maps, graphic organisers, symbolic tools and sounds interact in these technologies and we must incorporate this spectrum of communication practices in our teaching (Snyder 2003) in order to capitalise on the semiotic track to literacy.

Computers are seen as motivators particularly for reluctant readers as well as being suited to breaking the reading act into component parts and providing frequent feedback on progress. (Wild 2000) However a word of caution by di Sessa (2001) reminds us that the www. com mantra is everywhere and “information is a shockingly limited form of knowledge” (di Sessa
This form of knowledge is only one form - but it is a valid one that can be infused into our pedagogical practices.

Inclusive pedagogies aspire to enable all students to be school literate. Academic competence can provide marginalised students with increased life opportunities. Teachers need ongoing opportunities to understand the role of culture in learning and to collaborate in environments that support their emerging understandings. We also require opportunities to examine learning theories and their relationship to the student’s home and school literacy practices. Hybrid theory is one such example. Reflective and situated practice is what is required. In addition to this flexibility in organisation, pedagogy and curriculum should be promoted.

**Implications for understanding Indigenous Youth**

The majority of Indigenous staff interviewed for this research commented that in order to support Indigenous students better, we must really know where our students come from and who they are. This does not simply mean knowing what they do on the weekend but also includes knowing how our students function in the set-ups we have at school. Many Indigenous youth experience prejudice, stereotyping, racism and repeated marginalisation and failure. These encounters negatively affect self-esteem, mental health and academic achievement. (Gay 2000)

This can lead to coping behaviours that resist school rules and may cause complete disengagement. This seems an overly grim picture but such contemporary discourses on youth are familiar. Tait (1993) notes, the 'problem' youth of today find themselves interpreted via a subculture that labels them as 'streetkids'. This diverse group of individuals are transformed into, and positioned as a discrete entity, with specific codes of behaviour and ways of relating to the outside world.
Many of the frameworks that underpin explanations of these studies are structured around a neo-Marxist explanation of the complex relationship which exists between dominant and subordinate social classes. (Tait 1993) And yet, it is crucial that we understand this generation of students that are growing up in a world vastly different to the one we grew up in. There are homogenising factors including music, movies, food, clothing, sport and entertainment activities. These factors are generally related to new technologies and communications, economies, mass media and consumerism. Embedded firmly in these are literacies, common to many students regardless of culture. The current student population have been identified as a disconnected generation. (McCrindle 2004) I worked with an Indigenous youth worker who commented that the kids he was involved with had a great deal of abuse in their lives and adverse poverty. They were uncertain about the present let alone worrying about their futures. They needed empowerment and a sense of identity. They opposed anything they saw that supported the racist ideologies directed against them. (Billy Gordon 2004 personal communication.) Many of the students this youth worker was referring to, have been taught that ‘people like them’ do not do well at school. How to achieve school success has been made largely invisible to them and they look for other ways to obtain power and success. Stigmatised minorities may use popular culture as a way of forging common links and develop dialogic communities of practice. (Marsh 2003) This discourse serves to validate our students’ cultural resources which are firmly embedded in the texts of popular culture.

Our current student population is increasingly entrenched in consumerism that overwhelms many of their lives. Marsh and Thompson (2001) suggest that it is time to firmly embed popular cultural and media texts encountered in the home and family into schooled literacy practices. I have used these texts in my own classroom and found that the students instantly recognise the story, characters, plot, sub-plots, associated vocabulary, humour and place, which I believe makes the literacy focus an easier and more meaningful task. Motivation is a crucial aspect of learning. Popular culture provides the material for student writing and the motivation. If the teachers in the vignettes had a deeper understanding of the students’ home and community
lives and experiences they would see that popular culture is firmly embedded in their out of school lives. The teachers could turn their negative attitudes into proactive ones that acknowledge that popular culture has become an important source of the students identity. Dyson (1997 in Marsh 2003) concluded that popular culture was a medium for advancing social relationships in the classroom and provided a bridge between school literacy and the literacy practices of the children’s unofficial worlds of home and community. The use of popular culture forging social relationships in the classroom has been seen to be extended in the playground. As a kind of lingua franca in the playground, children from diverse linguistic, cultural and economic backgrounds have an opportunity to establish connection with each other. (Marsh 2003)

Kundanis (2003) suggests that children’s self-identity is affected by their experiences of many things. This includes their observations of mass media images and technology. What they see through these channels affects their idea of who they are as well as how they perceive the world. McCrindle (2004) regards the generation we are teaching now as post literate. By this he means that the way students are influenced and 'won over' with information is no longer through traditional teaching methods such as simply listening to what teachers have to say. They are bombarded with multimedia and multi-sensory experiences in their lives. The majority of their time is spent in screen time, that is, X Boxes and Playstations, computers, DVDs, T.V. and mobile phones. The television is an important source of literacy in both the families participating in this study and the students I interviewed. The teachers in the first vignette are very aware of the amount of screen time their students have. McCrindle’s research into the learning channels of students revealed that in the 1970’s, 80% of students were auditory learners. In the 1990’s 80% of students were visual and kinesthetic learners.

Technology supports this visual learning which has the potential to support students’ literacy development. Lankshear and Knobel (1997) claim that technological literacy inherent in playing some video games encourages the acquisition of problem-solving and prediction skills, and
supports the development of a range of higher order capacities such as analysis and synthesis. Video games can provide "opportunities for applying educational principles like building on existing interests, experiences and forms of mastery in order to enable and enhance classroom learning." (Lankshear and Knobel 1997 p. 150) In addition to these overt aspects there are also covert skills being learnt. In learning video games, the player is being apprenticed to rule-governed activities and to testing ideas about how to work within rule-governed settings. This prompted Lankshear and Knobel to conclude that these games teach us that some forms of learning are compelling, fast-paced and rewarding. Self-discovery is important as opposed to the formal didactic forms of instruction. In the technological world, technique and content are forever changing. Our students are adept at keeping up with these changes - it is important that as teachers we can too. Lankshear and Knobel (1997) point out that significant qualitative differences exist between the technological literacy practices enacted across different homes. These differences will have inevitable consequences for patterns of scholastic success and failure. Schools and teachers are once again instrumental in equity agendas being called on to make access to technological literacies as equitable as possible.

More recently Knobel and Lankshear (2004) discussed the widening gulf that exists between the types of literacy schools teach and those they encounter in the world beyond school. Their discussion on 'weblogs' sees it as a new literacy which has emerged from online social practices. 'Blogging' is a kind of recycling of information in that "interesting, curious, hilarious and/or generally newsworthy content" (2004 p.88) is set up as a website or hyperlink by a 'blogger' who constructs a presence online. The authors argue that blogging could become an important aspect of school based learning involving learners and teachers investigating authentic problems and questions. Is this problem-posing education 21st millennium style? It is certainly drawing individuals further into a techno culture, which is a significant part of youth culture.

Daiute (1997) argues that youth culture need not be considered a negative thing. Habits of dress, interest in electronic media, slang and behaviours of youth culture are seen as typically
undesirable and antithetical to learning. Daiute notes that teachers work hard to keep youth genre out of the classroom "requiring quiet classrooms, separating children from their friends, using their own logic as a standard...." (Daiute 1997 p. 327) But the cultures can meet. Daiute suggests that we can do this through challenging collaborative learning activities in a meaningful social context. It is important to recognise youth genre in the classroom. The topics that interest our students hold keys to their culture. Knobel and Lankshear (2004) make the point that everyday cultures must not be incorporated into the classroom in a slap-dash way. Rather the practices, and not the artefacts must reflect the notion that education is a social practice and the different identities students have both in and out of school have the potential to complement each other when technologies are used in this way. This will result in more integrated meaningful learning.

This acknowledged diversity of student populations has meant there needs to be significant changes in the skills and qualities that teachers and education systems promote in their students. We are dealing with new student identities, new economies and workplaces, new technologies, diverse and complex communities and cultures. But this rapid change does not need to be considered a problem. Rather it is an opportunity for teachers to learn new skills and knowledges. "Students engagement with mass media, and popular culture, their focus on electronic communications and their boredom with traditional print media, the rapid changes to our communities and economies: all of these things are often taken as impediments to teaching - an aberration, a silly fad that will soon pass." (Education Queensland 2000 p.2)

These aspects of our emerging world can mean exciting changes for teachers’ work and how we help prepare our students for that world. Programs like Queensland’s New Basics has responded to change that allows staff to focus on the knowledges, skills and discourses required for students in dramatically changing times.

As this new century unfolds, effective teachers will still need to show all the features of good teachers in the past. Teachers will need to have strong educational leadership from the
principal, high expectations of student achievement, an emphasis on basic skill development, a safe, orderly environment and frequent evaluation of pupil progress. (Reynolds et al. 2002) In addition to this teachers will need to see students and their families and carers as participants in robust learning communities with whom they engage in ongoing dialogue to examine their assumptions, theories and practices. Heterogeneity should be an organising principle of instruction and the social, linguistic and cultural resources of all students should be utilised. (Gutierrez 2000) The implication is that learning is the goal of the programs in that all involved are learners. Our learning is never complete. We have already talked about the dynamic nature of knowledge and literacy. The importance of this view cannot be over-stressed. The world we live in is anything but stable and our students are anything but homogeneous. This dynamic nature should drive changes in education and inform our practice.

**Conclusion.**

Children and adults within the families that were part of this study are exposed to an abundance of varied language and literacy practices. The view of literacy as a social practice and its situated nature, means that it is a dynamic and continually changing phenomenon. These situated literacies require a response that is localised. As it renegotiated by members of society teachers must adopt a perspective of literacy that sees it as fluid, and move with these changes. They must recognise differences in the type of literacy materials that are used, the purposes of the literacy event, the mediators of literacy events and the critical role culture plays. Teachers also need to reflect on their own values, their assumptions about meanings and ways of knowing. This should be part of the ongoing educational discourse of teachers.

It is clear that in the present educational climate there is a high priority placed on students’ attainment of literacy standards. As a teacher I have asked myself why the flood of research
identifying the failure of Indigenous students to achieve academic outcomes and age appropriate literacy levels has not illuminated our understandings about how to support the needs of Indigenous students. All too often the focus has been on the students and their family’s cultural inadequacies, but in reality, previous studies have revealed more about teachers, schools and education systems and the accompanying deficiencies in our expectations, observations, policies, programs, structures and infrastructures. School boundaries are traditionally rigid. In addition to this rigidity we see that cultural discontinuities contribute to lower outcomes for Indigenous students. Unequal access to education resources and firmly established power relations between schools and families, ensures that some students remain excluded. Eisner (1979 cited by Marsh 2003) talks of a 'null curriculum' that can be thought of as 'renegade knowledge'. According to Eisner this knowledge is:

"housed within official school discourse but situated behind the backs of teachers........{it} exists outside the boundaries of institutional sanctions and defies institutional order. The null curriculum is represented by silences, deliberate omissions and what the institution of school designates as cultural taboos, controversy or matters deemed extraneous to the values of efficiency and standardisation. Its exclusion is most evident when 'covering the material' mandates the silencing of student voice and, concurrently, the diminishment of students experience."

(Eisner 1979 p.143 cited by Marsh 2003 p.117)

External standards marginalize certain groups of people. Their focus on contrasting and comparing students does not enhance teachers understandings of different cultural processes and knowledges. Schools’ narrow conception of what knowledge is contributes to the success or failure of Indigenous students and their ability to become school literate. This is entwined with the socio-economic and racial inequities that are omnipresent in our societies. As teachers’ we cannot go on the same way and expect different results in student achievement.
One starting point for future work is Watson's (1989) explication that cultures can work together. Watson's idea centers on the belief that the energy which has sustained the earlier intense (and often violent) encounters must be redirected in order that constructive cultural encounters might be achieved. Indigenous students need to be competent in Western literacy practices in order to gain access and compete for jobs that will improve their social conditions. How do the two worlds successfully meet so that one group of people is not disadvantaged? Watson (1989) documented a useful metaphor from the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land which I referred to in Chapter Two of this thesis. In a process of meeting and mixing of two streams, one of which flows from the land (Yolngu knowledge) and the other from the sea (Western knowledge), the meeting of two cultures is explained. "The theory of this confluence, called ganma, holds (in part) that the forces of the streams combine and lead to deeper understanding of the truth." (Watson 1989 p. 5) The interface of the two currents creates foam at the surface. This foam marks the boundary of interchange between two cultures. Both streams contribute equally.

The ability Indigenous Australians have shown in adapting to the most extreme change imposed since European invasion should provide non-Indigenous people with inspiration. There can be no denial however that the social effects of this change have been lasting. Disadvantage is prevalent and it is within school literacy levels that we see the effects of this disadvantage. Western education systems continue to privilege values and ideologies of the dominant elite. As Gee (1996) notes, "The most striking continuity in the history of literacy is the way in which literacy has been used, in age after age, to solidify the social hierarchy, empower elites, and ensure that people lower on the hierarchy accept the values, norms, and beliefs of the elites, even when it is not in their self-interest or group interest to do so." (1996, p 36) Western society has systematically tried to turn all its citizens into what Jack Goody (1982) refers to as members of the same species, homo legens, or 'reading man'. The cumulative effects of
differences in family backgrounds and home-related factors, explain to a significant degree the vast inconsistencies in student literacy performance.

The notion of multiliteracies has informed this thesis with the contention that literacy is not only a social practice, as opposed to a series of technical skills to be studied and learned during formal education, but also that it has a multiplicity of text forms and discourses. A closed list of skills and capabilities that define literacy will never be adequate. Di Sessa (2001) discusses the diversity of literacies making reference to what literacies are valued. He questions, "whose values and of what sort? Scientists' parsimony, citizens' political empowerment, artists' aesthetics, a child's joyfulness in play?" (di Sessa 2001 p.21) Through this we must recognise the inescapable diversity in the phenomenon of literacy. Language and literacy occurs naturally in social life and has different meanings in different contexts for different cultural groups. In this way there are many tracks to literacy learning. School literacies and the literacies found in community and home life are qualitatively different. Neither is inferior to the other. Children integrate and compose a range of 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al 1992 cited by Kelly, Gregory and Williams 2002) from their home and community environments in order to understand how school literacy works. National curriculums and testing processes do not acknowledge the literacies of diverse cultures. Hanlen (2002b) calls for teachers to understand how Indigenous families situate themselves with literacy practices and learning and build on existing knowledge to accommodate Indigenous children's learning needs. This should be part of a teachers 'core business'. Educational theories and practices must be developed in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

On 30th November 2004 the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr. Brendan Nelson MP, announced a National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. Specifically the report stated that
"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to and opportunities in, schooling so that their learning outcomes improve and, over time, match those of other students" and further "all students understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures to Australian society and possess the knowledge, skills and understandings to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians." (Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty First Century, MCEETYA. 2005)

The Queensland Education Views (March 17 2006) had a front page article citing the opening of Australia's first Indigenous leadership institute designed to improve school education and employment opportunities for Indigenous students. Education Minister Rod Welford is quoted as saying the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute "would help principals and teachers develop their skills in leading and teaching Indigenous students." The Minister further commented that the 2004 Benchmark results in reading, writing and numeracy had revealed an improvement in the performance of Indigenous students. Mr. Welford acknowledged the results were encouraging but that there was still much work to be done.

Teachers of the twenty first century face expectations and demands that extend way beyond what was once considered to be the domain of a teacher. Vast changes in our society have impacted on education systems and the manner in which we go about our business. But we can learn from Indigenous Australians, who despite forced and dramatic changes have managed to maintain cultural identity - clearly evident today. As teachers we can learn from this. We can reflect on our own identities and use these understandings as a vehicle for transformation that sees our skills as teachers open doors for all students. As a nation we embrace democracy but do not always give tomorrow's generation an equal place at the starting line. All people involved in the lives of students must take proportional responsibility adopting an approach that shares accountability for our children. As teachers
we must understand that literacy is not value-free. It is not neutral. Literacy interacts with
the cultural practices of a community. We must familiarise ourselves with local knowledge
and actively engage in cross-cultural experiences. Improved literacy competence is a
starting point for people who have been marginalised to improve the social and economic
conditions of their lives. Literacy and its relationship with power should not be maintained
by educational practices that have not evolved with our changing world.

My journey

The opening lines of the preface to Teachers’ Stories (Jalongo and Isenberg with Gerbracht
1995) state, "Becoming a teacher is a complex process characterised by conflicts and
challenges, uncertainty and contradiction. A teacher certification program is barely a starting
point for the journey to competent teaching, much less professional excellence." (Jalongo and
Isenberg with Gerbracht 1995 p. xv) For me this study opened up Govinda’s (1969) concept of
stories and how one story creates other stories. The actors involved give perspectives of an
event according to their viewpoint. As I read, reflected and observed, story after story sprang
to life. The lessons from these stories began to penetrate deeply rather than simply settle
superficially on my skin. Not content with things as they are or the teacher that I am, I began
to deconstruct the policies of the education system of which I am part and then reconstruct my
practice. Reflection was pivotal.

Just as teaching is a social activity, so too is research. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) note, "the
classroom can become a place of endless, repetitive living out of stories without possibility for
awakenings and transformations." (1995 p13) They continue suggesting that "teachers need
other teachers to engage in conversations where stories can be told, reflected back, heard in
different ways, retold and relived in new ways..." (1995 p13). The narrative approach has
supported my professional growth and opened spaces for dialogue with other teachers and
community members where I was once not confident to do so. My own stories have helped me
explore the situations that have challenged me and supported my search for really authentic
learning experiences for my students. This study has opened my eyes in terms of valuing what is
happening in the homes of the students I teach. Prior to this there was a lot of rhetoric about
valuing parents and seeing them as partners in teaching but not a lot of proactive behaviour
that would suggest I really believed this. Talking to, and interviewing the teachers opened the
lines of communication and developed stronger relationships. I made friends with Jeanie and
Esther and still see them socially.

I have learned that there is a great deal of literacy that goes on in the homes of the two
Indigenous families observed in this study, the students interviewed and those I teach. They
have encountered many difficulties within the school system, in addition to experiencing
disadvantage and racism in the wider community. They continue to face hardships such as
limited job opportunities. Other difficulties pervade, such as the making of payments for goods
and services and accessing and understanding many mainstream systems. They know there are
members of the wider community that see them as "using the welfare system." They are aware
that many of their children are experiencing failure at school and are often accused of not
looking after their children properly. The socio-economic status impacts on their lives and yet
they remain optimistic about the future for themselves and their children. The literate
identities they have constructed of themselves make many of the participants believe they are
not competent. Despite this, they are able to mediate all the literacy requirements of the home
and wider community with efficiency. McNaughton (1995) in his study of low income Maori,
Samoan and Europeans reveals resourceful families who support their children’s early literacy
learning in the following ways: joint activities whereby family members offer guidance and
support, personal activities in which the children have opportunities to practice a specific form
of literacy on their own, and ambient activities in which the child is immersed in literacy
practices as part of daily life. We know that literacy is not culturally neutral and families have
varied resources including time and space and many use these effectively to support their children’s learning.

Because of my interest in this study it has made me aware of what I do with my own pre-literate children and I have watched with great interest how their literacy skills have evolved. The literacy events that occur in our household in one day are enormous. My children constantly ask myself or their father to read this, write that, letters to fairies which are left outside and an answer found in the morning, spell books, a la Harry Potter, stories about ponies and dogs. They ‘read’ recipes, write Egyptian Hieroglyphics and make treasure maps for evil and deadly pirates. They make paper money and count it, and make comic books. They write letters and make stamps. They read and present work in all manner of genres. They read 'Kinder Surprises’ and complicated Lego instructions. They ask me to read every label or manual they come into contact with. They are prolific and are a product of my print saturated home environment laden with reading and writing artefacts. I have encouraged this behaviour, sometimes intentionally and sometimes inadvertently. Literacy is such an important part of my identity. For every literacy event that my children engage in, there are other literacy events going on in the homes of the children I teach. They read brochures and write with whatever they find on any surface they can. They watch the weather for suitable times to go camping and hunting. They 'paint up’ and dance, play music, listen to stories. They watch the adults play card games and copy them, they listen to people read the Bible and study family photos. They make up games and rules for them, pretend, role-play and practice. They read food labels and proudly display their new clothes, bags and shoes pointing out the words and reading them carefully. They sell bags of quandongs and limes to fellow classmates negotiating prices and counting takings. They negotiate the purchasing of goods for younger family members. They listen to popular music, play video and computer games and watch a vast array of DVDs. They know every inch of their community environment searching the rainforest for bush food and good hiding spots. They send out written invitations for pretend birthday parties, wear jewellery and decorate their bodies
with words and symbols. They collect stickers and cards, chant rhymes, raps and traditional songs and teach and look after younger family members.

These are all the things I know about because I am their teacher. But for every thing I know, there are many things I do not know. What is important is that their literacy practices are abundant and glowing with life. Through this study my own experience has been enriched. I see that my students bring their home practices with them to school meshing them with what we do in class and producing new and dynamic products. I still see a critical need for competence in formal school literacy. This is illustrated in the following story that stands out in my mind from my experience in an Arnhem Land community. My family and I spent a great deal of time with a man who afforded many hours of his time teaching us about his world. He is a superb bushman and highly respected Lawman. He told me quietly one day that he had won a million dollars. He had received a flyer in the mail about a competition that announced on the front of the envelope that "You are already a winner!" He kept the letter safe and waited for the money telling only a few people. Word got round and within the non-Indigenous community and he was made the subject of humour. What really stood out to me was the powerlessness of his relationship to wider society. In turn, many non-Indigenous community members saw this experience and probably many others like it, as exposing the difficulties that are faced on a daily basis in mainstream community. This impacts on people's confidence in that they see society as finding them 'deficient'. It is a difficult situation for people to change. I learnt the critical importance of appreciating many literacies from many different communities. I learnt that I am in a privileged position and others remain extremely disadvantaged and I learnt that I must change the way I teach in order to provide opportunities for all students to ensure school success.

I once read a poster that said 'at each stage of learning we must give up something, even if it is a way of life that we have always known.' I have learnt a great deal. I can give up some of my old ways, attitudes, and values and become a more effective teacher aware of what is
significant to my students and their needs. But what is critical to this story is that there is no final knowledge. The story is always evolving and will continue to do so as I meet my next class of students.
Epilogue

This year I am fortunate to be working in a school that actively promotes family and carer participation and the building of community links. My research has heightened my understandings of the issues involved hopefully making me a more successful participant in the new project. The principal has identified that families are reluctant or unable to come into the school and we have begun a program to bring the school to the community. The community is in fact made up of a number of small Indigenous communities but we are targeting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous families.

This diagram has been adopted from Goldenberg’s discussion on making schools work for low-income families in the 21st century (2002 p. 212.) Goldenberg comments that these are the national goals for education in the USA. This model is useful for the Kuranda school project as it clearly emphasises the importance of parent/school partnerships and school success for students. Our goal is to support local families in getting their children ready for pre-school and school. (See Hill et. al. 1998 100 Children go to School: Connections and disconnections in
literacy development in the year prior to school and the first year of school. The authors identify within group of 100 students from diverse backgrounds what items children learn most in their first year of formal schooling, contrasting this with the knowledge and skills they have brought with them before school begins. These results not only highlight what the children bring from home and the community, but they are indicative of what teachers are teaching in the first grade. Therefore they are an important source of information.) With a Freirean framework we have encouraged dialogue between the families and the school. Freire discusses the investigative process of uncovering meaningful thematics and problem-posing education. Investigators begin by visiting the area and dialoguing with the community members. Discussions centred around how the school could provide support for children's transition from home to school. In the second stage a proposal was drawn up based on the understandings of literacy practices occurring in the homes and community. The third stage was a return visit to the communities with the proposal. The final stage occurred with the implementation of the program. Interdisciplinary teams work together; in this case health and education. (Freire 1993)

Our starting point was acknowledging the family as the first teachers and working with them to demystify and make explicit the language and concepts we as early childhood teachers promote in our classes. Our program titled 'Families As First Teacher' has targeted families with preschool aged children and we have held workshops in a number of communities whose children attend the local school. Participants have been intergenerational, that is, grandparents, parents, aunties or uncles and siblings, and have engaged in a number of preschool related activities designed to promoted pre-literacy skills. The first sessions in each community have driven the following sessions with input and ideas from the participants. They have talked amongst themselves about the importance and possibility of setting up play groups for their children during the week (those siblings who are too young for pre-school.) What has clearly emerged so far is that it is families, and not just parents, are critical to children's literacy development. Wasik, Dobbins and Herrmann (2002) cite Bronfenbrenner, who concluded that "the family seems to be the most effective and economic system for fostering and sustaining the children's
development. Without family involvement intervention is likely to be unsuccessful and what few effects are achieved are likely to disappear once the intervention is discontinued." (2002 p. 300) Many families send older siblings to participate in the workshops. These siblings are well placed to understand the differing worlds in which their younger siblings make sense of literacy. This feature has been noted by Kelly, Williams and Gregory (2002) who make a strong link between older siblings and their capacity to provide models and support for their brothers and sisters in their literacy development.

The project has been going for more than two years now and thus far it has been greeted with enthusiasm. In 2006 we won a Queensland Education Showcase award for improving students’ outcomes and won this award again in 2007 for significant gains in early years education. Also in 2007 our program won a national Dare To Lead award for commitment to accelerating improvements in the quality of education for Indigenous Australians. The stories and discussions that surround the workshops are about early school literacy, school literacy development and how children learn school literacy. It provides opportunities for myself as one of the presenters to make explicit why we teach particular strategies to children and how they will be able to use these skills at school and in the wider community. All participants thus far have been Indigenous and this has created a kind of focus group whereby family members have discussed their children and their own literacy issues in a supportive environment. For me, the long car trips to one of the communities with the Indigenous co-presenter and interested community members, and the contact with the families which I would not otherwise get, has been invaluable in understanding the backgrounds of some of my students and really getting to know them. Other teachers at the school not directly involved in the project are keen to come to the workshops and meet the parents of their students. The teachers at this school are very committed to understanding their students in order to support the learning and teaching process. I look forward to my involvement and the continuation of this project and the opportunities it provides to improve educational outcomes for students through the forging of authentic relationships with families.
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