

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION:
OUTLINING THE PATH

THE TASK

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and describe the social world of a group of Indigenous Australian postgraduates' experiences in learning the research process. Postgraduates are students who have completed a bachelor's degree, (frequently at honours level) and, who are undertaking further study to upgrade their professional qualifications and/or learn research skills (Ashenden & Milligan 1991, 5; Holmes 1995, 9).

In the first instance this Study responds to a broad priority recommendation outlined in the 1994 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training [hereafter DEET] (1994b, 46). The recommendation calls for "the development of indicators of the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' educational experiences".

It is understood that the recommendation stems from the perception held by the Indigenous community that Western education is not only inappropriate but culturally corrosive (DEET 1994b, 35). Evidence of this concern is provided in the 1994 *National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (DEET 1994b, 35):

Many submissions argue that the content, processes and organization of the dominant forms of Australian education do not acknowledge their culturally corrosive effects on Indigenous Australians. It is crucial, they argue, that the integrity of Aboriginal peoples [Peoples'] and Torres Strait Islanders [Islanders'] knowledge, communities, and cultures be actively recognised and supported as the basis for their continuing development.

The phrase 'culturally corrosive' is taken to mean imposition of knowledge and values significantly different to those of the diverse Australian Indigenous cultures. The issue, 'quality of educational experiences', reflects a continuing collective Indigenous concern for culturally appropriate education provision for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, across all four sectors of education.

In the second instance, the Study relates to four of the listed recommendations for further research, (See page 4 and Appendix One), arising from the only study conducted on Indigenous postgraduates. The study was conducted by the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Indigenous Postgraduate Students' Project Team (hereafter CAPA IPS), and is titled *Indigenous Postgraduate Education* (CAPA 1997).

The CAPA IPS Teams' findings are valuable because an area of Indigenous postgraduate education enquiry is opened up through identifying barriers to students' participation (CAPA 1997, B14¹). We now need to understand the social world of Indigenous postgraduates including their experiences of specific curriculum components offered in Australian postgraduate programs. In this way insights can be gained into the quality of program delivery through matching program

¹ The CAPA IPS document is set out in two sections, A and B. Hence the paging, as referenced, indicates section A or B.

components against student experiences. That is, the entire spectrum of stepping stones to be crossed on the sequential socio-educational path of learning research.

Given that research has recently become a priority area for all Indigenous Peoples, globally, I decided to focus on this aspect of postgraduate program provision (World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples [hereafter WIPC:CIPRIP] 1993, 1).

Interest in researchers and research related issues forms a fundamental part of a global Indigenous move to re-take control of identity construction by creating Indigenous controlled written knowledge traditions (Jordan 1986, 260; WIPC:CIPRIP 1993, 1). 'Construction of Identity' encompasses the notion of 'Indigenes as the primary agents and benefactors of Indigenous knowledge traditions' (WIPC:CIPRIP 1993,1).

I felt that insights into Indigenous postgraduates' experiences in learning the research process would provide theoretically sound cultural information about the quality of program provision through insights into:

- university research training program provision and the learning environment within which it is provided (program setting),
- what postgraduates learn by way of knowledge content and research skills as part of their various processual research training programs (program activities),
- who/what constitutes this new social group of postgraduates, their educational backgrounds, their motivation for postgraduate study (student profiles),
- how postgraduates perceive their various learning experiences and subsequent learning outcomes (student perspectives).

I also anticipated that the cultural information provided by the four broad above-cited curriculum insights would increase understanding about the nature of the knowledge being produced by Indigenous postgraduates. And how, or whether, it influences and/or shapes the contemporary face of Indigenous cultural traditions and cultural practices, as well as those of wider Australia. These are the issues that form the basis of this Study.

Significantly, the issues forming the primary focus of the Study relate to four of the 'recommendations for additional enquiry' proposed in the 1997 CAPA IPS² document. The recommendations are Recommendation XIV (research complexities and protocols in Indigenous communities), Recommendation XIX (research into the nature of cultural differences impeding student progress), Recommendation 21 (evaluation of current practices and procedures in relation to Indigenous postgraduates), and Recommendation 25 (examination of issues relating to Indigenous epistemologies and research ethics).

Consequently, this Study focuses on Indigenous postgraduates engaged in research training culminating in producing research based projects. By 'research project' I mean students engaged in research activity that is to be written up as dissertations/projects or theses comprising twenty thousand to one hundred thousand words. The stipulated word component corresponds to university general criteria for dissertations and theses³ (Maxwell 1992, 4). I specify, here, the significance of the word component as an indicator of a substantial piece of academic work.

² CAPA Secretariat recommendations are annotated in Roman numerals while CAPA IPS Teams' recommendations are noted in Arabic numerals.

³ Dissertations are part of course-based programs whereas theses are part of research-based programs (Maxwell 1992, 3).

Both Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders collectively constitute the Indigenous population of Australia. (The terms, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and Indigenes/Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.) The 1996 census data shows 352,197 Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders living in Australia, constituting approximately 1.6% of Australia's 17.8 million population. Importantly, the Indigenous Populations of Australia are not homogeneous but consist of a variety of groups and individuals with differing cultural traditions (Douglas *et al.* 1988, 75; Hayden & Carpenter 1993, 616).

The most recent, and commonly accepted, definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is the "working definition" used by the Commonwealth government which is based on the 1983 New South Wales Land Rights Act. The definition reads "one who is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as being Aboriginal and is recognized as Aboriginal by the Aboriginal community" (See *inter alia* Creamer 1988, 48; C. Bourke 1996, 2; Lofgren 1996, 10). In texts, the word Aboriginal is often taken to include Torres Strait Islanders as well (C. Bourke 1996, 2). Within Australian society Indigenous Populations are widely acknowledged and, consequently labelled, as a culturally diverse, economically disadvantaged, minority group.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH TASK

Conceptually, two spheres form the background to this emergent enquiry area of Indigenous Postgraduate Education. One sphere concerns the social context of postgraduate education, while the other concerns Indigenous involvement in the sector.

Postgraduate Education: Social Context

The literature is vague but it reveals that Postgraduate programs were first offered in Australian universities during the early third of this century, that is, around the 1930's (Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee [hereafter AVCC] 1990b, 6). In contrast, the first *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* postgraduate course was offered in the mid 1980's at the University of South Australia (McConnochie & Tucker 1990, 63; E. Bourke *et al.* 1991, 5).

Masters degrees were offered, in Australia, early in the century, with Doctor of Philosophy degrees appearing in mid century (AVCC 1990b, 6). The first Australian doctoral degrees were awarded in 1948, to two women and one man (Moses 1984, 154; AVCC 1990b, 8).

Again, in contrast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in postgraduate education is a recent event, beginning in the mid 1960's (CAPA 1997, B16). The first known master's degree awarded to an Indigenous person was in 1968 and the second ten years later in 1978⁴. Records further show the first known doctoral degree awarded to an Indigenous person was in 1973. The next doctoral degrees were awarded in 1989, one in Australia and the other in the United States.

Australian higher education was initially patterned after the British tradition (Meek 1990, 194; Cullen *et al.* 1994, 9). During the last few decades, aspects of German and United States of America postgraduate education approaches have also influenced Australian practice (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 9). Over time, the higher education tradition in Australia has reflected continual ideological and structural change (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 9; Hayward 1998, 59). Conditions have changed in response to

⁴ The first known Australian Indigenous graduates appeared in the late 1950's and early 1960's (C. Bourke 1994, 2).

international models as well as perceived national need arising from social, political, educational, and economic forces (Jakubowicz 1993, 123; Cullen *et al.* 1994, 9).

Historically, the nature of Australian universities has been seen as elitist (Meek 1990, 194-5). It is only within the last decade that universities have opened up to the masses in Australian society following a dramatic education reform in 1988 (DEET 1988a, 6-8). Even so, many argue that elitism prevails in the form of social advantage through acquired social capital (Hayward 1998, 60; CAPA 1997, B26-27). The cultural basis of Australian universities, however, has remained grounded in the Anglo-Celtic traditions (Meek 1990, 196-197; Gamage 1993a, 69; CAPA 1997, B27). (This issue will be taken up in Chapter 2.)

Role and Function of Research and Research Training

Postgraduate education is acknowledged as a national necessity given that universities are the main providers of professional preparation and research training in Australia (Powles 1984, vii; R. Smith 1989, 74, Korb *et al.* 1998, 17). The Australian Research Council⁵ (hereafter ARC) states postgraduate research training is fundamental to Australia's economic growth and cultural development (National Board of Employment, Education and Training [hereafter NBEET] 1992, 3-4). Significantly, the ARC states that postgraduate students' research constitutes a "major part of the research output of higher education (NBEET 1992, 5).

⁵ The ARC is a statutory body, (established in 1988), whose responsibility is to advise the Commonwealth government on research funding, "national research priorities, co-ordination of research policy, research programs and training, and the improvement of research collaboration and transfer" (R. West 1998, 75). The ARC provides its advice through NBEET (NBEET 1992, 6).

Three main purposes of research and research training are listed by the R. West Review Committee, in the 1998 *Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy* (1998, 50). They include:

- train higher degree research students and to enable the teaching provided to other students to be informed by research;
- contribute to innovation in Australia through the production and diffusion of knowledge and skills; and
- expand the world stock of knowledge.

Furthermore, the ARC (NBEET 1992, 1) states that the three key functions of higher education are teaching, research, and scholarship that encompass professional practice. The three attributes are perceived as inter-related inasmuch as each element is informed by the others (R. Smith 1989, 116; NBEET 1992, 3; Korb *et al.* 1998, 18). Universities are expected to foster development of all three elements in both staff and postgraduate students (NBEET 1992, 2-3). Universities in other countries adhere to the same practice, for example, the United Kingdom (Middlehurst 1993, 50-52).

Importantly, expertise in teaching, research, and professional practice constitute the basic attributes of an academic as well as the activities of academic life (Middlehurst 1993, 73; Lowe 1994, 33, Korb *et al.* 1998, 18). Previously, those with master's degrees were acknowledged as academics. Today, the academic entry trend shows a shift toward doctoral degrees as minimal qualifications (Alderman 1994, 22; Pearson & Ford 1997, 10).

Postgraduate qualifications signal to the public that minimum professional standards have been attained within the respective professions (Lowe 1994, 17). These students are thus assumed to

possess increased professional expertise and, in the case of research degree students, independent researcher status.

Societal Expectations of Universities

All education interest groups generally view the university's primary function as knowledge transmission and professional accreditation (Meek 1990, 203; Lowe 1994, 49). However, different sets of community interest groups have competing demands and expectations of universities regarding research training (DEET 1988a, 9; Middlehurst 1993, 196). Industry, for example, requires personnel who can conduct effective research in an industrial setting (Sekhon 1989, 197; R. Smith 1989, 66).

In contrast, Australian Indigenous Peoples require proficient, but culturally sensitive, researchers who can assist the process of Indigenous self-determination (See *inter alia* Lanhupuy 1987, 32; DEET 1988b, 34; Bin-Sallik 1989, 62). The definition of the term culturally sensitive is not evident in the literature, however, the implied meaning assumes the notion of awareness of, and positive disposition towards, the various Indigenous cultural heritages and knowledge traditions.

Significantly, the term 'self-determination' is difficult to define but Indigenous generally perceive self-determination as "the right to make decisions on issues relating to them and to manage their own affairs" (D. Roberts 1994, 212). In reality, the degree to which Indigenous self-determination can be attained in Australia is arguable.

Thus, D. Roberts (1994, 212), attests that the Commonwealth government "limits the exercise of self-determination to what is compatible with the interests of the Australian state". Nevertheless, self-determination efforts are legitimated, within the Western world, under the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (Coombs, 1994, 226).

Other Indigenous Peoples have established their own culture-specific universities in furtherance of their self-determination pursuits (R. Morgan 1992, 54-57; Williams *et al.* 1993, 289-301; Willmot 1995, 2). Examples include the United States, Canada, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Indigenous Australians, however, have only recently begun seriously exploring this possibility⁶ (Koori Mail 1995, 29; Weir 1996b, 12; C. Bourke 1996).

Meanwhile, Australian Indigenous students pursue their higher education aspirations within Australian 'mainstream' universities. Australian Indigenous Peoples, however, have specific expectations and requirements of universities, as outlined in the 1989 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (hereafter NATSIEP Policy), that is, "culturally appropriate education delivery" and "autonomy" (DEET 1989).

Indigenous Postgraduate Education Perspectives

Australian Indigenous Peoples, along with their international Indigenous counterparts throughout the world, are striving for culturally appropriate education provision, as a means of facilitating self-

⁶ Optional models are discussed in Willmot 1995.

determination and cultural preservation (World Indigenous Peoples Conference: Education [hereafter WIPC:E] 1993a, 7; Durie 1996, 23).

Self-determination in education, globally, is essentially seen as control of 'construction of identity' which involves Indigenous Peoples' writing their own knowledge traditions. National strategies differ concomitant with the socio-political and politico-legal context within which each Indigenous group is situated.

Australian Indigenous self-determination aims in education are framed around "culturally appropriate education provision" (DEET 1989). Some Indigenous people as well as some educators perceive that 'culturally appropriate education' can best be provided by incorporating varying perceptions of 'two-way/both ways' curriculum models⁷ (See *inter alia* Lanhupuy 1987, 34; Reid 1993, 86; Panot *et al.* 1994, unpaginated). The aims of the varying models represent understanding of the need to bring together Indigenous knowledge traditions and Western knowledge traditions (See *inter alia* Lanhupuy 1987, 34; H. Reid 1993, 86; Panot *et al.* 1994, unpaginated).

The various two-way/both ways curriculum models reflect traditional Indigenous practices of incorporating the three key elements in an education program, that is, institutions, students, and the local community (Prophet 1983). Furthermore, the models incorporate Indigenous historic practice wherein Elders are respected as cultural leaders and knowledge experts (Moodie 1992, 21; WIPC:E 1994, 28).

Indigenous education efforts are conducted within a spirit of Reconciliation. That is, "bringing together" Indigenous Peoples; governments; and other Australians within one national political estate

⁷ Aboriginal theorizing on four "two ways/both ways" conceptual models is elaborated in Jordan undated, 6-16.

(Bin-Sallik 1991, 56; D. Roberts 1994, 213). Cynicism about the process exists in the minds of some (Burney 1991, 41; Heath 1991, 33; Fesl 1993, 192-194). In contrast, Bin-Sallik (1991, 56-57) enters the spirit by calling for the higher education sector to engage in the Reconciliation Process on 'curriculum' terms. In other words, re-thinking knowledge production processes and the status and treatment of Indigenous People within them (Bin-Sallik 1991, 56-57). The CAPA IPS Team echoes the same view (1997, B32-33).

At the present time, considerable tension exists on the Australian socio-political scene as a result of three major unresolved social issues. Namely, *Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Indigenous incarceration), *The Stolen Generations* (prior forced removal of Aboriginal children from their parents and homelands), and The Wik Debate (Indigenous Land Rights). The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B22-23), suggests that the present Commonwealth government lacks empathy for Indigenous Peoples and, further that, the broader Australian 'community' has hardened its attitude towards Indigenous Peoples. These issues affect the lives of Indigenous postgraduates as they go about their studies.

Indigenous Perspectives on Research Practices

Since Australian Indigenous research is about studying Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, Indigenous Peoples are concerned about the 'who, what, and how' of this knowledge expansion process. That is, who is to do the research; what is to be studied; and how the research is to be conducted as well as the uses to which the research is put (See *inter alia* Bin-Sallik 1991, 61; E. West 1991, 52; Williams & Stewart 1992, 91).

Two allied philosophical notions underpin fundamental Indigenous research concerns. First, 'authority to interpret and theorize about people's lives and experiences' (Wilton 1993, 163). Second, representational authority, that is, who ought to be representing Indigenous views and values (E. Bourke 1994, 10; Currie 1994, unpaginated). Another aspect of this debate involves the contentious issue "Who should teach Aboriginal Studies", that is, Indigenous or non-Indigenous lecturers.

Historically, Indigenous knowledge traditions can be mapped through three critical intellectual periods. First, the Pre-Contact Period, wherein Indigenous societies controlled their identity construction via oral knowledge traditions arising from the various Indigenous world-views.

Second, the Post-Contact Period, wherein non-Indigenous researchers created written Indigenous knowledge traditions. Considerable ongoing tension exists about the 'images' created by some of these researchers as well as methodologies used in such constructions (See, *inter alia*, Langton 1981; Hughes 1984; Tupuola 1993; Rigney 1996; and L. Smith 1996).

Third, the Indigenous Cultural Renaissance Period, in which Indigenous societies are engaged in re-taking control of identity construction by creating their own written knowledge traditions. This strategy signals a dramatic cultural shift from orality (an oral cultural tradition), to literacy (a literate cultural tradition). Little Australian literature is available about this issue. However, for my People, the Malara, the cultural shift is one from orality to selective literacy (See Weir 1993, 1997). In other words, sacred, secret, and confidential information remain within the realms of orality.

Training culturally sensitive researchers is fundamental to the successful carriage of Indigenous cultural goals in this latter period. However, little is known about the training these researchers are receiving. Indigenous researchers are trained either in the academy or, other places such as research institutes. McGrath, (1995b, 374) asserts that Aboriginal history is mainly constructed outside the academy because the discipline is “non-exclusive” and, because “its language or theory is not specialist”.

Significantly, a growing international pool of Indigenous education literature is now evident. This literature constitutes an emergent Indigenous School of Thought. At this time no structural map of an Indigenous school of Thought exists. My perception of an Indigenous School of Thought is one that incorporates all writings about Indigenous Affairs and issues involving Indigenous culture and heritage that is authored by Indigenous persons.

Dodson, in a 1994 Wentworth Lecture titled *The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality*, offers a comprehensive discussion of the politics of defining Aboriginality and how the power to construct the definition continually affects Aboriginal lives. He argues, (1994, 8), that the definitional debate is not about “whether the content of these images is true or false” but, the fact that construction of selected aspects of Aboriginality have been used for manipulative purposes to further the aspirations of other peoples.

As a result of historical precedent, non-Indigenes are universally recognized as ‘the experts’ in Indigenous matters (E. West 1991, 52; W. Brady 1995, 13; D. Roberts 1995, 36). Indigenous leaders and researchers are striving to overturn this state of affairs by taking control of their own knowledge and images through academic research (E. West 1991, 52; Williams & Stewart 1992, 91; D. Roberts 1995, 39).

One initiative involves encouraging Indigenous students to use Indigenous source materials as references in their writings (Sabbioni 1992, 89; Felton 1993, 39; Horton, 1994, 275). This strategy is perceived as fulfilling two purposes, that is, raising the profile of Indigenous material and, providing a comparison with non-Indigenous perceptions of Aboriginality⁸ (Felton 1993, 39; Horton 1994, 275).

Using 'Indigenous only' source materials is complicated by the fact that there are few published Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bibliographies (See Appendix Two for a list). Furthermore, given that the status of the material mainly falls within the realm of discussion and debate as well as experiential information, debate about its legitimacy is absent from the literature. How students resolve this issue is a matter for further enquiry, which forms part of this study.

Importantly, a comprehensive bibliography of postgraduate theses and dissertations does not exist. Whereas students researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues often donate a copy of their thesis to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, only seven Indigenous higher degree students as well as eight bachelor honours students have done so. Theses by Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are also listed in *The Australian Education Index* (published annually since 1978) but the listing is incomplete.

Postgraduate students engaged in research activity impact on the knowledge production process inasmuch as they are engaged in original research activities which are written up in the form of dissertations and theses, usually published in either, full or abridged form. Students have a moral and political responsibility in knowledge construction,

⁸ Prior to the 1960's few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders produced literary or academic works (Horton 1994, 275).

especially in terms of research approach and theoretical choice, because these choices 'set the scene' for future studies (Lever 1975, 146).

Postgraduate students, consequently, have the potential to shape debates in the same way as does academia (Thiele 1984, 165-166). Information about research training, and the way it shapes Indigenous researcher/theorizer views, thus becomes increasingly important, during the present Indigenous Cultural Renaissance Period. This issue will be taken up as part of this Study.

Resolution of Indigenous research concerns is subsumed under the strategy of 'community control', incorporating adherence to Indigenous knowledge traditions and Indigenous cultural protocols. These research imperatives impact on postgraduate research training programs. Whether the guidelines and protocols constitute part of the curricula of research training programs requires investigation, which is part of this study.

Community control of research is considered essential to individual community self-determination aspirations (Williams & Stewart 1992, 96-97). Williams and Stewart (1992, 97) explain the implications of this concept, which possibly reflects other Indigenous Peoples' research objectives:

The key features of this new paradigm include the redefinition of relationships in the research process, appropriate initiation of research projects, development of appropriate consultation and negotiation procedures, construction and implementation of accountability procedures, and proper recognition of rights in terms of ownership, copyright and publication. At the heart of this definition are concerns about power and control. Above all, it is about communities using their collective participatory and collaborative decision-making processes to ensure that power and control is exercised by the community and in the interests of the community.

Guidelines on research ethics, protocols, and ownership of intellectual property are constructed by most Indigenous organizations and Indigenous Education/Support Units (D. Roberts 1995, 39). Universities may also construct guidelines (D. Roberts 1995, 39) but only a few such as the University of New England (hereafter UNE) have done so. Inasmuch as these guidelines are expected to be followed by all researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, they represent aspects of training required for researchers who intend entering this field of enquiry.

Other global Indigenous groups express similar concerns about Indigenous intellectual materials and cultural appropriation. For example, North American Indians (Swisher 1995 cited at the 1995 Indigenous Higher Education Conference), and Maoris (Tupuola 1993; L. Smith 1996). To this end, a global network of Indigenous Peoples exists to pursue Indigenous education rights and freedoms in a politically driven, co-ordinated fashion (WIPC:E 1993a, 4).

Suffice it to say here that two documents form the basis of international Indigenous collaborative politico-educational action, namely, the 1993 *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education*⁹ and 1993 *Mataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (hereafter WIPC:CIPRIP). (Titles of the documents derive from the places of where they were constructed, namely, Coolangatta, Australia and The Nine Tribes of Mataatua around the Bay of Plenty in New Zealand.)

⁹ The Coolangatta Statement was revised and re-endorsed at the 1996 WIPC;E conference.

Both documents are to be submitted to the United Nations for adoption and, subsequent ratification and endorsement by 'home' countries. Reasons for this political strategy are outlined in the preamble to the draft Coolangatta Statement (WIPC:E 1993a, 4):

The need for such an instrument is self-evident. Over the last 30 years Indigenous people have argued that they have been denied equity in non-Indigenous education systems, and that non-Indigenous education systems have failed to provide education services which are both scholarly and culturally nurturing.

Almost all Indigenous peoples and in particular, those who have suffered the impact and effects of colonisation, have struggled to access education that acknowledges, respects and promotes **the right of Indigenous peoples to be Indigenous.**

The *Coolangatta Statement* is organized around the principle that Indigenous Peoples have the "inalienable right to be Indigenous, which includes the right to self determination" (WIPC:E 1993a, 3). The underpinning thread of the document incorporates two fundamental notions. First, Elders as keepers of Law and culture as well as being teachers (WIPC:E 1994, 28). Second, Spirituality as a shared common cultural value (WIPC:E 1994). (Refer to Appendix One for WIPC:E 1993 Elder's Vision Statement.)

Research recommendations targeted at Indigenous Peoples, States, National and International agencies form the basis of the *Mataatua Declaration*. The conceptual basis of the document is framed around six principles (WIPC: Conference on Intellectual and Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples [hereafter CIPRIP] 1993, 1):

We

Declare that the Indigenous Peoples of the world have the right to self-determination, and in exercising that right must be recognised as the exclusive owners of their culture and intellectual property;

Acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples have a commonality of experiences relating to the exploitation of their culture and intellectual property;

Affirm that the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples of the world is of benefit to humanity;

Recognise that Indigenous Peoples are capable of managing traditional knowledge themselves, but are willing to offer it to all humanity provided their fundamental rights to define and control this knowledge are protected by the international community;

Insist that the first beneficiaries of indigenous knowledge (culture and intellectual property rights) must be the direct indigenous descendants of such knowledge;

Declare that all forms of discrimination and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous knowledge and indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights must cease.

Some Australian Indigenous Communities refer to the above-noted documents when devising research guidelines. Notably, research guidelines tend to be stringent to ensure culturally acceptable research practices are followed (E. West 1991, 52; Williams & Stewart 1992, 91).

Recommended methodologies include action-oriented research and "research relevant to the needs of Aboriginal people as defined by Aboriginal people" (National Aboriginal Education Committee¹⁰ [hereafter NAEC] 1985, 34). Jordan (undated, 5) questions this advice

¹⁰ The NAEC became defunct in 1989.

arguing that concentration on one methodology could create dependency on Western theorizing.

Other commonly used theoretical frameworks include cultural dualism (Weir 1993, 3) as well as feminist frameworks such as those used to construct life histories and express women's concerns (Rigney 1996) and, more recently, poststructuralism (Bin-Sallik *et al.* 1994b). These methodologies facilitate, respectively, cultural comparison, deconstruction of existing patriarchal images, and deconstruction through language analysis.

Importantly, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders express concerns about the cultural appropriateness of western methodologies and methods in Indigenous research (Langton 1981, 21-22; Hughes 1984, 20; M. Brady 1990, 18). Maoris echo similar views (Tupuola 1993; L. Smith 1994, 1), as do sectors of Western society such as women (Stanley & Wise, 1983; Weedon, 1987; Pettman 1992). Hughes (1984, 20) provides an explanation of Indigenous methodological concerns:

The theories and methodologies used in education are designed by and for middle class Australians of Anglo-Saxon extraction ... Curriculum theories and methodologies are therefore largely inappropriate ... [for Aborigines] ... and this also contributes to a lack of success of Aboriginal students. The end result is institutionalised racism and assimilation, albeit unintentional and unconscious.

Jordan, a non-Indigenous academic, provides two illustrative examples in support of Indigenous methodological grievances. First, Jordan (undated, 20-21), argues that framing Indigenous 'identity construction' within the Western conceptualization of Resistance Theory, leads to cultural misinterpretations and misrepresentations.

Namely, the incorrect assumption that Indigenous persons reject Western knowledge, when in actuality, Western solutions to Indigenous

problems are being rejected. Second, Jordan (undated 20) asserts that the anthropological trend of framing Indigenous 'identity construction' within historical frameworks denies evolutionary cultural developmental realities. (Other examples of Indigenous methodological issues are raised in Chapter 3.)

Nevertheless, little Australian Indigenous material is available on precisely what is considered culturally relevant methodological criteria. One can speculate that this information gap affects postgraduates as they make their methodological choices.

Some Indigenous scholars, however, are developing 'other' theoretical perspectives and methodologies as alternatives to western theoretical frameworks. For example, various Australian Northern Territory community constructions of holistic methodologies which are based on Action Research but framed on traditional cultural knowledge perspectives (Harvey & McGinty 1988; Marika *et al.* 1989); Rigney's 1996 Indigenist Methodology framed on counter-racist principles; Maori exploration of alternate methodologies and methods (Tupuola 1993; L. Smith 1996); Weir's Spiritual Methodology (1997); as well as Maori critiques of Western Research (Bishop 1996; L. Smith 1996).

Efforts to change the power relationship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research are resisted by some non-Indigenous academics (E. West 1991, 51; D. Roberts 1995, 39). Reasons proffered for this stance include loss of freedom in academic enquiry; potential closure of research areas; danger of only 'politically expedient' research being produced; apprehension that the research process could be compromised; and misgivings that research findings could be tainted (D. Roberts 1995, 39).

Other academics assert that rigid Aboriginal 'research control' measures controverts intellectual freedom (R. Berndt & C. Berndt 1992, 547; Mulvaney 1991 cited in D. Roberts 1995, 29). Considerable tension exists over power relationships in Indigenous research. (For further reading see Attwood and Arnold 1992; Bin-Sallik 1991, 1993; Miller 1991; D. Roberts 1995; Partington 1996.) Partington's (1996, 78) *Hasluck versus Coombs, White Politics and Australia's Aborigines* raises many controversial issues and also questions many basic assumptions in the literature such as "Aboriginals timeless links with the land" (Partington 1996, 78).

Evidence exists, however, of greater Indigenous community involvement in research projects as well as increased attention, by academics, in applying culturally appropriate research procedures (Veth 1991, 63-65; D. Roberts 1995, 37). For example, construction of Codes of Ethics by professional organizations and, willingness to enter contractual agreements underpinned by culturally appropriate principles (Hatte *et al.* 1991, 69-70; Veth 1991, 63; D. Roberts 1995, 38).

Postgraduate Education: Benefits

The ARC (NBEET 1992, 3), asserts that postgraduate education benefits the general community in five main ways:

- contributions to the quality of our culture;
- direct applications of research results;
- graduates of high quality;
- increased institutional capacity for consulting, contract research and other service activities; and
- international links.

Examples of community benefits through the advancement of knowledge are enquiry into key social problems and development of new products

and industrial processes (Brennan 1992, 2; Gallagher 1992 cited in Cullen 1993, 35). The Indigenous community is believed to specifically benefit by increased numbers of Indigenous professionals and researchers.

Postgraduates themselves are said to benefit by increased expertise in an academic field as well as increased research skills (Becher 1989, 106). In practical terms, this means enhanced career opportunities and potential higher income levels for postgraduates (Hayden & Carpenter 1993, 497).

Postgraduate employment destinations comprise Academia, the public service (Lowe 1994, 35), and the private sector (R. Smith 1989, 121-126). Career prospects in academia are currently rated as poor, due to unsatisfactory industrial conditions and less job security (Lowe 1994, 35; Korb *et al.* 1998, 18). The same perceptions about career prospects holds true for Indigenous postgraduates (CAPA 1997, B30).

The CAPA IPS Team speculates that there is less incentive for Indigenous postgraduates to acquire postgraduate qualifications as long as promotional positions are occupied by non-Indigenous 'experts' (CAPA 1997, B30). Consequently, the CAPA IPS Team (1997, B30) recommends universities undertake systematic Indigenization of key Indigenous leadership roles and senior Indigenous positions.

Another important employment condition relates to the fact that 'membership and status' in academia is measured by research output (Becher 1989, 3; R. Smith 1989, 74). Consequently, staff promotion is linked to research reputation (Heath 1991, 34; Lowe 1994, 50). Heath (1991, 34) asserts that Indigenous staff are "restricted in their ability to obtain internal research grants". Heath's comment reflects the fact that few Australian Indigenous staff are employed as lecturers 'within the

various disciplines'. No statistics exist on Indigenous staff promotional positions.

The 1991 DEET Enquiry *Career Development in Higher Education* (E. Bourke *et al.* 1991, 24) shows that Indigenous academics only comprise a small percentage of university academics. Indigenous academics appear to be mainly employed in *Indigenous Support Programs* with a lesser number in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies* programs and, even lower numbers in other Departments (Pettman 1992, ix; Hollingsworth 1993, 110; W. Brady 1995, 11). The 1997 CAPA IPS findings indicate this proportional imbalance still exists (1997, B29).

Other Indigenous groups reflect this same pattern of employment numbers and occupational positions. For example, North American Indians (Swisher cited 1995 at Indigenous Higher Education Conference, University of South Australia), and Maoris in Aotearoa/New Zealand (L. Smith cited 1998 at International Womens' Conference, University of Technology, Sydney).

Indigenous Involvement in the Postgraduate Sector

Indigenous entry into the postgraduate sector of education is a recent event (CAPA 1997, B16). In this regard, students entering this sector constitute a new social group in the tertiary education sector, the Australian Indigenous community, and the broader Australian community.

The postgraduate sector is peopled by students undertaking Postgraduate Diploma (master's qualifying courses), Master's by Coursework and, Higher Degrees by Research programs (University of

Canberra [hereafter UCAN] 1996, 60-67). Three Higher Degrees by Research programs exist, that is, Master's by Research, Doctor of Philosophy, and Professional Doctorates (UCAN 1996, 67). Statistics obtained from the Department of Education, Employment and Training, and Youth Affairs¹¹, (hereafter DEETYA), show the below listed (See Table 1.1) Indigenous postgraduate, across Australia, sector enrolments for 1996. These 1996 figures are given because my fieldwork endeavours commenced in 1996.

Table 1.1: 1996 Indigenous Postgraduate Enrolments.

Doctor of Philosophy	68
Professional Doctorate	0
Master's-by-research	55
Master's-by-coursework	209
Postgraduate qualifying and preliminary programs	6
Total	338

Table 1.1 depicts statistical evidence that a significant, (for the Indigenous community), number of Indigenous students are engaged in the postgraduate sector. However, in equity terms Indigenous postgraduates are acknowledged as being under-represented in the postgraduate sector, constituting only 0.3% of total student enrolments (CAPA 1997, B30). Precisely what the 0.3% figure represents in comparative enrolment terms is not clearly stated in either the 1998 R. West Report or by the CAPA IPS Team.

In socio-economic terms, the low enrolment figure indicates limited Indigenous representation in professional fields, including academia. Significantly, the majority of Indigenous students are enrolled in 'mainstream' courses and not, Indigenous Cultural Studies Programs

¹¹ The figure is an underestimation since DEETYA statistics are only drawn from those students accessing government funding from Abstudy for their studies.

(C. Bourke 1996, 7; DETYA¹² 2000a, 17). Notwithstanding, it is not known what, if any, cultural ramifications arise from these discipline choices.

Indigenous postgraduate 'enrolment by discipline' statistics are published annually by DETYA. Understandably, postgraduate disciplinary enrolments (DETYA 2000a, 137 & 141), reflect similar trends to those of undergraduates. In numerically descending order they are: Education, Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences, Health, and Law.

Two implications arise from the statistics. First, the statistics tentatively indicate a lower level of academic representation at the postgraduate level in Business; Administration; Science, and Economics and, conversely, a higher representation in Education, Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences, Health, and Law. Moreover, the conclusion can be drawn that these same patterns are reflected in the professional sector of Australian society.

Notwithstanding, in terms of research training for Indigenous postgraduates, it is not known whether the Australian 'system' is fulfilling the aims of the collective Indigenous Australian Community. In particular, the collective Indigenous Australian Community wishes to know whether the System is training culturally sensitive researchers, the nature and quality of the research training, and what implications arise from student involvement in this education sector.

Furthermore, since little is known about this new social group I will also explore if, and/or how, Indigenous postgraduates are establishing a Sense of Place in postgraduate education. For Australian Indigenous Peoples it is a commonsense and well acknowledged tradition that entry

¹² DEETYA changed to DETYA, (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs around 1996.

into a 'new place' entails establishing/claiming this new space through establishing a Sense of Place.

Sense of Place is an abstract social mechanism for establishing order in the social structure of Indigenous society. It enables persons to 'know their place' by understanding their role and function and the protocols governing standards of behaviour within a space, be it physical and/or abstract.

Procedural Sense of Place measures involve claiming space on spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical levels of being/consciousness. In practical terms, the procedural practice also requires that kinship relationships and cultural protocols be instituted. Of particular relevance to researchers are those involving knowledge transmission (authority and representation protocols), and accountability procedures framed on community control of research procedures as outlined by Williams and Stewart (1992, 96-97) earlier in this chapter.

Willmot (1986, 27), in speaking about the entry of Indigenous students into the tertiary sector as long ago as 1986, observed that the students would have a lasting effect on Australian society. The same statement could apply to the Indigenous postgraduate sector today. Willmot (1986, 27), further asserted in 1986 that the next Indigenous generation would comprise "a group of elder statesmen and women different from anything that has existed before". The addition of a significant number of postgraduates to Willmot's predictive formula increases the probability of his observation coming to fruition.

Having explored the background to the study by outlining the Social Context of Postgraduate Education and, Indigenous Involvement in the Postgraduate Sector, I now explain my research orientation.

RE-STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH TASK

Information is known about barriers to the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduates as reported in the 1997 CAPA *Indigenous Postgraduate Education* project. However, a comprehensive picture of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates' experiences in 'learning to do research', remains unpainted. Information is thus not available about the precise quality of each program component within the totality of postgraduate program training. Consequently, there is an urgent need for a conceptualization of the phenomenon as a basis for filling this knowledge gap.

My research orientation, therefore, focuses on describing the social world of a group of Indigenous postgraduates by looking for the meaning the group itself gives to the dynamic learning world they inhabit (Kellehear 1993, 21; Sarantakos 1993, 37). This orientation follows prescribed research procedures for emergent phenomena (Salkind 1994, 12; Sarantakos 1993, 7).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This Study was considered significant for three reasons. First, it was intended to offer a conceptualization of the phenomenon and, thereby, lay a foundation for subsequent investigation into this recently designated priority research area (Chenitz & Swanson 1986, 7), in the field of Australian Indigenous education (DEET 1994b, 46).

Second, it was believed that such a conceptualization would serve as a basis for evaluating the existing quality of postgraduate program provision for Indigenous postgraduates. Third, it was conceived that the Study itself would be interesting since little has been written about Indigenous scholars researching Indigenous communities (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 182).

The value of the Study was seen as resting in the fact that stakeholders, as well as related interest groups, could enter the social world of learning research by way of a detailed descriptive account and, thereby, increase their understanding of the phenomenon (Patton 1990, 203; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 213). I perceived that interest groups would include those not directly involved with postgraduate programs such as the wider Indigenous community, the wider university sector, and by implication other Indigenous postgraduates and other postgraduate students.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The thesis is organized so that a developmental picture of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates' experiences in learning research is constructed, chapter by chapter. Chapters Two to Six provide aspects of the developing picture, including the Methodology used to guide the research. Then, having described aspects of the developing picture, a comprehensive narrative conceptualization is presented in Chapter Seven. A summary of the research procedure and major findings are subsequently proffered in Chapter Eight. A fuller description of chapter outlines follows.

The situational context, the setting, of the study is outlined in Chapter Two by constructing an epistemological picture of Australian

postgraduate program provision. The picture illuminates Higher Education policy guidelines, related research, and postgraduate program components. Documented accounts of Indigenous Australian postgraduate students involvement in these programs is also included.

In this way insights are gained into the extrinsic socio-cultural, socio-educational, and socio-political conditions within which Australian Indigenous postgraduates learn to do research. Three geo-political settings are relevant, the international, national, and the local institutional university setting.

The theoretical orientation which informs the basis of this Study is explained in Chapter Three. The research approach is described as well as the Methodology including research protocols, the theoretical approach, ethical considerations, selection of participants, data collection, processing and analysis procedures and processes, as well as the limitations and delimitations in methodological choice.

In Chapter Four, I begin to map the social world, (a methodological window), of participants' experiences in learning research. Facets of this intrinsic social world provide insights into the educational backgrounds of participants and their experiences of prescribed program components as well as the nature of program instructional arrangements.

In particular, I explore their motivation for pursuing higher degree studies, program goals, prior research experience, pre-program preparations, and experiences of program content. Quandaries about unknown features of proposed study programs as well as what they hope to achieve are also explored.

A descriptive account of participants' experiences of engagement in learning the research process is presented in Chapter Five. Aspects of the picture include the learning continuum/sequence of the research process, that is, data collection and analysis.

Participant views are further explored in Chapter Six through exploration of their perspectives on their experiences of writing knowledge, their socio-cultural and socio-political learning environment, the way in which their progress was monitored, and their perceptions of the learning outcomes of learning to do research.

In Chapter Seven, participants' social world of learning research is portrayed in a narrative description, a conceptualization, of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates learning research. Analysis involves drawing conclusions about the nature and quality of Indigenous postgraduates social world of learning to do research.

Chapter Eight contains a summary of the research approach, research procedures, and the research outcomes. Emergent patterns are summarized and the research findings noted. Recommendations for further research are also offered.

We now begin the journey into the social world of Indigenous Postgraduates by describing the situational context within which they learn to do research in Chapter Two.

SECTION ONE

OUTLINE

This Section of the thesis consists of two chapters which frame the context of the study, that is, the literature review and the methodological basis for researching my topic.

In Chapter Two the prevailing situational context within which Indigenous postgraduates learn to do research in Australian universities is outlined. The stepping stones of the path to be travelled by research trainees is thus recorded as part of the data from which program quality will be evaluated.

Subsequently, in light of further understanding of the context of the Study, my search for a theoretical framework and resultant research design are documented in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW:
SITUATING THE PATH

OVERVIEW

This chapter is concerned with reviewing the literature as the basis for constructing a picture of the situational context within which Indigenous postgraduates learn the research process (Patton 1990, 95). In this way, Indigenous postgraduates' social world of learning is located in space, time, and social context. The constructed picture provides insights into the practical realities of the path Indigenous postgraduates must travel to learn to do research, in Australian universities (Kellehear 1993, 21; Greene 1994, 536).

Inasmuch as other Equity group postgraduates are engaged in this same path, primary sources of data (Salkind 1994, 57) are used to note the similarities and differences in experiential happenings between them and Indigenous postgraduates. The situational context thus incorporates depth and breadth to provide a comprehensive understanding of the situated context of Indigenous postgraduates' social world of learning. The material is organized in accord with prevailing practice in postgraduate enquiry except for the first section, which is my own construction.

In analysing the situational context I explore and deliberate on the Bureaucratic Framework, Program Setting, Program Structure: Content, Program Learning Conditions, and Program Outcomes. A Summary concludes the chapter.

BUREAUCRATIC FRAMEWORK

The bureaucratic framework forming the basis of Australian postgraduate program provision consists of higher education policy, higher education ideology and program evaluation processes.

Policy Base

Higher education policy prescribes flexible guidelines which universities are required to follow in generalized university administration, management, and program offerings. Policy determinations set the learning scene for students as they go about their studies.

Two higher education policies underpin education provision for Indigenous postgraduates. One policy, the 1988 *Higher Education, A Policy Statement* sets out policy determinations for the higher education sector. The other policy, the 1989 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* specifies issues relating to education provision for Indigenous Australians.

The central themes of the 1988 policy are "quality and diversity" which are to be managed through 'equity provision' (DEET 1988a, 6-7; Baldwin 1991, v). As stated in the 1988 policy (DEET 1988a, 7), these themes constitute Australia's response to accommodate the needs of its multicultural society.

The 1989 NATSIEP policy, reflecting the government approach, focuses on "culturally appropriate education delivery" and "autonomy" (DEET 1989). The two policy aims are perceived as achievable through Indigenous involvement in educational decision-making, increased

access and participation rates, and equitable and appropriate outcomes (DEET 1989). (NATSIEP goals related to higher education are listed in Appendix Three.)

In the field of education, the concept of multiculturalism translated into education policy is a means of promoting societal order and cohesion through consensus values (Bulbeck 1993, 459; Sargent 1994, 29). It is not within the scope of this thesis to enter this debate but, rather to describe how the *status quo* affects Indigenous students. Notwithstanding, the Australian marginalized mosaic is isolated into separate cultural groupings who compete for resources and status (Sargent 1994, 217).

Ethnic background thus becomes an important source of identification for individuals (Jakubowicz 1993, 125), and bureaucracies. Waters and Crook, (1990, 224), assert boundaries between marginal/minority groups are set, and maintained, by providing different services. Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are recognized as having Indigenous status rather than ethnic minority status (Dyck 1985b, 13; Sargent 1994, 217).

There are six identified equity, (alternatively called marginal/minority), groups in Australia (Hunt 1978, 3; Jones 1990, 59; Martin 1994, 5-6). Equity groups comprise Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, the socio-economically disadvantaged, women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, the physically disabled, and people from rural and isolated areas (Hunt 1978, 3; Giddens 1989, 429; Jones 1990, 59). Within this form of multiculturalism ethnic and Indigenous women face a double disadvantage (Pettman 1992, 156). Furthermore, equity students can be faced with multiple disadvantage arising from various combinations of disadvantageous circumstances.

In overall terms, the 1988 policy reflects a paradigm shift from “life style to life chances” (Markus 1994, 220). Policy benefits, outlined in the 1988 document, comprise long term expansion of opportunities, greater equity of access, and greater equity in participation (DEET 1988a, 13).

National equity strategies are delineated in the document, *A Fair Chance For All: National and Institutional Planning For Equity in Higher Education, A Discussion Paper* (DEET, 1990). The concept of equity is perceived as involving impartiality in the education of each student (MacPherson & Weeks 1990, 198). Equity strategies are framed around equality of opportunity principles incorporating aims and targets focusing on:

- access to higher education
- participation in higher education consistent with overall population profile
- success in higher education

As a result, equity discourse is conducted within the ‘framework of response’ to these three key concepts, that is, access, participation and success (Gale & McNamee 1994, 11). Although bureaucracy views the concepts as neutral, Equity groups argue the reverse is true, in both definitional terms and implementation terms (Gale & McNamee 1994; Burton 1995).

The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B22), criticizes the existing equity strategy as a deficit approach. The Project Team defines a deficit approach as one that focuses on changing “participant skills and attitudes” to achieve its targets, without first conducting sound research (CAPA 1997, B22). Significantly, sociological research demonstrates that education is an important site for constructing power hierarchies, and consequently, rather than changing inequalities, education tends to

reaffirm them (See *inter alia* Giddens 1989, 423; Waters & Crook 1990, 272; Sargent 1994, 28).

Government criteria used for assessing university performance are outlined in *1994 Equity and General Performance in Higher Education, Volume 1*, written up by Martin for DEET. Access opportunities are formulated on indicators proportional to equity population group, as a percentage of Australian population (Martin 1994, 12).

Participation indicators are interpreted as "the share that members have of total student enrolments (Martin 1994, 13). In other words, participation measurement is calculated on rates of proportional numbers of Equity groups enrolled. Participation defined in this way limits the cultural expression of marginal/minority groups to mainstream programs (McConnochie & Tucker 1990, 72; Gale & McNamee 1994, 11).

Success, for students, is interpreted in two ways, that is, completion of requirements for an award, and also, success within a year's study (Martin 1994, 14). Again, success is not a neutral term, inasmuch as it is based on merit defined from within the Western knowledge tradition of the Dominant group.

The concept of meritocracy embodies the principle that individuals be rewarded, (status and careers), through individual acquisition of talents and application of effort (Grabb 1990, 89; Doyle 1992, 96-97). Furthermore, the concept implies inequality will not then arise from inherited status, (be it high or low), but from lack of individual effort (Grabb 1990, 89). Theorizers, such as Grabb (1990) and Doyle (1992), argue that the concept is flawed in implementation terms since education is more accessible for those who can easily afford it.

For the Indigenous community the two policy documents constitute an unresolved paradox. Consider the fact that the 1988 policy promises opportunity to 'catch-up' with mainstream society whereas the 1989 policy promises Indigenous self-determination, albeit within defined limits.

Policy Implementation

For universities, policy determinations (in both the 1988 and 1989 policies) mean greater accountability to government for implementation of equity measures (Williams *et al.* 1993, 82-283; Martin 1994, 12; Gale & McNamee 1994, 9). Compliance with equity measures is regulated by tied funding allocations subject to triennial review, based on measurable access, participation, and success quantifications (Jakubowicz 1993, 123; DEET 1994b, 10). Therefore, Government is often criticised for rewarding quantity not quality in education (Jakubowicz 1993, 123; Korb *et al.* 1998, 19).

Policy directives translate into two 'new' institutional practices for the Indigenous community. First, Indigenous students are designated a 'place' in institutional planning processes (Baldwin 1990, 41). Second, Indigenous education strategies are now included as part of institutional profiles (Baldwin 1991, 2). Institutional initiatives for Indigenous students are facilitated by mandatory institutional Vice-Chancellor's Indigenous Access and Participation Committees (Bin-Sallik *et al.* 1994b, 7; C. Bourke 1995, 17). Similar arrangements exist for other marginal/minority students, usually within one Equity Access and Participation Committee.

The status and effectiveness of Vice-Chancellor's Indigenous Committees varies on an institutional basis concomitant with

institutional commitment to equity, and reporting structures (Bin-Sallik *et al.* 1994b, 5; C. Bourke 1994, 17). Notwithstanding, many in the Indigenous community believe there is inadequate monitoring of Indigenous concerns (Bin-Sallik *et al.* 1994b, 8; C. Bourke 1994, 17). Further research is needed to assess this situation.

The cultural diversity of Indigenous students is accommodated in two mandatory ways in institutional practice:

- Indigenous Student Support Programs, and
- Departments/Schools of Indigenous Studies/Cultural Studies

Both initiatives place the cultural interests of equity or marginal/minority students outside 'mainstream' student programs and activity. Importantly, under existing equity arrangements, universities are not obliged to accommodate culturally diverse marginal/minority groups, within 'mainstream' curriculum (DEET 1988a), thereby situating the provision as 'optional'.

In other words, accommodation of cultural diversity within 'mainstream' programs is left to individual universities and their faculties and/or departments. Structural violence and institutional racism are thus legitimated and treated as normal within the "social order" of Australian education settings (1992 Eckermann *et al.* cited in Eckermann 1994, 34), including universities.

Structural violence occurs when the System is structured to 'favour' one group over all others (1992 Eckermann *et al.* cited in Eckermann 1994, 34). To elaborate, in Eckermann and colleagues (1992 cited in Eckermann 1994, 34), words structural violence, (and institutional racism), occur through "systemic frustration of aspirations" when:

the predominant social order denies one category of persons access to the prerequisites to effective participation in a system developed and controlled by powerful interest groups.

Careful scrutiny of the 1988 policy (DEET 1988a, 7) reveals two other less obvious policy determinations for culturally diverse equity groups. The 1988 policy (DEET 1988a, 7) states that:

Individual students have a wide range of aspirations and needs, for which the system must provide. Institutions should adapt their offerings to the needs of particular student groups.

I extrapolated this statement to mean that universities' are expected to provide culturally sensitive lecturers and supervisors as well as a supportive learning environment for culturally diverse students.

Support Program facilities for all Indigenous students, are thought to be inadequate within most universities (Heath 1991, 34). The CAPA Project Team, (1997, B36), findings affirm the situation still exists. For other Australian Equity groups, a combined Equity Support System exists and for women, Departments/Schools of Women's Studies, now becoming known as 'Gender' Studies.

Moreover, in the interests of improving Indigenous research, Five *Australian Indigenous Teaching and Research Centres*, were established across Australia in 1996. Similar mechanisms for Indigenous students exist in other countries such as Canada (Jordan 1986, 273).

Policy Determinations and Implications

Given the nature of higher education policy, legitimated university intellectual culture is exerted through a fundamentally monocultural ideology (See *inter alia* Bulbeck 1993, 459; Williams *et al.* 1993, 288; Sargent 1994, 29). The basis of the ideology arises from the Anglo-

Celtic traditions (See *inter alia* Foster & Stockley 1984, 104; Gamage 1993a, 69; Sargent 1994, 217). In other words, a state of hegemony exists.

Hegemony is thus institutionalized in universities, as in other spheres of Australian education and, pervades Australian university climate, environment, organization and administration (Ritzer 1988, 128; Smelser 1994, 269-270). Within this type of educational framework difference translates into disadvantage which is subsequently thought to be normal and justified (Foster & Stockley 1984, 91; Cocklin 1992, 243).

Indigenous Peoples' expectations as set out in NATSIEP, (for example, culturally appropriate education) are subject to, (relegated as secondary to), the 1988 Higher Education Policy determinations and funding arrangements. As a result, any Equity group's proposed recommendations for changes in education delivery depend on the co-operation of the dominant group (See *inter alia* B. Robertson & Blomeley 1991, 81; Andreoni 1993, 12-13; C. Bourke 1995, 19). Andreoni (1993, 12-13) asserts that such co-operation rarely occurs in Australian higher education institutions. C. Bourke (1995, 18) however, argues that Aboriginal control of education funds would facilitate educational autonomy.

The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B20), succinctly summarizes the situation through its assertion that under existing higher education policy determinations, all marginal/minority, (Equity group), students are embedded within an assimilationist learning environment with little chance of improving their 'unequal' situation because the label marginal is a permanent designation.

Higher Education Ideology

The prevailing ideological basis of higher education reflects existing Australian national priorities, that is, economic rationalism (See *inter alia* McLaren 1989, 14; Lowe 1990, 231, Cocklin 1992, 244). The educational thrust, arising from economic rationalist principles, aims at training students for national efficiency (Duncan 1989, 7; McLaren 1989, 14; Lowe 1990, 231). Economic rationalism ideology in operation means educational leadership and decision-making is replaced by "new managerialism", that is, managing the system (Cocklin 1992, 243; Ramsay 1994, 91-93).

The ideological approach adopted in the 1988 policy is perceived as a 'minimalist' one, (Sargent 1994, 250), and does not receive universal approval from academics (Ashenden & Milligan 1991, 11). For example, Crittenden (1990, 294-295) argues for a return to liberal education in the interests of autonomy and academic freedom, Duncan (1989, 7) maintains that "the values of the marketplace corrupt those of education", and Korb and Colleagues, (1998), speculate that the economic future of Australia has been seriously impeded.

Ideology and Cultural Diversity Issues

The determinations in the 1989 NATSIEP Policy indicate that the principles underpinning Indigenous Australians preferred curriculum model, 'culturally appropriate education provision', are based primarily on culture and not, specifically, on philosophical educational principles. Popularly rhetoricized two way/both ways¹³ integrated

¹³ Two-ways/both ways curriculum models are functioning successfully in a range of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, the place where the concept was first conceived and implemented (Andrews & Hughes 1988, 19).

models, (also called Indigenous Perspectives models), follow this same trend. Importantly, a paucity of literature and/or research¹⁴, exists on such trends/models at the university, or any, level.

Indigenous Peoples recognize that integrated curriculum models require a certain degree of cultural accommodation (Willmot & Hughes 1982, 7). However, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders emphasize that skills acquisition must not be at the cost of loss of cultural identity and its spiritual origins (See *inter alia* Fowells 1988, 1; M. Atkinson 1992, 139; Williams *et al.* 1993, 304). Other Indigenous Peoples adopt similar education objectives and practices. For example, the Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand (O'Malley 1993 cited in WIPC:E 1993b, Abstract Occasional Paper 6) and the Kuna in Panama (Gardel 1993 cited in WIPC:E 1993b Abstract Occasional Paper 25).

The literature shows the basic Indigenous procedural *cum* implementation curriculum strategy appears to be unquestioned acceptance of established Western models while negotiating introduction of Indigenous curriculum perspectives into mainstream programs as a means of overcoming internal colonialism. That is, co-option of Indigenes to support the *status quo* (D. Roberts 1994, 221) and its outcome, "entrenched inequality" (R. Morgan 1992, 57).

Feminists and other Equity groups appear to follow the same strategy inasmuch as their theorizing focuses on equity implementation critique. For example, the published papers of the 1993 *Inter-cultural Conference, Cultural Diversity and Higher Education: Has it Made a Difference? Should it Make a Difference?* (Barthel 1993), reveal generalized theorizing and reported empirical research revolves around

¹⁴ Whether two way/both ways models are not only feasible but, viable at the university, or any, mainstream level is yet to be fully tested.

devising initiatives to facilitate students' adaptation and/or accommodation within the existing system.

Notwithstanding, the Australian higher education ideology translated into curriculum means program efficiency is rated in economic rather than educational terms (Gale & McNamee 1994, 10-11; Korb *et al.* 1998, 45-46), and personal interests are subservient to economic interests (Grant 1996, 113). Assuming that provision for cultural diversity takes additional time and funding, there is less incentive for universities to factor cultural diversity into curriculum planning (Gale & McNamee 1994, 10). Consequently, the ideology further embeds marginal/minority students within Anglo-Celtic knowledge traditions.

Program Evaluations

In bureaucratic terms, fulfilment of the purposes of postgraduate education directly relates to the quality of education provision, amount of resource allocation (Moses 1993, 50; R. West 1998, 159), and the number of students graduating (Powles 1994, 41).

At the national level, the Commonwealth Government and universities cooperatively interact, (albeit in a one-sided power relationship), to monitor aspects of postgraduate programs through intermittent reviews and evaluations. Education Reviews take the form of national government system reviews while evaluations focus on aspects of program provision. Program quality and effectiveness is measured each triennium by numerical performance in access, participation, and success indicators, as noted earlier in this chapter.

Several broad-based national level reviews of Indigenous education policy and implementation practices have also been conducted since the

introduction of the 1989 policy (See Appendix Four for a list). Postgraduate issues receive lesser attention than other sectors of Indigenous education within this procedural practice.

Meanwhile, at the local level, universities monitor their own performance through annual program reviews. Student perspectives are collected via 'program evaluation' questionnaires. The 1990 AVCC *Code of Practice Guidelines for Maintaining and Monitoring Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees* is the self-referent standard used (R. West 1998, 153).

Postgraduate program issues are also discussed at frequently held national conferences, seminars, and symposia. However, these gatherings mainly focus on mainstream and International student issues. Equity groups' concerns are discussed at infrequently scheduled intercultural conferences and women's conferences. Indigenous educators schedule annual conferences but, postgraduates concerns are rarely discussed. Rather, Indigenous conferences focus on undergraduate concerns and research related issues.

The Research Base

The set of knowledge pools which influence postgraduate education provision include policy statements, education reviews, research projects/studies, conference/seminar reports and journal articles (See Appendix Four for examples).

The set of documents share two common features. Most of the research was commissioned by DEETYA or other government bodies and, little attention is given to Indigenous postgraduates or other marginal/minority groups. Equity groups' concerns are researched in

separate equity-specific projects. The prevailing practice means marginal/minority groups are mainly excluded from basic information about the topic, and thus little information is available on their learning conditions. Notably, the major part of the research concerns PhD students with lesser attention to master's students.

Research on Indigenous education issues, (since the late 1980's), is conducted through government initiated national consultations with Indigenous Peoples, rather than solely relying on academic research. Nevertheless, consultation cannot replace the role of research in discovering whether policy promises are being delivered. It is this type of research that is absent in the higher education sector.

Theorizers researching mainstream postgraduate issues tend to use a functionalist framework¹⁵. A functionalist approach treats the area as unproblematic and is "largely uncritical" towards it (Sargent 1994, 3). Within this approach, to use Meek's (1990, 203) words, society is viewed as "one cohesive whole, with individuals and groups bound together by their acceptance and internalization of fundamental social norms and values". Furthermore, the approach treats society as meritocratic, with 'success' measured by course completions and, 'structured inequality' is not a factor (Meek 1990, 203).

Structural functionalists, Grabb (1990, 114) explains, view inequality or stratification, as "an inherent aspect of societies". In practice, this form of theorizing locates the various diverse cultural groups within pluralist Australia, in a defined hierarchical structure (Hunt 1978, 3; Giddens 1989, 429). Viewing inequality from this perspective of

¹⁵ Other theoretical frameworks mainly used in analyzing Australian higher education, according to Meek (1990, 203) are "political pluralism or conflict approach and the neo-Marxist approach".

ascribed status, reflects Weberian rather than Marxist or many other perspectives which challenge the *status quo* (Grabb 1990, ix).

Research outcomes reflect the economic rationalist philosophy underpinning government postgraduate education concerns. Gallagher¹⁶ (1993a, 35), explains the concerns encompass "How to foster scholarship and yet encourage postgraduate studies which help solve key social problems and also increase productivity".

Theorizers researching Equity issues tend to use 'equity theory' to publicise their concerns. Research and discussion are conducted within the 'discourse of difference' as a means of redressing an already inequitable social circumstance, that is, reproduction of inequality (Giddens 1989, 423; Waters & Crook 1990, 278; Smelser 1994, 264). Two national studies exist, one on women's issues (Moses 1989) and the other, a study of Indigenous postgraduates (CAPA 1997). The current equity focus is on undergraduate conditions, obstacles to career path advancement, and institutional equity management issues.

Program Efficiency

The most recent higher education review, that of the R. West 1998 Review Committee, revealed improvements have been achieved in research degree access (R. West 1998, 20) for mainstream groups, and women master's degree (R. West 1998, 141) students. Improvements in access have not been achieved for Indigenous postgraduates (R. West 1998, 92), or women's access to doctoral degrees, or access for other marginal/minority groups (R. West 1998, 141).

¹⁶ At the time the explanation was given, Gallagher was Director of Academic Developments in DEET.

DETYA statistics reveal that over the years 1992-1999, participation rates for Indigenous higher degree postgraduates have shown a 204% increase (DETYA 2000a, 16). Other Indigenous postgraduate awards have shown a 63% increase (DETYA 2000a, 16). Success rates for Indigenous higher degree postgraduates, in 1998 figures, are cited as 8.7% in contrast with 13.3% for non-Indigenous higher degree postgraduates (DETYA 2000a, 9). Success rates for other Indigenous postgraduates are cited as 14.2% in contrast with 15.9% for non-Indigenous postgraduates (DETYA 2000a, 9).

Program Effectiveness

There is international consensus that PhD education can be advanced by improvements to the supervisory process and also, by the introduction of coursework and graduate schools (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 16). The Canadian researcher Holdaway, (1993, 29), adds increased funding to the list.

Australian researchers and theorizers argue that a structured entry phase would greatly assist program delivery (Powles 1993, 78; Pearson & Ford 1997, 70). Cullen and Colleagues, (1994, 93), believe 'alerting students to the nature of the [research] passage would help alleviate emotional pressures. Moreover, Cullen and Colleagues, (1994, 94), assert clarification of reciprocal expectations by both supervisor and student would increase the mutual value of program outcomes. While Moses, (1993, 57), believes students should be given 'better preparation' before undertaking postgraduate study.

In a differing vein, Pearson and Ford, (1997, 108), argue the system would be better served by "rethinking supervisory relationships and

responsibilities". Otherwise, some researchers believe the nature of the supervisory role requires reconsideration (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 101; Pearson & Ford 1997, 112). That is, 'supervisor as teacher' in place of 'supervisor as trainer" (Connell 1985, 38; Lee & Green 1998, 3). Importantly, Pearson and Ford, (1997, 81), found that although universities have constructed Code of Practice guidelines, they are yet to be fully implemented.

The 1994 NATSIEP Review Team found little was being done to implement the aims of the NATSIEP policy, specifically in the way of culturally appropriate education provision (DEET 1994a, 6). The CAPA IPS Team's 1997 findings echo the 1994 NATSIEP Review Team's conclusions (CAPA 1997). The CAPA IPS Teams' findings imply that the 1995 Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (hereafter MCEETYA) 'strategies for improving Indigenous participation in education' implementation guidelines and performance measures are receiving little and/or gradual attention. Further research is needed to accurately assess the situation.

Importantly, Indigenous cultural legitimacy issues are unresolved within universities and remain the subject of ongoing controversy (W. Brady 1992; Rigney 1996; CAPA 1997, 49). Other groups, such as Feminists, also experience legitimacy problems, albeit for differing reasons but, with similar 'gendered' outcomes (Pettman 1992, 131).

In an attempt to resolve 'cultural diversity' issues the CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B52), recommends universities examine their own practice regarding Indigenous postgraduates (See Appendix One, Recommendation 20 & 27). In other words, universities need to rethink what responsibility they have toward Indigenous students (Bin-Sallik 1993, 12).

Having explored the bureaucratic framework which sets the guidelines for establishing Australian postgraduate programs, I now explore how universities translate these guidelines into postgraduate program provision.

PROGRAM SETTING

The setting for postgraduate program provision consists of the number and type of program offerings, educational policy governing the basis on which the programs are offered, and access and entry conditions.

Postgraduate Program Offerings

Research training in university settings is provided through a hierarchically structured, flexibly sequenced system of four levels of program offerings. Each stage/program signifies a level of scholarship in general and, inferentially, research skills training in particular. Table 2.1 illustrates the phenomenon.

Table 2.1: Universities and Research Training: Program Structure and Sequence.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Research Training</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Entry Requisites</i>
Doctor of Philosophy.	Autonomous researcher.	Thesis; Careers Development.	Honours - master's or bachelors.
Professional Doctorate; Master's by research; Master of Literature; BA Hons.	Semi-autonomous researcher.	Thesis/Project or dissertation; Careers Development - limited.	BA pass with research potential; Master's by Coursework with prior research experience.
Master's by Coursework;	Researcher orientation (optional).	Mini dissertation or, a Project.	BA pass; Bachelor of Letters; or mature age entry.
Postgraduate Diploma.	Researcher orientation (optional).	Mini dissertation or, a Project.	BA pass; Bachelor of Letters; or mature age entry.

Table 2.1 depicts the logic behind the manner and type of research training provision students can receive, concomitant with type of course, entry qualification, and related exit qualification. Notably, variations in program entry do occur dependent on individual student potential and institutional program guidelines.

All Australian universities offer a diverse array of programs, some concentrating on distance education, some on overseas students, and others demonstrating greater involvement in research provision (R. West 1998, 88). As in all educational activity, program offerings are underpinned by a policy base which guides educational content and procedures to be adopted and implemented.

Access, Participation, and Funding

Access requirements and procedures consist of fulfilling various preconditions, such as program entry qualifications, mobility recommendations¹⁷, and for some, probationary periods of candidature. As a result of equity measures, the student body in Australian universities has increased and is noted as "extremely diverse" (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 21; Pearson & Ford 1997, 21; R. West 1998, 1).

Selection criteria for Postgraduate Programs normally constitute the entry qualification requisites outlined in Table 2.1. For research degree students, additional essential 'success' criteria include research potential (NBEET 1993, 23), together with motivation (Baker *et al.* 1997, 47).

¹⁷ Research degree postgraduates are encouraged to enrol in a university different to the one in which they undertook their undergraduate degree for greater exposure to research practices and program offerings (R. West 1998, 150).

Participation conditions encompass mode of enrolment, time to degree, and residency requirements. Importantly, changes in candidature such as changes in mode of enrolment, time extensions, withdrawals, or suspension of candidature affect program completion times (AVCC 1990b; Baker *et al.* 1997, 43).

Funding for study includes both fees for programs and income support. Postgraduates are required to pay a Higher Education Contribution Scheme fee, (hereafter HECS), unless they have been awarded a HECS free scholarship¹⁸ (UCAN 1996, 38). Funding to access research degree programs is facilitated by a limited number of Commonwealth scholarships such as the Australian Postgraduate Awards (Powles 1994, 39; Baker *et al.* 1997, 4), and individual university scholarships (UNE PhD Prospectus) which are neither taxed nor, income-tested. In contrast, Federal scholarships in other countries such as Canada, are taxed (Holdaway 1993 quoted in Cullen 1993, 31).

Student Situation: Access

Indigenous students are under-represented in the postgraduate sector, constituting only 0.3%, as previously stated in Chapter One. The R. West Review Committee (1998, 141), notes students from low socio-economic status groups and isolated students are under-represented across the board in higher education. In contrast, Women's access has shown an overall increase except at the doctoral level. Information on probationary periods of candidature is not evident in the literature.

¹⁸ HECS fees constitute approximately 20% of Commonwealth contributions for students and are differentiated according to discipline (R. West 1998, 73).

Overall, Australian students are noted as being far less mobile than those in other countries (R. West 1998, 150). Indigenous overall student statistics (DETYA 2000a, 6), show that Indigenous students are more likely to study away from their homes than non-Indigenous students. Notably, the CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B34), found existing postgraduate funding arrangements and residency requirements affect Indigenous postgraduates and their Clan and family responsibilities, especially when researching within a remote Indigenous community.

Anecdotal statements contained in the literature reveal Indigenous student motivation factors for pursuing postgraduate education coincide with the dominant group, that is, the intrinsic outweighing extrinsic. For example, Pearson and Ford's list, (1997, 9), based on doctoral candidates' reasons for pursuing further studies, shows primary factors as careers development both within and outside academia, upgrading professional expertise and/or practice, and changing careers. However, for Indigenous students, a broader purpose is evident, that of community progress rather than solely individual aspirations. This view corresponds with that of American Indian students (Kirkness & Barnhart 1991 cited in Williams *et al.* 1993, 304).

Student Situation: Participation

DETYA (2000a, 6-8) 1999 figures indicate that overall, more Indigenous postgraduates study part-time and externally, than full-time. Moreover, the CAPA IPS Team (1997, B44-45), found that many postgraduates work while pursuing their studies because of financial need due to family responsibilities and commitments. Women study under similar conditions for similar reasons (Moses 1993).

Given that 'type of enrolment' candidature directly correlates with predictable completion rates (AVCC 1990b), estimated figures indicate a relatively high degree of attrition for Indigenous postgraduates based on type of enrolment. The same conclusion could be drawn for women students. This issue will be taken up in the Program Evaluation section, later in the chapter.

Student Situation: Funding

Funding assistance mechanisms constitute an equality of opportunity measure for financially disadvantaged students (Bulbeck 1993, 82; Baker *et al.* 1997, 4-5). Significantly, funding assistance is not proportional to 'equity' entry scales. Instead, priority places are usually awarded to first class honours students, (See *inter alia* Powles 1994, 39; Baker *et al.* 1997, 16; Pearson & Ford 1997, 19), inasmuch as selection criteria are "academic excellence and research potential" (Baker *et al.* 1997, 4). Baker and Colleagues (1997, xiii), supply evidence that the APRA award needs to be increased.

Indigenous postgraduates, (subject to income-testing and Aboriginality conditions), can apply for income support from Abstudy¹⁹. The level of Abstudy living allowance is perceived as inadequate (CAPA 1997, B45). Moreover, Abstudy is subject to income tax whereas Commonwealth scholarships are neither taxed nor, income-tested (CAPA 1997, B9). The CAPA IPS Team found that this circumstance created an additional hardship for Indigenous students (CAPA 1997, B46).

¹⁹ Abstudy is a Commonwealth funding program established in 1969 to provide financial assistance for students fourteen years and over across all levels of education (Bin-Sallik 1989, 16; Atkinson 1992, 138; DEET 1995, 5).

Interestingly, the CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B31), found that although "some universities do offer scholarships for Indigenous postgraduates" they "rarely award them". The Project Team also found that university 'special' scholarships such as those for women, are not easily accessible for Indigenous women (CAPA 1997, B44). Details were not provided explaining the anomalies.

Moses in her 1989 study *Barriers to Women's Participation as Postgraduate Students* (Moses 1989, 36), found many women also experienced financial hardship with nearly one third changing their enrolment to part-time at some stage and one seventh suspending enrolment for some time. There is no evidence to show that this circumstance has dramatically changed for women students.

Having outlined the range of postgraduate program offerings as well as program access issues, I now explore the way in which universities structure postgraduate program content.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE: CONTENT

Structural arrangements for postgraduate programs comprise program phases, socialization procedures, program content, and the knowledge production process. Statistics and evaluation findings cited may, perhaps, be somewhat/slightly misleading in that national evaluations do not differentiate students either by gender or ethnic background. As a result, it is impossible to ascertain what proportion of Equity groups, if any, are represented in the cited statistics, or in the findings. Nevertheless, this is of lesser importance than the similarities and differences revealed between the three groups of students.

Program Phases

The postgraduate program process comprises student experience over the 'time duration' of their programs (Moses 1993, 50). Processual conditions consist of sequential stages of activity, some of which require simultaneous action. Although institutional variations occur, the following list of fifteen conditions outlined in Table 2.2, generally apply. The conditions are flexibly constructed from those described in the *UCAN Guide for Postgraduates* (1996, 75-85):

Table 2.2: Program Phases: Research Degree Postgraduates

- Attendance at the university
- Appointment of supervisors, (primary, secondary and additional)
- Clarification of supervisor/candidate expectations (during first year)
- Preparation and completion of research proposal
- Annual Progress Reports
- Completion of coursework where applicable (during first year)
- Presentation of two work-in-progress seminars during period of study (applies to research degree candidates)
- Research phase
- Writing the thesis, dissertation, or project
- Submission of the thesis, dissertation, or project
- Selection of examiners (applies to degree students)
- Examination
- Major revision and re-submission (applies to research degree candidates)
- Retention of the thesis by the university
- Course completion

Doctoral candidates are expected to work independently and, are fundamentally responsible for their own progress (UNE 1994b, 11; UCAN 1996, 77). Other students receive instructional assistance concomitant with their awards.

Socialization Procedures

All postgraduates are expected to internalize the culture of their chosen discipline (Becher 1989, 24-25). Induction into and, being a member of an intellectual community requires intellectual expertise, personal commitment, adherence to disciplinary norms, and collegial allegiances (Becher 1989, 24). The socialization process underpinning this induction procedure includes extending and expanding knowledge, acquiring theoretical skills, and building a network of contacts (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 57). Moreover, each disciplinary community protects and defends, in Becher's (1989, 24) words:

... their traditions, customs and practices, transmitted knowledge, beliefs, morals and rules of conduct, as well as their linguistic and symbolic forms of communication and the meanings they share.

The above-cited constitute required attributes of disciplinary-based research cultures, forming the cultural capital of the various disciplines (Becher 1989, 25; Waters & Crook 1990, 273). Research cultures necessarily have a "textual" dimension to them (Cavanagh & Rodwell 1992, 39). Mandatory residency requirements for external students attempt to ensure that all students undergo adequate and appropriate socialization (Pearson & Ford 1997, 35).

The culture and attendant socialization procedures of the disciplines is a critical factor in student learning, inasmuch as it shapes their attitudes and thinking processes (Becher 1989, 26). Particularly, the disciplinary culture affects what students learn, how they learn, and the manner in which they subsequently expand knowledge through their research.

Sargent, (1994, 88-89), points out that within existing Australian education socialization processes, students learn their place within Australian society. Sargent (1994, 89), adds that Dominant groups "learn how to behave as persons of superior status", while marginalized groups learn their inferior/second class status/place through 'victim socialization'.

Student Situation: Cultural Diversity and Socialization

Given that established Western, (that is, Anglo-Celtic), forms of knowledge, theory, values, academic conventions, and protocols are the legitimately applied academic standard for all students, marginal/minority knowledge traditions and values are generally treated as second-rate.

In reality the prevailing hegemonic situation means that the dominant/mainstream group assumes the authority to define what counts as knowledge and who defines what counts as knowledge (See *inter alia* Miller 1991, 68; Keeffe 1992, 83; Pettman 1992, 131). Further, the dominant/mainstream group also assumes the power to define and/or limit opposing views such as alternative cultural frameworks of marginal/ minority groups (See *inter alia* Miller 1991, 68; Keeffe 1992, 83; Pettman 1992, 5). Williams and Colleagues, (1993, 288), argue that prevailing defined boundaries of permissible discourse discourage clarification of social alternatives.

Nevertheless, under equity guidelines, supervisors are required to be sensitive to the needs of culturally diverse students (DEET 1988a, 6-7; Baldwin 1991, v). Precisely what this means is not clear. Interestingly, academics have tactfully asserted that responding to cultural diversity

“presents many challenges” (Edmonds 1993, 68; Jakubowicz 1993, 123).

It needs to be noted, however, that the learning situation for Indigenous students is exacerbated by the fact that no documented Indigenous conceptualizations of the various disciplines, (reflecting Indigenous perspectives), exists (Weir 1995, 9). Nor, at the time of writing, were there any comprehensive guidelines about the characteristics of an Indigenous academic, Indigenous scholarship conventions or, a Code of Behaviour for Indigenous Academics. Until Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders fill these important knowledge gaps, debate about either culturally appropriate education or, the feasibility of two-way/both ways education cannot proceed from a sound knowledge base.

The fact that women have documented, and to some degree legitimized, Feminist theoretical frameworks increases their chances of achieving culturally appropriate socialization experiences and subsequent culturally appropriate educational outcomes. Notably, Pearson and Ford, (1997, 35), reveal that tension also exists between the disciplines and Industry regarding socialization processes. Pearson and Ford, (1997, 35), explain that Industry questions the value of socialization into a ‘scholarship community’ against ‘socialization for industry’ or, for “mode 2 knowledge production where producers and users work together”.

Program Content

Postgraduate programs are undertaken, and administered, in a significantly different way to undergraduate studies (University of New England Postgraduates’ Association [hereafter UNEPA] 1995, 2).

Postgraduates undertaking research degree programs are considered as academic apprentices (UNEPA 1995, 2).

Programs generally consist of three strands of activity. That is, disciplinary course units, research units (methodology including theory and methods), culminating in knowledge expansion through practical application of the research process (by constructing a thesis, dissertation or project). Universities frequently schedule research skills seminars to assist students (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 87). Enrolment and attendance is an individual student responsibility.

For doctoral candidates, one other strand is added, that of professional development and careers orientation. Master's by research students are also expected to receive similar training, but on a limited basis. Exactly what this means is not explained in the literature.

The professional development and careers orientation strand consists of various activities including orientation to academia, participation in the intellectual life of the university, and forging a career by building an academic reputation through publishing papers as well as establishing professional networks. Importantly, university guidelines imply that doctoral candidates are expected to have already acquired a well-developed theoretical and methodological skills base.

Development of a lengthy thesis or creative project enables students to learn all facets of the research process through practical application (Connell 1985, 57; UNE 1994b, 7). Study programs for research degree candidates are thus individually tailored based on thesis topic choice (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 69). Bowen and Rudenstine, (1992, 255), writing about the United States situation, assert "the complexity and variety of new theoretical approaches" add new challenges to the learning process.

Selection of thesis/project topic requires careful consideration since it needs to be interesting in order to sustain student motivation, and also be manageable and researchable within program time frames (Blume & Amsterdamska 1987, 65). Availability of funding also affects topic choice (Jansen 1998, 11). Bowen & Rudenstine (1992, 261), advise that topic choice must be above "politics and personalities". NBEET (1992, 4), states that "exploration of concerns specific to Australia" are important areas for research and also, areas of international interest. Time to choose a topic is known to take as long as one year (Blume & Amsterdamska 1987, 66-67).

The main source of research funding for academics is the ARC which awards grants on a competitive basis. A specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Application was introduced into ARC funding grants in 1997. Research grants are also available from industry, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs²⁰ (hereafter DETYA), and Health Agencies such as the National Health and Medical Research Council (Hereafter NH&MRC), or a range of university scholarships.

Information about training in teaching competence, as part of higher degree programs, is not evident in the literature. The knowledge gap indicates such training is not a formalized part of program provision which is a curious oversight inasmuch as teaching competency is one of the required attributes of an academic. This practice contrasts with Canada, for example, wherein teaching training is provided but is not considered effective (Holdaway 1993, 28-29).

²⁰ DEETYA changed to DETYA in October 1998, meaning that administratively, employment was separated from education, training and youth affairs.

Student Situation: Program Content

The CAPA IPS Team (1997, B34-55), findings indicate that Indigenous student 'preferred learning' comprises learning both Western and Indigenous knowledge traditions. Moreover, the CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B34-55), further indicated that "preferred learning conditions" included culturally appropriate pedagogy, supervision by an Indigenous academic, a culturally supportive learning environment, an adequate living allowance and resource infrastructure. However, precisely how this could be done is not explained. Other Equity groups' expectations are not evident in the literature.

No Indigenous postgraduate student comments on their experiences in Research units and Research Skills Seminars are evident in the literature. Likewise, no comments by other Equity groups of their experiences in these aspects of program content are evident in the literature.

However, the CAPA IPS Team (1997, 54-55), found the language of Western academic texts and the discourse of the various disciplines causes comprehension problems and subsequent interpretive difficulty for some Indigenous postgraduates. In particular, difficulty for those Indigenous postgraduates who speak English as a second language. Similar communication barriers are experienced by both Australian Non-English Speaking Background (hereafter NESB) and international students (Buckingham 1993, 45; Edmonds 1993, 69; Le & Judy Spencer 1993, 143).

No specific comments are evident in the literature on either teaching training or, careers development *per se*. Notably, The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, 39), reveals that Indigenous students indicate a need for an

Indigenous Postgraduate Journal as a means of providing space for Indigenous voices.

Knowledge Production Process

The research process is not only complex but, varies across disciplines (Powles 1984, 1; Moses 1990, 355). Basically, producing knowledge encompasses inter-related activities such as reviewing related literature, collecting data, adhering to disciplinary ethical practice and, conforming to disciplinary documentation and presentation conventions (Maxwell 1992, 9). The knowledge production process is considered a characteristically solitary activity for Humanities and social science students but, greater scholarly interaction occurs within the sciences and technology disciplines (Stranks 1984, 171).

Research skills are normally used within the three categories of research, namely, Basic (curiosity motivated); Applied (tactical problem-oriented); and Experimental development (Powles 1984, 5; R. Smith 1989, 27-28). The boundaries between the three categories are not distinct and, do overlap (Powles 1984, 2). Most Indigenous postgraduates are involved in basic research similar to the majority of other postgraduates (R. Smith 1989, 117).

Recently, the concept of research and the way knowledge is produced has begun to change (Pearson & Ford 1997, 16; R. West 1998, 6). Pearson and Ford, (1997, 16), give mode 2 knowledge production as an example wherein “producers, users and others mingle in an open system which is trans-disciplinary, heterogeneous and diverse”.

The advent of technology coupled with the internationalization of research and changed perceptions about what constitutes knowledge, are

seen as underpinning these recent changes (Pearson & Ford 1997, 16-17; R. West 1998, 6). Technology also affects the way knowledge is collected, documented, and communicated (Pearson & Ford 1997, 93).

Producing knowledge involves a range of ethical considerations and protocol procedures. Researchers are required to gain permission from appropriate authorities to conduct research, disclose their research approach (whether the research is overt or covert), ensure participants' confidentiality is protected, and provide feedback to participants (Maxwell 1992, 9). Conformity with ethical considerations is reviewed and authorized by university Ethics Committees but administered by supervisors (Maxwell 1992, 9; UCAN 1996, 96-97).

Documentation and presentation of knowledge produced requires adherence to scholarly disciplinary conventions (Maxwell 1992, 9; UCAN 1996, 89-92). Consequently, thesis and dissertation presentation and the discourse within which it is framed, is fundamental to successful completion of a research degree. Supervisors thus have specific responsibilities in assisting students to learn how to write (Moses 1992, 14). As well, universities schedule Thesis Writing Workshops (Moses 1992, 14), and provide various associated learning aids, such as videotapes and audiotapes.

Thesis and dissertation format varies according to disciplinary conventions and practice. However, common features do exist within Arts-Humanities, Education, Social Sciences, and Health. A commonly accepted formatting structure for qualitative research is: Introduction; Statement of the Problem; Purpose of the Study; Context of the Problem; Statement of the area of Research and Initial research Questions; Significance of the Problem; Methodology; Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations; Description and Analysis of data; and Major Research Findings and Conclusions (Maxwell 1992).

Intellectual Property guidelines set out the rights and responsibilities for universities, staff and students regarding the end product of research endeavours (UCAN 1996, 97). Variations occur between universities but, normally, the university retains one copy of higher degree theses in their libraries and sometimes, intellectual property rights to the material.

Student Situation: Knowledge Production Process

The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, 49) found Indigenous students experience “tremendous difficulties” in inter-cultural communication over differing approaches to knowledge construction and related issues such as field of research, culturally appropriate theoretical approaches, and writing style. The issue relates to ‘how to communicate a message’, which is the end purpose of any research endeavour. Women students working within Feminist traditions report similar knowledge construction issues but, from a gendered rather than cultural stance (Pettman, 1992, 130-131).

The findings of the CAPA IPS (1997, 49) Team indicate the ‘research process’ is stressful for Indigenous students. The fact that CAPA is presently engaged in a *Suicide Project* to discern the effects of postgraduate study for all postgraduates and its relationship to Australian suicide rates, is telling in itself.

Indigenous postgraduates, as previously stated in Chapter One, also express concerns about the cultural appropriateness of Western methodologies and methods in Indigenous research (See *inter alia* Langton 1981, 21-22; Hughes 1984, 20; M. Brady 1990, 18). For example, Huggins (1993, 69-70) who wonders how ‘the oppressed’

ought to write 'the oppressed', Weir (1996a, 12-13) who searches for spiritual consistency within methodologies²¹, and Rigney. (1996), who needs methodologies to research racism as well as analyze policy²².

Furthermore, the CAPA IPS Team (1997, B49) found that research conducted within Indigenous communities can be quite difficult for Indigenous students. Unfortunately, the Team did not give any specific examples of such reported difficulties. Abron, (1992, 99), provides clues with her assertion that research is a "negative" word in Aboriginal communities as a flow-on from prior negative experiences with some non-Indigenous researchers.

The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B49), notes that students raised concerns about "widespread ignorance" in non-Indigenous Academia about "the appropriate observation of protocols including knowledge protocols". To reiterate, some university departments have constructed ethics guidelines for researching Indigenous issues but, only a few universities *per se*, such as UNE, have done so.

Intellectual property issues such as non-Indigenous authorship and subsequent ownership of Indigenous knowledge together with joint supervisor-student authorship on academic papers were reported by the CAPA IPS Team (1997, B55) as sites of considerable tension. In the same vein, some Indigenous students argue that their efforts to re-take control of identity are undermined, if not subverted, by non-Indigenous gatekeepers (Fesl 1993, 182-183; Rigney 1996, 1-3). The Maori academic and recent PhD student, L. Smith (1993, 10-11) expresses similar views about the learning climate in New Zealand.

²¹ Weir has constructed a Spiritual Methodology (See, Weir 1997).

²² Rigney has constructed these methodologies (See, Rigney 1996).

Having examined program content, I now explore the way in which content is delivered, that is, program learning conditions.

PROGRAM LEARNING CONDITIONS

Learning conditions in postgraduate programs encompass instructional arrangements, resource provision, student progress and examination procedures, and learning environment.

Instructional Arrangements

The instructional/supervisory relationship is fundamental to the research training process inasmuch as successful postgraduate research training is dependent on competent supervision by skilled and active researchers (See, *inter alia* Moses 1992, 15; Sheehan 1992, 7; UNEPA 1995, 1). Student choice in supervisors is facilitated by published *Staff Research Interest* lists produced by each department.

Supervisory arrangements can be organized on the Apprenticeship Model consisting of a single supervisor and/or a co-supervisors or, the Committee, (or Panel), Model constituting a supervisory panel (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 89). Cullen and Colleagues, (1994, 89 & 99), assert that the relative value of these options is arguable. Arrangements in supervisory practice varies between and within universities²³.

Nevertheless, all universities have supervisor 'authorization' procedures, albeit mainly for supervisors of PhD students (Pearson & Ford 1997, 20). Some universities also provide Staff Development

²³ For further information refer to Pearson and Ford 1997, Chapter Four.

Units and/or staff training sessions, (Powles 1993, 79), in varying ways and to varying degrees.

Both the academic and the administrative elements of the research component of a student's program is 'supervised' by either a supervisor, for research degree students, and by both course convenors and supervisors, for master's by coursework students (Pearson & Ford 1997, 69). For doctoral students, supervisors are also responsible for guiding the professional and careers development of students by "introducing them into the academic milieu" (UNEPA 1995, 1).

Importantly, course convenors, supervisors, and students have reciprocal responsibilities within the 'supervisory' relationship. These mutual responsibilities are outlined in Code of Practice Guidelines contained in university handbooks (See Appendix Five).

Supervisory arrangements and communication with external students is conducted through many mediums including a variety of electronic mechanisms, university magazines, off-campus visitations, and talk-back radio. Nevertheless, face-to-face communication is still considered very important in the PhD situation (Pearson & Ford 1997, 40).

In recognition that supervisor-student problems exist, most Australian universities have established formal mechanisms for lodging grievances (Sheehan 1992, 5; Cullen *et al.* 1994, 98). To arbitrate supervisor-student conflicts and other related matters (Moses 1992, 55), some universities have also set up Research Committees (Moses 1992, 55; Sheehan 1992, 7) and PhD Committees (UNE 1994a, 5)

Student Situation: Instructional Arrangements

Indigenous postgraduates are less likely to be supervised by Indigenous academics since there are few in academic positions (CAPA 1997, B30), and even fewer with PhD's or Honours Research Master's degrees. In Moses' 1989 study *Barriers to Women's Participation as Postgraduates* she found that women needed women supervisors as illustrative role models to show how they have "renegotiated both the academic and traditional roles" (Moses 1989, 34).

The CAPA IPS Team, (1997, B40), found supervisors, in the main, were not culturally sensitive to the needs of Indigenous postgraduates. In specific terms, students were not receiving culturally appropriate supervision either in terms of knowledge expertise or, supervisor-student rapport (CAPA 1997, B35). Moreover, Indigenous postgraduates asserted they were "under continual pressure to assimilate into the western knowledge system" (CAPA 1997, B40).

Other Equity groups state they face lack of cultural sensitivity among university staff. For instance, Buckingham (1993, 43-46), talking about both undergraduate and postgraduate NESB students, (including overseas students), asserts that universities make little effort to understand or accommodate the wide diversity of these students. Further research is needed to substantiate this broad statement.

Resource Provision

An adequate resource infrastructure is acknowledged as critical for an effective national research system (Baker *et al.* 1997, 48; R. West 1998, 159). Correspondingly, adequate resources are noted as being a necessary condition for the "completion of a good quality PhD" (T.

Roberts 1993, 39; Baker *et al.* 1997, 48). Under existing Australian education funding policy, resources are becoming scarce (T. Roberts 1993, 39; Jansen 1998, 11). The R. West Review Committee, (1998, 157), asserts the problem of scarce resources exists on a global scale.

Recommended supportive institutional and departmental infrastructure provision are outlined in the 1989 *Committee to Review higher Education Research Policy* edited by R. Smith (1989, 109) and in proceedings from the 1991 ARC and AVCC sponsored conference on *Research Training and Supervision* edited by Moses (1992, 56). Level of resources equates with field of study but generally constitutes knowledge experts, learning materials, technology, networking and student support mechanisms, as well as student funding for related research activities (R. Smith 1989, 118).

Institutional infrastructure incorporates such things as buildings and laboratory facilities; libraries; study skills centres; support centres for Equity groups; research equipment; special research facilities (science equipment and structures); computing services and facilities; technical, clerical and secretarial support; and central administrative support (R. Smith 1989, 109; Moses (1992, 56). As well, many universities now have Graduate Studies Centres (Pearson & Ford 1997, 97). The various learning support centres frequently schedule training sessions for students.

Departmental infrastructure, in Moses' words (1992, 56) includes "work space; access to equipment; library provision; audio-visual; technical support and workshop assistance". Moses (1992, 56 -57) adds that Departments are also expected to provide funding allowances for generalized intellectual development such as "library searches; copying; local travel to other libraries; conference and travel support for research

students in the humanities” and, similar support for students in other disciplinary areas.

Intellectual development and associated interactive support is facilitated by provision of networking opportunities and where possible, a ‘critical mass’ of students (Moses 1989, 34; Pearson & Ford 1997, 63). These measures also assist in overcoming student mental, emotional and physical isolation (Moses 1989, 34). Notably, some universities provide structured mentoring systems, as for example, Deakin University (Pearson & Ford 1997, 47).

Funding for attendance at conferences and seminars, enables students to contribute to academic discussion and debate and establish networks (Weir 1996b, 12). Funding support is normally restricted to research degree students, with preference given to doctoral candidates, as is the case at UCAN (1996, 97).

Postgraduate Student Associations normally exist at all campuses. Some Associations are affiliated with CAPA, and some are not. Student Associations usually provide advocacy and representation for students, as well as a range of social and academic services as is the case at UCAN (UCAN 1996).

Student Situation: Resource Provision

The CAPA IPS Team’s (1997, 36) findings showed Indigenous Support Units do not provide specific academic services for Indigenous postgraduates. The Team’s (1997, B55) findings further that revealed Indigenous Support Units were generally under-resourced. No comments about Support Units by other Equity groups were evident in the literature.

Moreover, funding for conference and seminar attendance are a concern for Indigenous students (Weir 1995, 12), as well as women researchers (Panel discussion 1995 Womens' Conference cited in Payne & Shoemark 1995, 215). Jansen (1998, 11), speaking on behalf of CAPA, believes travel funding for all research students should be increased.

Networking opportunities for all postgraduates exist within the various advocacy organizations such as 'mainstream' student associations. Additional organizations available to Indigenous postgraduates are the *Indigenous Australian Higher Education Association*, the *National Indigenous Student Network*. Other Equity groups have similar interest-specific advocacy and networking organizations available to them.

Furthermore, an *Aboriginal Alumni Association*, (administered by Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies at the University of South Australia), has been initiated (Cruse 1992, 65). The Alumni Association intends maintaining a Graduate Registry to fulfil the dual functions of providing an Indigenous Academic directory and an Indigenous academic labour pool list (Cruse 1992, 65). North American Indians publish a similar type of directory annually (Swisher 1995 cited at the 1995 Indigenous Higher Education Conference).

Importantly, CAPA has taken steps to assist Indigenous postgraduates to establish a networking mechanism by employing a permanent Indigenous Peoples Officer (with voting rights), establishing an Indigenous Postgraduates Association, and also, by supporting the inaugural Indigenous Postgraduates Conference held in October, 1998.

Student Progress and Examination Procedures

Student progress is monitored by course unit performance results, as previously stated, and annual reports. Higher degree progress reports are co-operatively constructed by both supervisors and students (Sheehan 1992, 6; UNE 1994b, 10-11). The same practice is followed overseas in places such as the United Kingdom (Phillips 1993, 19).

Other countries require a final oral examination for higher degree research students (For example, the United Kingdom and Canada). Australian procedures generally differ with regard to oral examinations (Gallagher 1993a, 37). Common practice involves scheduling oral examinations at two set periods during candidature, usually at six and eighteen months respectively. Some universities also conduct oral examinations when a student's performance level is under review (Spear 1993 quoted in Cullen 1993, 47; Pearson & Ford 1997, 34).

Dissertation and thesis requirements vary correlational to type of postgraduate award. Demonstration of coherence in presentation is, however, the main assessment procedure (Stranks 1984, 171). For research degree students, two additional 'essential criteria' are used, originality and quality (Phillips 1993, 12-13, 17; DEET 1988a, 92). Importantly, there is no agreement on what the two criteria mean in relation to PhD degrees (Phillips 1993, 12-13, 17-19). PhD examiners thus play a critical role in the interpretation of these two criteria (Phillips 1993, 15-16).

Moses, (1993, 51), believes the quality issue is adequately addressed by having external and overseas markers because the wider disciplinary community becomes involved in assessing the scholarship underpinning students' research efforts. Notably, Gallagher (1993a, 37) states that assessment criteria are rarely scrutinized for PhD degrees.

Confusion arises within the minds of academics over precisely what is being examined in research degrees, the thesis or the candidate (Stranks 1984, 171). Other countries also experience this dilemma, for example, the United Kingdom (Phillips 1993, 43-44). Another important assessment criterion relates to the perceived nature and purpose of higher degrees which subsequently influences preconceived perceptions of the finished theses/dissertations and projects (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992, 258). That is, whether the written 'work' is considered indicative of beginning research training or, the culmination of research training (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992, 258).

Research degree examiners normally take three months to assess a thesis (Maxwell 1992, 25), or creative project. Copies of examiners reports are often sent to students, and examiners can advise amendments or alterations to texts (Maxwell 1992, 25). Nevertheless, Faculty Examining Committees have final responsibility for formulating examination results (Maxwell 1992, 25).

Student Situation: Monitoring Progress and Examinations

The extensive array of broad recommendations arising from the 1997 CAPA IPS findings (See Appendix One), provide evidence of the enormous participation barriers faced by Indigenous postgraduates. How subsequent 'progress' was affected was not precisely stated. Notably, Indigenous students' framed concerns about their progress in cultural and economic terms. Major barriers for Indigenous postgraduates, (identified in the 1997 CAPA document), were noted as:

- lack of supervisor expertise in Indigenous knowledge matters,
- lack of culturally appropriate methodologies to underpin knowledge construction,
- contested cultural space in knowledge construction,
- institutional and personal racist treatment,
- intercultural language form differences,
- lack of Indigenous Support Unit academic assistance,
- funding for study (that is, a living allowance), and
- funding for research projects.

The 1997 CAPA IPS findings imply that of all progress barriers, cultural space in knowledge construction and institutional and personal racism are perceived as the most critical (See Appendix One, Recommendations 10-11).

Other ethnic groups participating in Australian universities also attest to racist experiences (Donef 1993, 160-161; Pebaque 1993, 187-188; Gamage 1995, 2). For example, Donef, (1993, 160-161), who asserts “racism is so pervasive that it seems acceptable and normal” and, “manifests as exclusion” which is an obstacle to multiculturalism. Furthermore, International students also identify institutional and personal racist experiences as a barrier to participation and progress (Meekosha & Hollingsworth 1993, 150-151).

Learning Environment

The learning environment encompasses status, socio-cultural interactions within universities and the wider community. PhD students are said to enjoy an enhanced status within the student body because they are regarded more as “colleagues or collaborators” (Powles (1984, x).

Student Situation: Learning Environment

Indigenous postgraduates identify positive participation factors as freedom in study conditions (Finlay 1992, 6; S. Morgan 1987, 124), freedom of choice in research topic (Skulthorpe 1993, 72), and self-directed study (Skulthorpe 1993, 72). Notwithstanding, Indigenous postgraduates raise several concerns about their learning environment indicating that they do not enjoy the same 'enhanced student status' as other postgraduates.

W. Brady (1995, 12), speaking as both student and lecturer, believes Indigenous academics are used to legitimize programs and research rather than "being included because we are scholars who have a voice and world views which flow from different obligations and goals". Drysdale, (1993, 68), asserts "universities are elitist and competitive which is culturally irrelevant" because "our society is a caring and sharing society".

Additional negative views include alienation (O'Shane 1984, 34; Behrendt 1995, 7); personal and institutional racism (W. Brady 1995, 13; Drysdale 1993, 68; Imlah 1993, 70); Indigenous inter and intra community racism (O'Connor 1995); being treated as second class citizens (Maddigan 1993, 52, Weir 1995 cited in S. Smith 1995, 13); constantly being expected to prove/justify selves (Drysdale 1993, 68; O'Connor 1995, 14); being silenced (Behrendt 1995, 7; W. Brady 1995, 13); and having to negotiate two sets of meanings (Weir 1995 cited in S. Smith 1995, 13).

Indigenous postgraduate students, similar to Indigenous undergraduates, are also faced with specific community concerns arising from their education endeavours. The literature indicates that student/community reciprocal expectations are unfulfilled. Students call for advice and

support from Elders (Moodie 1992, 23-24; Belleair 1993, 42), while communities assert students are unwilling to contribute to community self-determination and economic development (Valadian 1988, 102; M. Atkinson 1992, 139). Valadian (1988, 102), believes the individualism fostered in tertiary institutions undermines student-community linkages.

In other words, students imply that they face enormous pressures from being subjected to intense scrutiny by both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations as well as the wider Australian community.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

In bureaucratic terms, program outcomes are evaluated on the basis of efficiency (time to degree) and effectiveness (numbers of students completing programs). Quality of programs are adjudged according to these limited criteria. Effectiveness ratings sometimes result in program improvements.

Indigenous efficiency and effectiveness ratings are inconclusive. And, although participation and success rates for Indigenous postgraduates are increasing more research needs to be conducted on Indigenous reasons for not accessing postgraduate study. Furthermore, reasons for Indigenous non-completion are not evident in the literature.

However, the literature reveals Australian mainstream student reasons for non-completion are similar to those revealed in a 1990-1991 Canadian study "accepting employment prior to completion; financial constraints; inadequate supervision; lack of motivation; lack of ability; and an ill-conceived research project" (Holdaway 1993, 25). Reasons for completion, in the same study, are cited as "student motivation; appropriate supervision; careful selection of students; and clear

definition of research field" (Holdaway 1993, 25). Baker and Colleagues 1997 findings (Chapter 8) reflect similar trends.

Benefits of Postgraduate Education

Personal benefits resulting from postgraduate education, to reiterate, are increased expertise in an academic field and subsequent enhanced career opportunities, increased research skills for some, and for a few others, orientation to academia. Gale and McNamee, (1994, 10), assert that "equity success", (based as it is on meritocratic principles), is questionable given that the selection process rewards those who are most like the 'mainstream'.

The ARC regards postgraduate research "as an integral part of the fundamental research effort in Australia" (R. Smith 1989, 28; ARC 1992, 1). On a sub-scale, whether this pattern holds true for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders is difficult to assess, since no comprehensive bibliographies of postgraduates' research contributions exist.

New knowledge produced by students engaged in research activity is a contribution to the 'world pool of knowledge' (Powles 1984, 6). Knowledge produced by Indigenous postgraduates also adds to the Indigenous World Pool of Knowledge, if they have expanded knowledge in this area.

For Indigenous postgraduates, success is measured by degree of acceptance of, and ability to function, within both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities (Budby 1981). Other Indigenous Peoples hold similar perceptions, for example, Alaska Natives (Barnhardt 1996), and

Native Americans (Spitzburg & Thorndike 1992 cited in Barnhardt 1996, 10-11).

Despite determinations about program efficiency and effectiveness, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that program quality is unsatisfactory. That is, evidence of failure to provide Equity measures and the evidence of significant major barriers to participation as outlined in the 1997 CAPA IPS Findings. Moreover, a supportive Sense of Place was not evident, rather a state of marginalization and isolation existed.

Having explored the situational context within which Indigenous postgraduates learn to do research, I now summarise the chapter findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Indigenous involvement in postgraduate education is a recent event, thus literature about this new social group of postgraduate students is just beginning to emerge. From the published literature a narrative description of the situational context within which Indigenous postgraduates learn to do research has been presented. Categories used to organize the information were bureaucratic framework, program setting, program structure: content, program learning conditions, and program outcomes.

The literature provided an outline of postgraduate research training program components thus illuminating the stepping stones that postgraduates encounter as part of their learning paths. The literature further showed that the quality of program provision was deemed as

unsatisfactory inasmuch as the 1997 CAPA IPS Study showed Indigenous postgraduates faced eight major barriers to participation.

As well, the literature showed that these same students were hindered in their learning through university failure to provide mandatory, expected, and optional Equity measures designed to enhance their learning. The barriers to participation were attributed to policy based classification of Indigenous postgraduates as a culturally diverse Marginalized/Equity group. The 'place' classification legitimated a learning climate framed on structural violence and institutional racism.

Importantly, the situational context presented in this chapter serves as a foundational knowledge base for this Study as well as future research in this area of enquiry. It also serves as a useful guideline for all stakeholders involved in, and/or interested in Australian postgraduate program provision.

However, in terms of this Study, this information can now be added to the developmental picture of Indigenous postgraduates' Social World of Learning Research which is analyzed in Chapter Seven. Other aspects of Indigenous postgraduates' social world of learning research now need exploration before a fully developed picture can be presented. This Study seeks to furnish this important information in the data Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

Meanwhile, I now turn to Chapter Three where I explain the methodological underpinnings used to chart the way in which the needed information is to be collected.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY:
CHARTING THE THEORETICAL PATH

OVERVIEW

This chapter is concerned with explaining the methodological orientation used to research the focus question which guides this study:

How do Australian Indigenous postgraduates experience learning research?

In what follows I fulfil Research Protocols and then explain my Search for a Theoretical Framework to facilitate the Study; Emergent Research Design; Pilot Study; Selection of Participants; and Data Collection, Processing and Analysis procedures and processes. A Summary concludes the chapter.

RESEARCHER PROTOCOLS

Following Indigenous inter-personal communication protocols²⁴, I must first introduce myself by explaining my heritage, community links and connections, life-work experience so that Indigenous persons can understand my kinship and, also, gauge my integrity and credibility as an Aboriginal scholar. Transference of this oral protocol to a written research convention follows from a discussion with one participant in the Study.

Western academic protocols in the qualitative research mode require that researchers explain their motivation for undertaking their research so that readers can appreciate their attitudes toward their research including any personal perceptions that could influence attitudinal approaches to the Study and subsequent shape of the Study (Kleinman 1991, 184-185; Janesick 1994, 212; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 416).

Indigenous Protocols

I was born a member of the Bawden-Gordon Family line of the Malara People, a sub-group of the Bandjalang People. Our heritage area is located in Northern New South Wales, Australia. Inasmuch as I have lived in Canberra for a number of years my Indigenous community group encompasses both my Malara People and the Indigenous community in the Australian Capital Territory.

Being Malara for me means being a member of a spiritual-based progressive culture. Part of this progressive cultural development is the

²⁴ Although Westerners may neither be familiar with, nor understand this protocol, this is the way the scene is set for communication within Indigenous cultural practice.

present 'soul-searching' move from an oral tradition to a selectively literate tradition. I use the term 'selectively literate' because certain sacred/secret aspects of shared Malara culture will continue to remain within our oral tradition²⁵.

Being Malara also means I must continually up-grade my Clan roles (two particular areas of expertise) as I go about my daily life caring for people and the land as well as expanding my personal knowledge and practical skills. Also, being Malara means neither separating the spiritual and the political within my being/consciousness, nor compromising the spiritual for the secular. Fundamental to my service to life is daily spiritual learning together with spiritual activity. All else in my life is secondary to this ongoing priority.

My face-to-face teaching background encompasses approximately twenty years teaching experience in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education institutions in Australia, England and Canada from 1960-1982. I taught in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools.

Since leaving the classroom I have worked as an Aboriginal Education Co-ordinator for the Australian Teachers' Federation (now the Australian Education Union); and done consultancy work for various Aboriginal education groups and various Commonwealth government departments. Because I believe it is a citizen's responsibility to contribute to the defence of one's nation and/or family of nations, I spent three years as a general list Officer in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Prior to returning to university studies I was involved in several national level Indigenous education activities including national Indigenous education reviews, Indigenous education policy task forces,

²⁵ For further details underpinning this cultural stance see Weir 1993 and 1997.

and Indigenous education funding evaluation project teams. During my studies I have continually contributed to the field of Aboriginal Education through various international, national and local representations. Examples of activities include participation in university and community seminars and workshops, as well a variety of other education projects, in co-operation with both the Indigenous community and several universities.

Whereas I have an interest in all educational research and cultural studies research, my primary interest is Curriculum Studies research, including both curriculum design and curriculum evaluation. My research attention is primarily directed toward culturally appropriate systemic education provision for all population groups within pluralist societies.

My research approach is grounded in educational freedom, freedom which the rhetoric of Western democratic societies guarantees (Banks 1996, 75-76), through expressions of upholding egalitarian democratic ideals. Inasmuch as the rhetoric in Australia does not reflect educational practice, I pursue this democratic ideal of freedom in education together with other like-minded Indigenous and multicultural theorists and researchers (Pinar *et al.* 1995; Banks 1996, 75-76).

Western Academic Protocols

I decided to frame this Study on Indigenous postgraduates and their experiences in learning research because I uphold the notion that Indigenous researchers, equipped with culturally appropriate research training, are needed to facilitate Indigenous cultural survival. Importantly, we Indigenous researchers are a new social group on the Australian social landscape but little is known about us.

In cultural survival terms, which for me includes the spiritual dimension of being, I see my responsibility as participating in the collective international Indigenous trend to contribute to 'writing our own culture', together with other culturally knowledgeable researchers. In this regard my writings/activities on spirituality focus on how to walk a spiritual path, **not** the content of spiritual teachings.

Culturally appropriate research training is fundamental to my intended research endeavours. In my case this means becoming a culturally aware/sensitive researcher, equipped with the theory and skills to research educational issues of concern to Indigenous Peoples, as well as other groups in pluralist Australia. Such research endeavours may or may not encompass a spiritual dimension. However, my personal definition of cultural awareness/sensitivity incorporates the notion of awareness/sensitivity to all cultures.

Fulfilment of my research training aims is made unnecessarily difficult by the way in which research training is currently offered in Australian universities. That is, through mainly focusing on Western knowledge traditions, conventions, and protocols, with lesser attention to other knowledge traditions. In this regard I believe that the spiritual, cultural, social, economic, and political interests of a culturally pluralist society such as Australia, are not well-served.

I sustain an infinite curiosity about 'the learning process' and feel comfortable with my chosen discipline, Curriculum Studies. The recent appearance of a variety of discourses has increased my level of disciplinary satisfaction (Marsh & Stafford 1988, 30; Pinar *et al.* 1995, xvii).

Discourses such as race; autobiography and biography; theology; post-modernism and post-structuralism; and international perspectives (Pinar *et al.* 1995, xvii), have broadened the field. I foresee that the introduction of these varied discourses increases the potential for inclusive linkages between the growing pool of Indigenous knowledge, The School of Indigenous Thought, and non-Indigenous academia.

The practical reality of studying within a 'two knowledge system' intellectual framework may sound simple but it isn't. My intellectual dilemma arises from existing inherent inter-cultural and spiritual/non-spiritual differences, both between and within, all Australian population groups and also, educational discourses.

These differences are exacerbated by the fact that secular Australian education institutions have adopted a secular humanist education philosophy (Spencer *et al.* 1992, 68) and universities are no exception. Philosophical perspectives grounded in the secular incorporate many notions of 'truth' together with 'what counts as evidence' (Cuff *et al.* 1990, 9-11), and, can sometimes be used to advantage and, sometimes not. Significantly, within these perspectives Absolute Truth or truth based on spiritual principles are not recognized as legitimate forms of knowledge (E. Willis 1993, 24).

Given these competing paradigms for establishing 'truth', I develop coping strategies to negotiate my academic path through secular humanist knowledge traditions in universities. Two strategies are worthy of mention. One strategy involves constantly monitoring maintenance of my spiritual integrity during engagement in the knowledge production process. This personal approach often necessitates adapting/modifying Western theoretical frameworks to ensure I do not compromise my spiritual integrity.

A second personal strategy consists of constructing comparative illustrative charts to map any commonalities and differences between institutional education knowledge insights²⁶ and those of my People, the Malara, which are based on God The Creator's Laws of Cosmos, as we know them.

Moreover, I work to the principles of Sacred Geometry, the Golden Rule as explained by Pythagoras. This personal practice has arisen as a result of 'higher spiritual learning'. In research terms this means that I organize and plan according to Sacred Geometric formulas. The fact that secular procedural research processes are 'operationalized' in a significantly different way to my *modus operandi* means engagement in burdensome mental gymnastics to ensure that I balance the two in a spiritually integral manner.

Given my study problems, I often wondered how other Indigenous postgraduates were experiencing 'learning to do research'. In particular, I wondered whether my Indigenous colleagues were realizing their learning aims and goals. In other words, I felt this Study would help me to make sense out of my own strange social world of learning research.

My learning world has had its high points and low points. The high points came from those supervisors²⁷ who were respectful of me as an individual, appreciative of my Indigenous heritage and knowledge traditions, helpful in providing Western theoretical expertise, and were also supportive of my research endeavours.

²⁶ Educational literature is mainly based on, and reflects, secular humanist knowledge perspectives (Spencer *et al.* 1992, 12).

²⁷ When proceeding from a masters degree to a Ph.D I changed supervisors but not institutions.

The low points arose from one department's, thinly veiled but difficult to prove²⁸ indifference; lack of intellectual support²⁹; recurring episodic instances of personal disrespect; 'anti-religious freedom' behaviour through threats to subtract marks for using The Bible as a reference source; institutional violence by insinuating that religion and spirituality had no place in Education Studies; and hindrance in thesis topic choice - during both my master's and Ph.D programs. In contrast, when I was transferred to another department, the learning environment was supportive, respectful, and intellectually stimulating.

As a final point, my experience as a postgraduate student has been rewarding in that I have gained both knowledge of, and experience in, the research process. Interaction with culturally sensitive supervisors has also been rewarding. However, because of generalized institutional and personal racism the experience takes precedence together with my grade six one as undoubtedly being the worst educational experience in my life.

At the Indigenous community level, I have encountered, albeit from only a few people, amazingly negative reactions to my postgraduate education pursuits. Nevertheless, remaining ever optimistic, I know there must be good stories out there - somewhere.

²⁸ I did not invoke grievance procedures because issues such as these are difficult to prove. And, because I live a considerable distance from my university I perceived that I could not afford the burdensome financial and emotional costs of such an action.

²⁹ This department did give financial assistance by way of internal postgraduate scholarships to cover incidental study costs for consumable items and on one occasion, conference attendance.

SEARCHING FOR A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This Study is situated within the discipline, Curriculum Studies. It was designed to fulfil a dual purpose. One purpose related to the provision of descriptive information about Indigenous postgraduates' 'learning research' experiences as a basis for sound educational decision-making about program provision. The second purpose concerned laying the theoretical groundwork to facilitate further enquiry into the area. The reader is thus requested to view the Study from this perspective.

Theoretical Background

Finding an appropriate theoretical framework for my research task was not easy. My dilemma hinged on the fact that both the focus of my enquiry (Indigenous Postgraduate Education), and contextual area of my enquiry (the wider field of Postgraduate Education), are globally acknowledged as emergent fields (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992; Holdaway 1993).

Moreover, my disciplinary field has been undergoing an upsurge in scholarly activity on a global scale, with as yet undetermined implications and ramifications (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Greene 1994; Pinar *et al.* 1995). The major conceptual change consists of a shift from developing curriculum to understanding curriculum (Guba & Lincoln 1989, 51; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 6). My approach to this Study was influenced by these three factors.

Curriculum Studies is a complex area which has only recently become a legitimated field of enquiry (Pinar *et al.* 1995; P. Willis & Neville 1996). It is categorized as both a theoretical and practical discipline (Stenhouse 1975, 3; Marsh & Stafford 1988, 24; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 55).

The discipline lacks an underlying and unifying paradigm (Marsh & Stafford 1988, 29) as do some other disciplines, such as Sociology (Western & Najman 1993, 618). Nevertheless, a range of competing discourses exist, as previously noted (Marsh & Stafford 1988, 28; Patton 1990, 40-41; Pinar *et al.* 1995, xvii).

Curriculum theorizers and researchers borrow theory from other disciplines, (See *inter alia* Marsh & Stafford 1988, 24; Patton 1990, 66-67; Pinar *et al.* 1995, xvii), while adding disciplinary essence. Disciplinary essence consists of attempting to elucidate "curriculum patterns and underlying assumptions" and proposing "tentative action" to redress any perceived inadequacies (Marsh & Stafford 1988, 25).

Curriculum research consequently forms the theoretical base from which educational change can result (Patton 1990; D. Smith & Lovat 1991; Pinar *et al.* 1995). In this regard the discipline has distinctive features. Those features relating to curriculum evaluation are raised here because of their relevance to this Study.

In broad terms, curriculum evaluation research involves conducting systematic empirical data collection coupled with "thoughtful" analysis (Patton 1990, 11) for the purpose of making judgments and, subsequently decisions (TenBrink 1974, 11; Stenhouse 1975, 104), about curriculum issues for the betterment/improvement of educational practice (Stenhouse 1975, 98-104; Davis 1980, 127; Patton 1990, 52). The term 'curriculum evaluation' means different things to different people (See *inter alia* TenBrink 1974, 4; Guba & Lincoln 1989, 22; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 732). In this Study I use the term in accord with its broadest definition as outlined above.

Globally, Postgraduate/Graduate Education is considered as an emergent area of scholarly enquiry and it is generally acknowledged as

a difficult area to research (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992; Holdaway 1993). One main reason given for this conclusion rests in the fact that the heterogeneous disciplinary cultures within universities are not easy to reconcile within one research project (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992, 2).

Another mitigating factor underpinning difficulty in researching postgraduate education pertains to the reality that information is difficult to obtain because of the diverse ways universities store information both in Australia (Cullen *et al.* 1994, 4), and overseas (Bowen & Rudenstine 1992, 2). This is perhaps the reason for Bowen and Rudenstine's (1992, 1) observation that although studies on facets of graduate programs exist, there is little research on doctorate education in general, across the globe.

Indigenous postgraduate education is also globally categorized as an emergent area of enquiry. In Australia, only one Study exists, the recently published 1997 CAPA IPS *Indigenous Postgraduate Education* project, as previously noted. The CAPA IPS Project began in 1994 whereas this enquiry started in 1995. When I began work on this Study, I was aware of the nature and purpose of the CAPA IPS Project and designed this Study as a parallel endeavour.

Significantly, the 1997 CAPA document is a bureaucratic evaluation instrument. Although the CAPA IPS findings are valuable, they do not provide a sufficiently comprehensive conceptual base as a foundation from which other forms of enquiry might proceed, nor was it designed for that purpose.

Furthermore, the CAPA IPS Report does not precisely analyze 'barriers to achievement' in relation to postgraduate program goals. Rather, the Project orientation focuses on learning empowerment and

disempowerment (CAPA 1997, B3-5). I took these facts into account when searching for a theoretical base, that is, the 'stage the research was at' (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 45).

Evaluation Orientation

From among the wide range of available curriculum evaluation discourses, I selected Democratic Evaluation as the one most suited to the purpose of the Study. Democratic Evaluation serves the primary function of promoting understanding through description (See *inter alia* Stenhouse 1975, 121; Davis 1980, 127; Hamilton 1982, 109). Importantly, value judgments about the quality and adequacy of the educational program under investigation forms part of the evaluative process (Davis 1980, 127; Greene 1994, 540; Stake 1994, 239).

The Study falls within the realm of the Interpretivist tradition which as Greene (1994, 536), notes is also "variously called qualitative, ethnographic, and naturalistic". Democratic Evaluation endeavours presuppose the notion of obtaining information from a self-critical community, comprised of stakeholders pertaining to a specific educational phenomenon (Davis 1980, 127-128; Greene 1994, 540). The educational phenomenon under investigation, in this Study, comprises the research training components of the various graduate and postgraduate programs existing within Australian universities.

Educational benefits derived from Democratic Evaluation endeavours arise from two sources. First, any descriptive research serves as a foundation from which other types of research can proceed (Salkind 1994, 12; Sarantakos 1993, 7). Second, identification of the "quality of the work done" in programs and "the circumstances and available opportunities which can constrain what can be done" (Davis 1980, 127), can lead to sound educational decision-making grounded on a sound

research base. "Quality of the work done" in this Study relates to postgraduate students' perceptions about the quality of their learning experiences.

Consistent with this type of investigation, application of the evaluative findings can lead to program improvement consisting of changes in either methods, or materials, or learning environments (Davis 1980, 129), and/or a change in the culture of a program (Patton 1990, 68).

This Study is a preliminary Democratic Evaluation exercise because information was only obtained from Indigenous postgraduate students' and not from other stakeholders. Notably, this Study falls within the realm of basic rather than applied research (Patton 1990, 11-12). I focused the Study on the students because I felt their views were of primary concern inasmuch as they form the central point/primary stakeholders, of program provision. Moreover, I decided that the Study would focus solely on the students themselves so that ontologically and axiologically, they would feel free to collectively exercise 'control' of the Study.

Conversely, I felt that inclusion of supervisors, university administration, and members of the various relevant local Indigenous communities would impose limitations that would hinder the free flow of student information. Participants in the Study subsequently endorsed this direction. Nevertheless, participants did inform their supervisors of the nature of this co-operative Study (See Appendix Six, Paper C).

Theoretical Framework/Set of Procedures

To accomplish the research task I needed a theoretical framework, in curriculum evaluation terms a 'set of procedures' (Marsh & Stafford

1988, 61), appropriate to the Study aims and purpose and also, to facilitate what Patton (1990, 39), calls "situational responsiveness" and Greene (1994, 536) calls "contextualized meaning".

Contextualization is an important factor in qualitative research inasmuch as a fundamental assumption incorporates the notion that, to use Hollins' (1996, 155) words "context situates and shapes curriculum; thus changing a curriculum involves changing its context". For my Democratic Evaluation purpose I selected reflexive ethnography underpinned by phenomenological principles as an appropriate methodological procedure to facilitate cultural description from the postgraduate students' point of view.

Since Ethnography by definition is cultural description, it is useful for educational research (Patton 1990, 68; Crump 1992, 316; Delamont 1992, 7), because it relies on open-ended observation and is designed to facilitate enquiry into new topics from a cultural perspective (See *inter alia* Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 28; Lincoln & Guba 1985, 208, Patton 1990, 186). Ethnography also offers flexibility of choice in data collection methods and emergent design (See *inter alia* Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 28; Lincoln & Guba 1985, 208, Patton 1990, 186).

A basic assumption in ethnographic enquiry incorporates the notion that human groups interacting over time will develop a culture (Patton 1990, 68). Significantly, both people and programs can develop cultures (Patton 1990, 68). Ethnography used for curriculum purposes thus facilitates decisions on whether a required program improvement might require a change in program culture (Patton 1990, 68) in cases where culturally diverse students are involved. In this case ethnography enabled exploration of potential inter-cultural differences between Australian Indigenous students and, the culture of Australian university programs which are primarily designed for Anglo-Celtic students (See

inter alia Bulbeck 1993, 459; Williams *et al.* 1993, 288; Sargent 1994, 29).

Reflexive ethnographic principles define the relationship between the researcher and the group being researched. These principles imply that self-as-researcher must also be self-conscious of self-as-author in the development, analysis, and presentation of the finalized study. Reflexivity incorporates the notion that, "we are part of the social world we study" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 14; Delamont 1992, 8).

The process of reflexivity does not attempt to eliminate the effects of the researcher but, rather, seeks to understand the research outcomes of the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 17; Delamont 1992, 9). The notion that the process acknowledges the potential importance of the researcher in shaping the context "thus becomes central to the analysis" (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 18; Delamont 1992, 8). There are several types of reflexivity (See Steier 1991, 9), however, in this Study, self as reflexive researcher, adheres to the original broad perspective of reflexivity as described above, which was documented by Hammersley and Atkinson in 1983.

Significantly, within the broad ethnographic framework utilization of phenomenological principles allows effects on consciousness to be examined (Hunt 1978, 5; Abercrombie *et al.* 1988, 184; Halfpenny 1991, 57). This is an important factor for Indigenous students inasmuch as the paradigm allows incorporation of the spiritual dimension of being/consciousness (van Manen 1990, 181).

Phenomenology is defined as the "science of phenomena" (van Manen, 1990, 183; Patton 1990, 69). The focus of this theoretical perspective

is, in Patton's (1990, 69) words, "what is the structure and essence of [this] experience for this group of people". The underlying assumption is that there is an essence, a core meaning, to shared experience in a commonly experienced phenomenon (Patton 1990, 70; Crotty 1996, 272; Ehrich 1996, 199). Notably, this Study is not a phenomenological one but, a Study using a phenomenological perspective, a common practice in educational enquiry (Patton 1990, 69).

Knowledge Boundaries

Program description using ethnography poses limitations contingent upon negotiated levels of access which, consequently, influence the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research findings (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 54; Woods 1986, 23). I did not consider these inbuilt problematic features as a major problem because I have been a member of the broad Indigenous Postgraduate Student community of scholars for a number of years. Moreover, since preliminary floating of the idea of the Study was well-received among a number of my Indigenous postgraduate colleagues, I believed that they would be willing to share their learning experiences with me.

In evaluation research knowledge determinations are limited by the focus of the evaluation method employed (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Patton 1990; Pinar *et al.* 1995). In this Study, the findings were anticipated as revealing a descriptive picture of Indigenous postgraduates experiences, from which determinations could then be made about the nature and quality of existing research training provision for Indigenous postgraduates.

Neither ethnographic nor phenomenological approaches allow for problem solving (van Manen 1990, 23), nor do they allow for causal

relationships to be explored (van Manen 1990, 23). However, when these approaches are used for curriculum evaluation purposes it needs to be remembered that value judgments do arise. I anticipated that value judgments in this Study would arise from participant identified features of specific program offerings (Davis 1980, 30; Patton 1990, 127-128).

Knowledge delimitations in this Study relate to the nature and extent of experiential issues raised by the participants (Patton 1990, 45). In other words, I anticipated that the range of knowledge available for subsequent analysis would correspond to participants' perceptions of 'significant' aspects of their learning experiences. I emphasize that knowledge about Indigenous involvement in postgraduate programs is limited to the views of only section of the program stakeholders, the postgraduates themselves.

Theory Construction

Supplying a conceptualization of a phenomenon raises the probability of its use, and therefore, opportunity for further investigation of related issue (Glaser 1978, 10; Woods 1986, 140). I anticipated that a conceptualization would provide a useful heuristic device for illumination of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates learning research within a university setting (Abercrombie *et al.* 1988, 184; Patton 1990, 424).

I believed that ethnographic and phenomenological analysis would facilitate construction of the conceptualization (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 23; Kellehear 1993, 21). Nevertheless, the degree of explanation of Indigenous postgraduate student experiential phenomena was seen as limited because, as Lewins asserts, (1992, 24) a

typification, or conceptualization, "is only a representation of the processes said to be operating in the social world".

As a final point, the orientation of the Study precluded it from claims of representativeness of Indigenous Australian postgraduates, *per se*, or of Indigenous postgraduates from other countries (Worsley *et al.* 1970, 112; McNeill 1985, 88; Garman 1996, 22). In this regard, the Study does claim, however, to identify concepts relating to the experiences of this small student group.

Notwithstanding, I anticipated that the research findings might be particularly beneficial to other Indigenous postgraduates. That is, beneficial as indicators of the conditions under which one group of postgraduates 'learned to do research' including what they learned, and their subsequent responses to those learning experiences. In other words, I perceived that a descriptive account would provide insights/understandings via surrogate experience (Davis 1980, 35; Patton 1990, 31).

In summary, this Study was situation responsive, as is most educational research, and related only to one group of Indigenous postgraduates engaged in learning research within existing postgraduate program offerings across several Australian universities (Davis 1980, 30; Hamersley & Atkinson 1983, 184; Patton 1990, 39). The research findings were intended to benefit, and be used by, relevant information users such as stakeholders and interested others (Davis 1980, 38; Patton 1990, 126).

EMERGENT RESEARCH DESIGN

The research task involved investigating and describing a postgraduate program phenomenon, that of research training, and Indigenous postgraduates' views of their experiences of that phenomenon (Kellehear 1993, 21; Sarantakos 1993, 37). The purpose of my research task was to increase understanding of the learning phenomenon, (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 254), so that any consequent educational decisions about the quality of the program could be made from a sound research base. My research approach was organized through asking the focus question:

How do Australian Indigenous postgraduates experience learning research?

The scope of the Study corresponded with Patton's, (1990, 202), prescription for constructing descriptive pictures:

- describe the setting that was observed,
- describe the activities that took place in the setting,
- describe the people who participated in those activities, and
- describe the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed.

Development of concept-evidence links were thus primarily intended to construct theory, rather than to test theory. Features of Indigenous postgraduates' experiences were to be used as the basis for evaluating program quality.

Evaluation Approach

Philosophical underpinnings of the enquiry incorporated fundamental epistemological, ontological, and axiological considerations (Guba & Lincoln 1989, 83; Garman 1996, 20). First, knowledge issues were to

take two forms, epistemological (data from the literature) and methodological (participant meanings). Second, ontological questions such as the nature of social and educational reality and the relationship between the researcher and the researched, (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 108; Garman 1996, 20), were to be derived from the participants' themselves. Lastly, in axiological (values) terms, the enquiry approach was designed to allow participants maximum freedom, flexibility, and confidentiality, in sharing their experiences.

The key concept used in this thesis was 'educational experiences'. The term was taken to mean experiences of the total range of processes and procedures existing in higher education research training provision. That is, participant perceptions of learning the research process including the culture and environment in which the learning occurs (DEET 1994b, 35). Furthermore, the term 'experiences' incorporates the notion of the interplay between feeling and circumstance (Woods & Hammersley 1977, 188).

Coherence in the developing picture was to be preserved by using the major structuring concept of 'learning the research process' including all sequential stepping stones on the path toward becoming a researcher. Unity in portraying the lifeworld of postgraduates was to be maintained by focusing on the sequential flow of postgraduate program offerings. From preliminary reading about the phenomenon, three assumptions were made. Each related to the premise that 'it is arguable whether Australian government education institutions serve the needs of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in a culturally appropriate manner'.

One assumption incorporated the notion that Australian education institutions, by their existing hegemonic nature, pose inter-cultural socialization difficulties for culturally diverse Indigenous Australians

(Harris 1992, 5; Weir 1996a, 12-13; CAPA 1997, B40). Socialization involves role learning through organized educational processes resulting in internalized behaviour (Waters & Crook 1990, 39).

A second assumption involved the concept that Indigenous postgraduates who wish to 'write their own culture' might face theoretical difficulties (Langton 1981, 21-22; Hughes 1984, 20; M. Brady 1990, 18). The final assumption contained the idea that engagement of culturally diverse minority group members in a foreign/alien education system often necessitates the use of cultural adaptations/survival mechanisms (Watson 1987 cited in R. Andrews & Hughes 1988, 32; Weir 1993, 39).

Evaluation Methods

Investigation of the topic entailed interviewing people and reviewing the literature. The working universe was seen as incorporating the volunteer participant Indigenous postgraduates as a group, with individual students constituting units of analysis (Cohen & Manion 1989, 141; Patton 1990, 387; Huberman & Miles 1994, 440).

For my data collection I planned using semi-structured but informal interviews. Cross-case analysis was then anticipated to facilitate conceptualization of Indigenous postgraduates' social world of learning as a basis for making value judgments about the quality program provision.

Before engaging in the enquiry process I conducted a Pilot Study to test the research rationale and research design features. Prior to this event the University of New England (hereafter UNE) Ethics Committee had approved the ethical procedures outlined in the research design which

included the Fieldwork Paperwork/audit trail³⁰ provided in Appendix Seven.

Notably, my proposed Study had been publicized in two Journal articles, The Campus Review and the UNE publication, Smith's Weekly. As well, word of mouth publicizing activities included telephone conversations, two national Indigenous education conferences, and two international Indigenous education conferences.

PILOT STUDY

The aim of the Pilot Study was threefold. First, to test the feasibility of the proposed study. Second, to test the research design including the plausibility of the research focus question. Third, to further clarify the subject matter and thus the nature of the enquiry. Consequently, the focus question which guided the Pilot Study was:

Do all key features of the thesis research design facilitate anticipated thesis aims and anticipated research outcomes?

In addition, I wanted to begin developing interaction with other Indigenous postgraduates to elicit their support for and participation in the enquiry (Janesick 1991, 213; Sarantakos 1993, 278). I also wanted to refine my interview questions and interview procedure (Sarantakos 1993, 278; Salkind 1994, 198).

Information was received from five postgraduates, studying at three different universities. A sixth student who was approached refused to participate in the Study because he said he did not know me and therefore did not feel able to trust me. Three students were internal

³⁰ I use the term paperwork/audit trail as a blanket device for all the accumulated notes and analytical and personal reflections used during the course of this Study.

full-time students while two were external full-time students. Three students were interviewed while two, who were in the field, completed questionnaires. The material received from these students subsequently constituted part of the data for this Study.

Pilot Study Findings

The Pilot Study findings showed that the Study was feasible in terms of manageability and, further that, the research focus question was plausible. Moreover, the findings also showed that the subject matter coincided with that in literature review and preliminary interviews. Significantly, participants found the Study interesting and said that it assisted them to clarify their thinking/reflections about their learning experiences.

The array of data collected confirmed that semi-structured but informal interviews were suitable for gathering the information needed to fulfil the purposes of the Study. For instance, the Pilot Study findings showed that one university pays little attention to providing culturally appropriate education for Indigenous postgraduates. The data also showed that within one university, significant departmental differences exist in attitudes toward Indigenous knowledge as well as the provision of resources for Indigenous postgraduates. Other universities may provide other stories.

Overall, the data collected provided confirmation of the nature of the subject matter and thus the nature of the thesis enquiry. A wealth of data was gathered which significantly added to the Study including valuable substantive clues for Indigenous postgraduate research culture. In terms of planning and groundwork preparation, the Pilot Study

provided generalized confirmation of my constructed fieldwork access and paperwork/audit trail, my fieldwork procedural plans and arrangements, and my strategy for participant selection. Details of these issues are taken up later in this chapter.

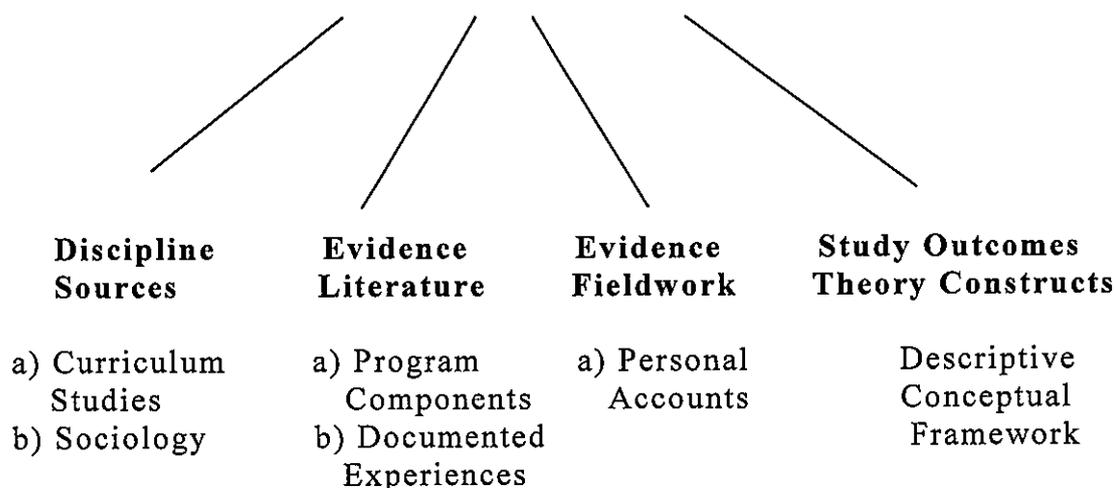
Evaluation Design

The fact that the Pilot Study findings confirmed the emergent research design and approach, the emergent theoretical framework thus read Reflexive Ethnography underpinned by Phenomenological principles. The theoretical path for developing the concept-indicator links which were to form the basis of the descriptive picture is illustrated in Figure One. The framework illustrates all aspects of the emergent research design.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework: Research Design

Nature of the Study: Preliminary Democratic Evaluation Research

Set of Procedures: Ethnography underpinned by Phenomenological principles and Process Study Evaluation guidelines; **Sites:** Several Universities; **Sampling:** Purposeful, Snowball; **Analysis:** Constant Comparative Method.



The Pilot Study was a worthwhile activity and enabled key aspects of the thesis research design to be tested which resulted in required research design modifications being made prior to entry into the field. It also substantiated the fact that, at least in the minds of the Pilot Study participants and self-as-researcher, that the Study would provide valuable insights into an emergent but critical topic affecting the future of Australian Indigenous Postgraduates and Australian Indigenous Peoples.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants were selected by a formal co-operative process between the researcher and Aboriginal Education Unit Directors, (hereafter AEUD), at selected universities. University choice was underpinned by the number of Indigenous postgraduates enrolled, and whether they were internal or external students.

This formal selection procedure was necessary as only a few Indigenous postgraduate students are enrolled at any one university across Australia. Overall, Indigenous postgraduates from eight universities spanning ten campuses across three states were involved in the Study. Nevertheless, regardless of where they were enrolled, the students formed one socio-cultural group in that they shared the common feature of identity as Australian Indigenous students engaged in (or recently engaged in), postgraduate programs (Giddens 1989, 730-731).

I used a combination of Purposeful Sampling and Snowball Sampling methods to locate information-rich participants during my time in the field (Patton 1990, 182; Sarantakos 1993, 131). Three broad categories of selection criteria were applied to reduce data distortion (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 159), which are explained below.

I was aware that my categories were ambitious. I was also aware that because Indigenous postgraduates are only a small group, necessity might force me to adopt a more flexible approach in participant mix. However, this was not necessary as I was able to find a sufficiently diverse group of volunteer participants in accordance with my pre-set selection criteria.

First, disciplinary interest was a primary concern since I wanted to maintain disciplinary similarity and consequently, similarity in research experiences. I looked for a mix of Arts - Humanities, and Social Sciences³¹ postgraduates because most Indigenous students pursue these disciplinary interests, as stated in Chapter One. As it happened the participant group consisted of a mix of Arts - Humanities, Health, Social Sciences and Education postgraduates. Importantly, these are disciplinary areas with which I am familiar.

Locating participants was not as difficult as I had anticipated because AEUD's and participants who had already been interviewed were helpful in suggesting/finding prospective participants. Sample size in a Study such as this one is dependent on the information that is sought (Patton 1990, 182-183). I interviewed twenty participants before a sufficiently comprehensive picture of Indigenous postgraduates experiences in learning research was obtained.

The total mix of twenty volunteer participant students comprised two in master's of letters programs, one in a master's by coursework program, five in master's by research programs, seven in PhD programs, one past recipient of an honours research master's qualification, two past recipients of PhD qualifications, and one 'deferred' PhD student. One

³¹ Specific interest areas are deliberately framed in vague terms to protect participants.

graduate certificate student was also interviewed because part of the student's research experience involved being one of a team of interviewers for a large-scale research project.

The stage participants had reached in their programs constituted a second criterion since I was describing processual engagement in an educational program. To ensure all learning research program phases could be adequately explored I looked for a mix of students. That is, students who were at the beginning, middle, and end of their programs as well as 'past' postgraduate students and deferred and/or postgraduate 'drop-outs/push-outs'.

It was easier to find students who were at the beginning and middle of their programs, than at the end of their programs. I found six participants who were beginning their studies, four who were at the mid-point in their studies, and five who were at the write-up stage of their studies. I also found three former students (1 master's by research and 2 PhD's), one student who had deferred his/her program, and one former 'drop out/push' who had resumed studies.

The final participant selection criterion used was enrolment status because I felt that it was important to note any differences in learning circumstances between internal and external students. As it happened, proportionally speaking, fifteen internal students and five external students participated in the Study. Only one person I approached refused to participate in the Study, as already mentioned.

In summary, my selection procedure allowed examination of a comprehensive range of Indigenous postgraduate research training experiences within a variety of Australian graduate/postgraduate program offerings, at a range of universities (Bulbeck 1993, 468-469).

DATA COLLECTION, PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Simultaneous data collection, processing, and analysis was an ongoing activity throughout my engagement in the field (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 221; Guba & Lincoln 1985, 335; Sarantakos 1993, 15). The data collection process involved two separate but inter-related activities, collecting personal/insider accounts from participants, and reviewing the literature to frame the situational context within which Indigenous postgraduates learn to do research (Patton 1990, 245).

Daily records of events were maintained during the entire fieldwork phase of the enquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 208; Woods 1986, 44). A separate folder of analytical 'reflections' on the data was also maintained throughout the fieldwork process (Woods 1986, 45; Delamont 1992, 69). During my fieldwork activity I took great care to separate description from interpretation in my daily 'reflections' and draft write-ups (Patton 1990, 375). I also sought to maintain this balance in my written presentation (Patton 1990, 429).

Fieldwork Preparation and Protocols

Fieldwork preparation consisted of first contacting the DETYA office in Canberra to obtain a listing of postgraduate statistics. This list, together with my personal statistical knowledge of where postgraduates were studying, was used as the initial basis for determining which universities to contact.

At the same time I looked for potential universities by reading published information (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983; Delamont 1992,

105), as well as talking to acquaintances within these universities. Information gleaned was treated as speculative until I visited sites and made my own determinations based on personal observation in conjunction with the accumulated 'homework'.

Access to universities was initiated by first telephoning AEUD's and discussing postgraduate student enrolments. All AEUD's contacted were most helpful in their efforts to locate potential participants. These students were then contacted by telephone to explain the nature of the Study and secure a verbal agreement to participate. Discussion included the issues outlined in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Fieldwork Protocols.

- introduction of self as researcher;
- explanation of the PhD enquiry and reasons for the Study including perceived benefits of the Study;
- request for volunteers;
- arrangements for an interview session, including the fact that interview time was projected at 1.5 - 2 hours.
- explanation of ethical issues including consent form, opportunity to vet transcript, ability to withdraw at any time, uses to which the research might be put, ownership of intellectual property;
- general discussion period; and lastly,
- expression of appreciation for their projected participation time.

Agreement was then formalized by sending letters to AEUD's and participants. The array of letters sent to AEUD's comprised access request letters for them to pass to Vice-Chancellors, as well as copies of explanatory letters to participants and also, their supervisors (See Appendix Six, Papers B to D).

Participants were sent letters confirming arrangements together with a letter for their supervisors which they could pass to their supervisors at

their discretion (See Appendix Six, Papers C and D). At this time an explanatory letter was sent to relevant State/Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (See Appendix Six, Paper A).

Once a research relationship was in operation, Indigenous Giving and Receiving Protocols were followed. Participants viewed our contact as an opportunity to expand their research network and sometimes phoned for chats during which various kinds of information was exchanged.

Many students were interested in discussing/receiving any information, Indigenous papers or names of contacts, relating to their topics. Happily, I was able to share a diverse array of information with participants since I had attended the WIPC: E 1996 conference in Albuquerque as well as several other national conferences. The fact that I participate in a broad education network also facilitated a useful exchange of information.

Post Access Protocols constituted sending thank-you letters to relevant AEUD's and participants. As well, a total of five participant Up-Date letters were sent at intervals throughout the duration of the Study. Most participants received all the Up-Dates but a few did not because contact was 'lost' through participant overseas trips and employment changes.

Co-operative Research Procedures

Being mindful of the potential implications of preliminary research in a new field, viewing the Study as a co-operative venture was not only a natural but, responsible choice. Co-operative determinations about my role as researcher were devised with the participants themselves during early phases of my engagement in the field. Although participants

understood, and agreed, that the Study was a co-operative venture, they perceived my role as that of 'trusted' informed insider providing a voice for them within the confines of "reasonable" confidentiality (Patton 1990, 356; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 208-209).

The agreed power-sharing arrangement thus involved self-as-researcher designing the Study, conducting the research, analyzing and compiling the findings, providing intermittent participant up-dates, arranging participant 'member-checks' of the data, organizing intellectual property matters, submitting the thesis for marking, and finally, organizing distribution of the research findings. Otherwise, my role involved publicising the fact that the Study was in train and airing generalized findings where appropriate and applicable, throughout the duration of my own study program.

Given the above-defined representational mandate, I perceived my active relationship with participants as tour guide into participants' social world and translator of the journey through that world. In specific terms, my relationship with participants meant using my Curriculum Studies 'design and evaluation' knowledge and skills to investigate and then act as describer/translator (Stenhouse 1975, 120) of: the social setting, the activities in the setting, the people in the setting and subsequent translator of participant views of the setting.

I use the term "reasonable" rather than strict confidentiality because Indigenous postgraduates constitute only a small group of persons which makes confidentiality issues exceedingly difficult (Patton 1990, 356). However, I felt that confidentiality issues would be handled with sufficient care through my continued efforts during the conduct of the Study, as well as by the volunteer members of the group (the participants in this Study) who performed final checks to ensure authenticity of the data (Delamont 1992, 159; McCutcheon 1995, 210).

Put in another somewhat unwieldy way, my self-conscious/reflexive role of 'self as researcher' can be translated as Indigenous curriculum studies researcher/teacher and PhD candidate being given the task of impersonally³² investigating and interpreting my peers shared social world, while maintaining awareness of spiritual, moral, ethical, and cultural implications of the outcomes of the Study.

Confidentiality Issues

Participants were invited to sign 'informed consent' forms (See Appendix Six, Paper D3) only after hearing an explanation of the importance of their collective data as an educational research instrument, as well as the variety of ways in which the research outcomes might be used (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 254; Giddens 1989, 686; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 207-209). In this respect, participants were to be apprised that they could withdraw at anytime (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 211).

Since the participants were adults it was anticipated that they would only reveal what they wished to reveal, in the interests of improving the general education experience for other Indigenous postgraduates. Nevertheless, keeping in mind the fact that interviewees sometimes inadvertently 'reveal what they do not wish to reveal, (Patton 1990, 355; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 209), moral and political responsibility issues were to be discussed as part of the interview process (Lever 1975, 146; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 208).

³² The term impersonal is used here in its spiritual sense, meaning the interpreter as a personality uses personal skills, knowledge, and expertise in interpretation while maintaining analytic objectivity (Prophet 1984, 179). The stance is similar to what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, 100) label as a 'marginal position'.

The use to which research outcomes are put is always of concern to Indigenous Peoples given that in the past, research findings have sometimes been used to disadvantage Indigenous Peoples (W. Brady 1992, 105; Pettman 1992, 147; Bulbeck 1993, 445). Inasmuch as the Study was framed as a co-operative endeavour, participants were aware of, and later agreed, that the thesis would probably be published or, at the very least, be open to public viewing.

Consequently, participants understood that the findings of the Study could be used, by any stakeholders or interest groups, for program decision-making. But, essentially, exactly how the findings might be used was beyond the control of self-as-researcher or the participants (Davis 1980, 53).

Ownership and Intellectual Property Rights

From my point of view the finalized thesis was always going to be 'owned' by the participants. In terms of intellectual property issues and university rules, I intended, (subject to subsequent participant agreement), following the Koori Centre's³³ Principles and Procedures for the Conduct of Research documented by W. Brady (1992,109-112). Specifically, I intended upholding the principle that joint/co-operative research documentation be negotiated between self-as-researcher and participants.

³³ The Indigenous Education Unit at the University of Sydney is titled The Koori Centre.

Data Collection Procedures

Fieldwork activity paralleled the customary three phases of Western ethnographic data collection procedures, that is, the first; middle; and final phases of fieldwork (McNeill 1985, 70-83). The first phase of fieldwork differed from the norm in that I did not need to learn the culture of Indigenous postgraduates since I was already an Indigenous postgraduate. However, when I did visit the various campuses, I attuned myself to be sensitive to the prevailing atmosphere and environment of each site.

The middle phase of the fieldwork involved a two staged process of data collection over a twelve month period. During the first stage, information was obtained through sixteen face-to-face interviews, two telephone interviews, and two participants who were 'in the field' responded via prepared questionnaires (See Appendix Six, Paper F).

Most interviews were conducted at the universities where participants were studying. However, external students were interviewed at a range of diverse times and places including meeting rooms when attending conferences, the home of an AEUD after a community meeting, a street-side cafe, a motel setting in a country area, and an outside setting at a cultural facility. Most interviews lasted for one and a half hours while a few took two hours, and a few took one hour.

Interviews were informal but, semi-structured. The interview focus question used was "Tell me about your experiences in learning to do research". The grand tour open-ended question allowed participants free and flexible response space (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 90). However, when one is attempting to construct a descriptive picture, it is not necessary to collect the same information from each participant

(Patton 1990, 286) rather, the focus is on filling in parts of the picture, that is, all aspects of research training provision.

For this reason I used an interview guide approach to gain basic program information (Patton 1990, 283; Sarantakos 1993, 182; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 90). Four additional primary questions about aspects of programs were asked during the conduct of interviews. Specifically, open-ended questions were asked regarding program content, learning, learning environment (within universities as well as the diverse local Indigenous communities), and anticipated learning/program outcomes.

When conducting interviews I was on the alert for 'negative case' examples to ensure that alternative experiential patterns would be explored within any program episodic instance so that a broad understanding could be presented (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 230; Janesick 1994, 214; Patton 1990, 463).

Interestingly, some participants shared a broad range of information while others focused on a few personally selected topics in an in-depth manner. The two differing response modes were equally useful and provided a comprehensive range of data such as introduction of new categories, additional dimensions to existing categories, considerable expansion of dimensions of existing categories, and further validation of the logic of connections in existing categories. A large amount of rich data was received.

Interviewing students engaged in learning research was a unique experience because participants presented their experiences in an organized manner. The logic of connections of shared information could readily be seen which helped me by making it easier to frame ensuing questions to maintain the interview flow.

My questions in interviews were tailored to the nature of information being given. I kept track of questions asked and answers received by making brief notes (Patton 1990, 352; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 100-102). Coming from an active oral history culture is an immense help to me as a researcher, since continuous attention to developing memory skills is part of my everyday cultural life.

My experience as an Indigenous research degree postgraduate undertaking a second research degree gave me insider information about the topic and facilitated my capacity to identify relevant phenomena (Corbin 1986, 92; Patton 1990, 472; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 185).

However, due care in influencing participant responses was a primary concern during interviews and any informal conversations. When interviewing and reviewing interview material, I took particular care to guard against personally preconceived viewpoints about the phenomena. I also took care to 'see' what was actually happening while guarding against presuming what was happening (Corbin 1986, 92).

I found it easier to interview those participants that I either personally knew or, had met previously, because there was a pre-existing relationship. Notwithstanding, Indigenous protocols were followed when interviewing all participants prior to the signing of consent forms. These protocols were conducted at the outset of interviews and essentially constitutes a review of the issues previously outlined in Table 3.1.

Even so, previously 'unknown' participants, understandably, generally took a little time before openly sharing their experiences and reflections about those experiences. However, I was amazed by the level of trust

participants accorded me in the way they shared their experiences and reflections on their programs.

My prepared de-briefing paper (See Appendix Six, Paper E) was given to those participants whom I felt might find it useful, that is, those who shared emotional and psychologically disturbing experiences (Patton 1990, 355). Significantly, most participants said being interviewed helped them to clarify their thoughts (Patton 1990, 353-354), and was helpful to them.

Self-presentation and self-disclosure (Delamont 1992, 133-134) conformed to what Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, 102) describe as the 'marginal' reflexive ethnographer. That is, maintenance of a degree of social and intellectual 'distance' in the interests of preserving analytical perspective. What helps me most as a researcher, is the fact that I like people and find their stories extremely interesting.

Nevertheless, in situations which required that Indigenous protocols be followed, this was done. For example, three participants, (during interviews), asked me a question which required immediate answer in accord with Aboriginal spiritual protocols. I upheld the protocol and responded in such a way that I did not superimpose my cultural beliefs. I perceived the questions were asked of me because of my age, community status, and education reputation.

Carefully maintaining post interview documentation was critical during this phase of the fieldwork (Patton 1990, 353). Immediate post interview documentation and analysis indicated the next type of information-rich participant to seek. Informal conversations and telephone contact were used to clarify issues when and as required (Patton 1990, 352-353; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 94).

My paperwork/audit trail, consisted of biographical details; an interview evaluation (setting and atmosphere); an interview summary (See Appendix Seven, Papers 1-4); as well as audio-tape abstracts; audio-tape transcriptions; Ethnograph (computer program) coding notes; tree diagrams; fieldwork overview sheets; and for two participants, Questionnaire information. A more detailed discussion of how I ordered the information follows in the next section of this chapter.

All interviews, with the exception of one telephone interview, were audio-taped to ensure an accurate account was available for analysis (Douglas *et al.* 1988, 40; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 209). Notably, on two occasions two separate participants requested that the tape recorder be switched off when it happened that they were passing on sensitive information (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 209). As a personal anxiety safeguard, (after an embarrassing episode when my tape recorder failed³⁴ during the Pilot Study), I used two tape recorders. It was a wise idea because one tape recorder did fail in a later interview.

Audio-taped interviews were firstly transcribed *verbatim*, by paid transcribers, and then abstracts were constructed from the transcriptions (Douglas *et al.* 1988, 138; Fyfe & Manson 1991, 13-14). Abstracting, or indexing, is a technique which facilitates rapid retrieval of information from audio-tapes (Douglas *et al.* 1988, 142; Fyfe & Manson 1991, 13-14).

One of the paid transcribers was a trusted neighbour whom I trained prior to her intermittent employment. Particularly sensitive tapes were transcribed by myself. Two copies of tapes were made, a master copy and a working copy, which were stored in a locked cabinet. Although

³⁴ As a result, the participant co-operatively repeated the interview.

participants were offered copies of their interview tapes, no-one accepted the offer.

Each participant's printed transcription was then sent to them for checking (Douglas *et al.* 1988, 142), and removal of any information the participant did not want to be included in the collective data pool. Some participants removed private information while others who had shared 'culturally sensitive but significant information' gave instruction that the information could be used as long as their confidentiality was ensured. Contact was made via mail or, by telephone, during this phase of the fieldwork.

One participant, who had been subjected to a 'very bad' learning experience, and subsequently suffered ongoing psychological consequences, especially requested that the information be used. Some of the personal information given was not used in the documented presentation but, it did help in supplying valuable background information on participants' perspectives.

The second stage of data collection, (conducted at the end of the twelve month period), consisted of in-depth informal interviews with five participants drawn from among first stage participants. These participants were chosen for their reflective ability and willingness to discuss these reflections (McCutcheon 1995, 215).

When maintaining data files I used identifiers "P1" etcetera rather than devising names and/or mixing them up, as is often done in this form of research (Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 207-208). It is my spiritual/cultural belief that if you devise a name such as 'John Doe' you are 'creating an entity', which is against The Creator/God's Laws.

Given that participants in the Study formed such a small group, disguising people was very difficult. Consequently, where disguise was impossible and the issue perhaps harmful/threatening to the participant - I left the information out. In some cases, I checked with the participant and, depending on their advice, either used/did not use the information. In cases where disguise was difficult but the issue was non-threatening - I included the issue, for example, a person doing their fieldwork overseas without actually mentioning the specific overseas country.

The two stage data collection procedure facilitated tabulation of information under broad themes, and categories within themes, to determine emergent patterns prior to arrangement within the developing descriptive picture (Patton 1990, 386; Janesick 1994, 214; Huberman & Miles 1994, 437).

The final phase of fieldwork entailed withdrawal to write-up a finalized version of the material (Delamont 1992, 142; Pinar *et al.* 1995, 59). Time to withdraw came when I felt that I had an adequate amount of information to present a sufficiently descriptive picture of participants' interpretations of their 'learning research' experiences (Delamont 1992, 145; Morse 1994, 231). Moreover, I was particularly mindful and appreciative of the fact that participants had given of their valuable time over one university year and planned my withdrawal to coincide with this rhythmic research fact.

Withdrawal from the field meant making final decisions about the presentation of the material and its relationship to the context of the total thesis. Final decisions were also made about what information to include or omit, as well as broader ethical issues such as how to write-in participant contributions. Ongoing relationships are continually maintained with most participants since nation-wide, we are such a

small group and intermittently meet at conferences and other “professional pursuits” (Stebbins 1991, 249).

Participant member-checks of chapter drafts to ensure authenticity in description and interpretation of their personal accounts was carried out during the write-up phase (Woods 1986, 86; Delamont 1992, 159; McCutcheon 1995, 210). Within this procedural framework the authenticity of research findings is contingent on the logic of connections of theory-evidence links rather than trustworthiness of accounts in terms of representativeness (Worsley *et al.* 1970, 112; McNeill 1985, 88; Garman 1996, 22).

Data Processing and Analysis

Cultural analysis was informed by Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) “constant comparative method” using phenomenological and reflexive principles. This method entails the “constant refinement or revision of results until they are consistent with the data” (Glaser & Strauss 1967). I looked for participant designated categories and patterns in their accounts so that I could understand their modes of ordering and representing reality and, subsequently build a logical picture (Sarantakos 1993, 310; Altheide & Johnson 1994, 489; McCutcheon 1995, 218).

The arrays of data were managed by systematic data reduction through codification into manageable categories (Patton 1990, 386; Janesick 1994, 214; Huberman & Miles 1994, 437). I used a simultaneous interplay between wholistic and focused self-questioning, (McCutcheon 1995, 214), with the fundamental idea, in either procedure being “what are they telling me?” (van Manen 1990, 92; Huberman & Miles 1994, 432).

First, I re-read the collected data many, many times to gain an overview of the emerging picture of Indigenous postgraduates social world of learning from a cross-case analysis perspective (Patton 1990, 376; Huberman & Miles 1994, 441). Three key categories were evident: educational background, features of the learning process, and reflections on the learning process.

I then used Ethnograph to code the data and thus gain a clear idea of the sub-categories within the three key categories (Patton 1990, 384; Sarantakos 1993, 310; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 268). Codification provided a shape and order to the research findings and subsequent provisional presentation of the findings (Van Manen 1990, 79). The variety of participant experiences and consequent perspectives of those experiences strengthened the wholistic perspective of the evolving experiential phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 230; Janesick 1994, 214; Patton 1990, 463).

I found Ethnograph very helpful because category construction via this method, forces one to be very precise. Inter-relationships can also be more readily noted via this method. However, using Ethnograph is a very time-consuming exercise. Consequently, once I attuned to the Key categories and main sub-categories, (that is, a classification system), that would be used in the presentation of the thesis, I set Ethnograph aside and reverted to hand-written notation.

Notably, codification not only enabled the organization of the data but, facilitated the generation of concepts as well as insights into the inter-relationship between participant generated concepts representing reality (Rose 1982, 119; Smelser 1994, 23). For example, concepts emerged such as educational background, individual goals, program processes, psychological effects of postgraduate study, learning outcomes, and reflections on research and being a researcher.

The data was ordered in accordance with participant generated categories in concert with the sequential flow of postgraduate program processes, as happens when using Process Evaluation Study guidelines (Patton 1990, 94). In other words, each of the three key categories formed a chapter within the developing thesis.

Having coded the data, I then explored participants' interpretations of the various categories in terms of their beliefs, and ascribed meanings, and the language in which they were couched (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 210; Minichiello *et al.* 1995, 181). Searching for participant suggestions and proffered solutions for program improvement also formed part of this phase.

Participant accounts of any psycho-physical learning effects on spirit, mind, and emotions were also noted, as were inter-relationships between key happenings. For example, choice in thesis/dissertation topic being influenced by lack of funding; and lack of agreement between supervisor and student about methodology, resulting in cognitive dissonance for some students.

The descriptive conceptualization of participants' social world of learning was developed by continually linking experiential concepts and the evidence arising from the data (Rose 1982). The descriptive conceptual framework was primarily designed to illuminate the social world of Indigenous postgraduates and thereby form the basis for value judgments about program quality and resultant educational decision-making.

Presentation of the Findings

In my self-conscious role as evaluator *cum* reflexive ethnographer my stylistic intention was to act as tour guide and translator of a small Indigenous Postgraduate group's journey through the process of learning research. Narrative form by way of descriptive realism was thus geared to the third person when describing the group's 'learning research' journey (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 209-211; Denzin 1994, 507). In instances where I was situating self as part of the Study group, I used the pronoun 'our'. However, I used the first person when writing about my active role as researcher, for example, as in this chapter (McCutcheon 1995, 219).

The structural presentation, (textual organization), of the thesis was planned to reflect the sequential stages of postgraduates program phases and, thereby, be of readily accessible practical usage to interested stakeholders (Davis 1980, 38; Patton 1990, 432). In other words I used a *seriatim* presentation approach (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 216).

From my previous experience as an Aboriginal researcher compliance with suggested academic protocols regarding chapter length is neither plausible nor feasible. The simple fact is that upholding Indigenous protocols as well as proffering requisite/meaningful explanations about related cultural issues, understandably takes more space. Readers are respectfully asked to be appreciative of this cultural 'presentation' phenomenon.

The targeted audience, as previously noted, was foreseen as stakeholders comprising academics and educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as well as other Ethnic and Indigenous groups. Due care in presentation was planned so that language style was tailored to these groups (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983, 208; Patton 1990, 432),

that is, the discourse of postgraduate program provision. As a final point, it was planned that Footnotes were to be used, rather than End-notes, to accommodate Indigenous privately-voiced preferences.

Criteria for Assessing the Study

To ensure I maintained “quality” within the bounds of my research I used Garman and Piantanida’s criteria for ‘quality assessment in qualitative research’, jointly devised by them to assist qualitative researchers, especially doctoral students (Garman 1996, 18-19). Their eight criteria, as described by Garman, (1996, 18-19) reads:

- **Verite** Does the work ring true? Is it consistent with accepted knowledge in the field? Or, if it departs, does it address why? Does it fit within the discourse in the appropriate literature/ Is it intellectually honest and authentic?
- **Integrity** (as in architecture). Is the work structurally sound? Does it hang together? Is the research rationale logical, appropriate, and identifiable within an enquiry tradition?
- **Rigor** Is there sufficient depth of intellect, rather than superficial or simplistic reasoning? Are the portrayals sound?
- **Utility** Is the work useful and professionally relevant? Does it make a contribution to the field? Does the piece have a clearly recognizable professional audience?
- **Vitality** Is it important, meaningful ... non-trivial? Does it have a sense of vibrancy, intensity, excitement of discovery? Is the proper personae (or voice) used for the author(s) and other participants? Do metaphors, images, visuals communicate powerfully?
- **Aesthetics** Is it enriching, pleasing to anticipate and experience? Does it give me insight into some

universal part of my educational self? Does it touch my spirit in some way?

- **Ethics** Is there evidence that privacy and dignity have been afforded all participants? Has the inquiry been conducted in a careful and honest way? Does the inquiry have an ethical sensibility?
- **Verisimilitude** Does the work represent human experiences with sufficient detail so that the portrayals can be recognizable as “truly conceivable experience?” (Bruner).

Whereas these are the criteria I used to maintain intellectual rigour throughout the Study, readers may use these same criteria to assess the Study or, devise their own criteria.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The account of the theoretical approach underpinning this Study has been explained in terms of Researcher Protocols; the Search for a Theoretical Framework; Ethical Issues; Research Design; how a preliminary Pilot Study affected the theoretical framework; Selection of Participants; and Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis procedures and processes.

Insights into how Indigenous postgraduates experience learning research within the existing situated context are offered in the following three chapters. Correspondingly, a more complete picture of Indigenous postgraduate learning conditions is offered.

SECTION TWO

OUTLINE

The following three chapters contain participants' accounts of their experiences of program phases, the stepping stones on the path of learning to do research. These accounts form the data from which a conceptualization of their social world is constructed, (and judgments about program quality made), in Chapter Seven.

Since understanding of a social path/scene requires knowledge of every aspect of the path/scene, such details and 'moments' are included in the chapters. To protect the privacy of such a small group of Indigenous postgraduates, a cautious (sometimes vague) approach to information sharing is followed.

In Chapter Four, I begin to map the social world, (a methodological window), of participants' experiences in learning research. Facets of this intrinsic social world provide insights into the educational backgrounds of participants and their experiences of prescribed 'program content' components.

A descriptive account of participants' experiences of engagement in learning the research process is presented in Chapter Five. Aspects of the picture include the learning continuum/sequence of the research process, that is, the data collection and analysis process.

Participant views are further explored in Chapter Six through their experiences of writing knowledge, their socio-cultural and socio-political learning environment, the way in which their progress was monitored, and their perceptions of the learning outcomes of postgraduate program engagement.

Three past postgraduates, one deferred PhD, and sixteen present postgraduates supplied the data. Their collective experiences span approximately two decades of Indigenous involvement in the postgraduate sector.

CHAPTER FOUR
SOCIAL WORLD:
THE STUDY PATH

OVERVIEW

In this chapter the social world of Indigenous postgraduates learning research is entered by exploring the experiences of twenty Indigenous postgraduates from their perspectives. All are members of the new social group of students who have recently appeared on the Australian postgraduate scene. Insights are thus gained into who the members of the group are, why they become members of the group of Indigenous researchers, and what learning criteria and conditions they map for themselves as they progress toward fulfilment of their research aims and goals.

Insights come through exploration of Indigenous Postgraduates': Becoming Researchers, Organizing Self and Studies, and Personalized Study Paths including the structure and content of the study programs they chart for themselves. A Summary concludes the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Membership in this new social group of Australian students requires specific cultural and educational qualifications as an entree, together with a 'time and effort' commitment to walk a generally defined but flexible path. A path wherein one learns to do research, albeit in a variety of ways with diverse outcomes. Three perspectives were evident: students, lecturers as students, and 'other' careers' persons as students.

The twenty Indigenous participants who form the basis of this Study clearly showed that they view learning as part of a life-long process by the way in which they framed their information - as a part of a life-long education continuum. Determination, self-control, self-disciplined effort, commitment, vision, and capacity for self-analysis emerge as fundamental character traits of this group of postgraduates as we enter their world. The members of this group show that under adverse circumstances, people can do extraordinary things.

For confidentiality reasons, educational path and employment details are frequently couched in vague terms. And, for ease of reading, direct quotes from participants are noted in italics.

INDIGENOUS POSTGRADUATES: BECOMING RESEARCHERS

The past life-path experiences and circumstances which participants proffered as influential in their decisions to learn research include Cultural Heritage, Schooling Experiences, and Prior University Experiences. Although the group consisted of a mix of young adults (25%), mid-age adults (69%), and older adults (6%), their educational

experiences were surprisingly similar given the experiential educational time-span involved.

Cultural Heritage

Participants came from a diversity of cultural backgrounds and life-path circumstances. Some were raised in their Indigenous cultural traditions within their geographic heritage areas³⁵ and had the benefit of a strong cultural heritage. Other participants were raised within their family cultural traditions, albeit at varying depths of cultural grounding, but were not located within their geographic heritage areas.

Those participants whose parents had been 'stolen', were still tracing their cultural traditions while a couple had recently discovered their Aboriginality. Nevertheless, all participants shared an inherent commitment to Australian Indigenous cultural survival. They were pursuing these personal commitments in various ways and through various means. All participants felt that their contributions would be more effective through acquiring research skills.

Schooling Experiences

The schooling experience for participants was an uneasy, culturally alien path. Continual racist incidents dramatically affected the psychological well-being and learning chances of many. In a few cases racist treatment was extreme. For example, one male participant was continually harassed and told *to leave school at fifteen*. Nevertheless, it

³⁵ Many of the geographic cultural areas included Missions.

was during this time that school subjects encountered on the educational path formed the basis for disciplinary interests.

Women fared better on this stage of the educational path than the men, two of whom were capable students but were 'pushed out' by their schools before they attained grade 12. It was to take many long years before these men returned to institutional learning, and then only because of employment requirements. Subsequent educational success resulted in a boost in academic self-confidence. One participant disclosed, *It was probably one of the best things I've ever done because, I realised that I could succeed in it.*

Notwithstanding, three quarters of the group earned their grade 12 certificates at high school. For half the group it was a natural progression to immediately proceed to university. The other half went in differing directions. Some went to teachers' college, or nursing, or into other occupations. However, one of the participants who had been 'pushed out' was unemployed for a very, very long time before finding a job.

Prior University Experiences

Participants who had not earned grade 12 during their high school years either completed the qualification later or, entered university by way of mature-age³⁶ student entry. Half of the group proceeded directly to university from high school and did not work while studying as undergraduates. The other half, who were employed, undertook part-time undergraduate studies.

³⁶ Four participants entered university by this route.

Reasons for entry to undergraduate studies included *a love of learning*, awareness of *the need for western qualifications* as a mechanism for *improving career opportunities*, and the realization that *the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs skilled professionals* as a means of ensuring *cultural survival and self-determination*.

Participants enrolled in a range of disciplines as part of their undergraduate courses, Arts/Humanities, Social Sciences, Education, and Health/Nursing courses. Notably, five students (25% of this group of participants), enrolled in Bachelor honours courses. Only one student changed disciplines during undergraduate studies. Prior to engagement in undergraduate studies one mid-age student who had formed a love of research carefully mapped an educational path, (B.A. Honours and then a PhD), as the basis for an independent research career. Another participant also mapped a similar path prior to entry but, as the basis for an academic career.

Participants reveal they began their undergraduate studies aware of the concept of academic freedom, and *expected that things 'would be better' than they were in high school*. Many, both older and younger students, attest *I soon found otherwise*:

It's really disappointing. My first experience as [an] undergraduate was that I thought 'oh great, I can come to uni and things will be different, people will have different attitudes'. Wrong! ... slapped in the face, wrong 'wake up to yourself girl, they're just like everyone else out there', you know. Probably worse in some situations but, overall, it hasn't been too bad but ...

Two B.A. honours students reveal they each were given *special treatment because of my ability*. Significantly, when one started a serious exploration of his/her Aboriginal identity and cultural roots he/she reports that *my status changed*. The psychological effects of the

situation were profoundly confusing for the participant because he/she added that:

It was really hard on all those levels [psychologically, spiritually] until I realized what was probably going on ... At one point I was floating, not consciously - but I wasn't integrated into the Aboriginal community ... nor was I being accepted into the mainstream, so there really was an uncomfortable period then.

Other unpleasant undergraduate learning situations and incidents revealed were *being accused of plagiarizing, lecturers assuming Indigenous students had low levels of ability and thus not trusting the work produced by students.* Some participants also revealed that they received *different treatment from different lecturers* dependent on the lecturers attitude to Australian Indigenous Peoples, *You've got the ones who smother you with help and, the other ones who, once you start getting good marks - you're obviously cheating.* The participant added *but, overall, most people can't help you enough.*

The preceding thumbnail sketch of participants' cultural and educational backgrounds sets the foundation for their entry to postgraduate studies. In personal terms, participants felt that they had the intellectual *ability* for postgraduate studies since they had been successful in acquiring undergraduate qualifications.

Self and Research

My selection procedure, (previously noted in Chapter Two), provided for an examination of a comprehensive range of Indigenous postgraduate research training experiences within a variety of Australian graduate/postgraduate program offerings, at a range of universities (Bulbeck 1993, 468-469). To reiterate, Indigenous

postgraduates from eight universities spanning ten campuses across three states were involved in the Study. The total mix of twenty volunteer participant Indigenous postgraduates comprised fifteen women and five men.

It also needs to be noted that when I began interacting with, and interviewing, this group of twenty students, I found an array of prior university experiences. One person had completed two undergraduate degrees and was now undertaking a master's by research degree. One had completed a master of letters degree and was now taking a master's by research degree. Two had completed master's by coursework degrees and were now engaged in PhD's. And, two had each completed two master's by coursework degrees and were likewise engaged in PhD's.

I also interviewed one PhD 'deferred' student, as well as one former PhD 'drop-out/push-out', (because of a *racist supervisor*), who had now resumed studies, the incident having *interrupted my career*.

Notwithstanding, reasons given for entry to postgraduate study were framed on a twofold inter-related precept. That is, personal 'vision' based on *helping the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community* together with awareness of *the need for postgraduate qualifications* as part of careers/employment requirements.

Motivation

Even though participants had certain reservations about university programs, their motivation for learning research took priority. Personal 'vision' examples encompassed *self-determination and cultural survival; helping Aboriginal people through increased expertise in*

career fields; writing family/clan history and culture; improving ethical practice in Indigenous research; increasing the number of Indigenous researchers, and giving Aboriginal women a voice.

Self-As-Researcher

Participants' 'motivation and vision' perspectives influenced their approaches to their studies in terms of learning purpose, acquisition of research skills for specific objectives, and moulding of self-as-researcher. Acquisition of researcher expertise was regarded as an opportunity to problem solve, to correct perceived existing misinterpretations of the various Indigenous Groups' cultural concepts and practices, and to *write our own story in our own way.*

Three sets of researchers were apparent. One set's learning research objectives related to enhancing their effectiveness in their chosen careers so that a more valuable contribution to their fields of expertise could be made. One participant attested:

I believe very strongly that anybody that is in a position within an Aboriginal institution, especially at university, has no right to not have degrees in these days.

This same participant also felt compelled to do research as preparation for his/her future role as an Elder:

If you expect young people today to have qualifications you must set the example and have them yourself. I hear a lot of people talk about prior learning. And prior learning is OK, in lots of fields, but not within the education field. I just, it's something that I've got in my craw, something I believe very strongly, that if you expect these young ones to come up and get the qualifications and do the work, you must at least show them that you've done the work before. And I see lots of people sitting in high positions ... trying to motivate young

people to do the degrees, when they have no good degrees themselves.

A second set's objectives were framed on specified cultural survival issues. For example, acquiring the skills to document family history, local Aboriginal community history, being a community advocate, and/or giving voice to one component of the Aboriginal community such as women. One participant stated that:

Especially my family, and basically that's why I'm still doing postgraduate stuff, so one day I can go out and take out my family story.

The third set's objectives reflected an intense love for the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake, underpinned by an equally intense curiosity. One of these participants had definite ideas about how they wanted to be perceived as a researcher:

I'd like to be known as a researcher who has contributed useful research to my community, the Aboriginal community, in whatever area. So I'm very aware, and very conscious of the fact that I want to be seen, if as anything, as a researcher who has integrity who produces the goods ... but, mainly who has integrity ... who does quality research, is very, very thorough and I try to be very, very thorough in terms of checking my sources and stuff. And also as a researcher who could be looked upon as somebody who could be trusted ...

This participant's self-construction had arisen from former experiences of researchers, *because I had my own perceptions of what researchers were, and they weren't very good ones.*

All participants had spent time soul-searching their construction of self-as-researcher. During this reflective process, participants were intensely aware of the fact that *we have no role models* to follow and further that, *we have no history in this area*. In other words, they had no Sense of Place in postgraduate education, no cultural space, no rules

to follow, and no specified tracks to follow. Two participants however, used Marcia Langton as a role model and one other looked to *really special women, and men ... but mainly women.*

Some participants had clear ideas of what sort of researcher they wanted to become, and how to accomplish that aim. Others, however, were developing their ideas and thus had vague perceptions about how to accomplish their aims. In self-classification terms, most participants stated they wanted to become *a researcher*. Notably, only a few thought of themselves as solely *Indigenous researchers* (an Indigenous person researching Indigenous issues).

A variety of other self-classificatory views were also evident. Some said they were working toward becoming a *bi-cultural researcher* (ability to research both Indigenous and non-Indigenous fields), some toward becoming a *culturally sensitive researcher* (sensitive toward, and thus ability to research, all cultures). It needs to be noted that most participants defined the term culturally sensitive as *knowing where they [participants in a research activity] are coming from*. In other words, understanding and having an awareness of particular participants' knowledge traditions and cultural practices.

Reflective efforts at self-understanding were framed on a number of searching questions:

- *what is a researcher and what do they do?*
- *who can become a researcher?*
- *what do you have to learn to become a researcher?*
- *when does one become a researcher?*

The reflections gave rise to a number of notions about the qualities of a researcher and the generalized conclusion that *it has to be a bit of you, in your nature to be a good researcher*. One participant's self-examination on the question *how do you know you have the capacity to*

be a researcher, raised his/her awareness of the fact that I like the idea of it ... puttin' things down and recording everything.

Self-as-researcher perceptions and reflections also involved personal preferences about the levels within which to locate their research endeavours, that is, at the local, regional, state, national or international levels. Although most participants felt that geographic level would be determined by the nature of research, three were committed to working at the local *community level*.

Prior Research Experience

Prior to program entry, three quarters of the group had the benefit of prior research experience with several having 'established' research reputations. Only five percent of the group, however, felt they were *familiar with the academic research process*. The five percent included first-time postgraduates as well as second-time ones. One participant's comment crystallizes the situation, *I have done some research but I do not fully understand the process of research*.

Those who had received their prior research experience as part of public service, teaching, or nursing/health careers felt that they could readily transfer/apply previously acquired *Indigenous research protocols* and *Indigenous methods* within an academic setting. Notwithstanding, this same group was concerned about their *lack of grounding in academic theory*.

A significant number of participants had published articles for journals, both refereed and unrefereed. Some had also had articles included as part of published conference proceedings. Notably, others who had contributed to publications arising from publicly funded

consultative/joint reviews stated their contributions had not been directly acknowledged, and thus could not readily be used for *curriculum vitae* purposes.

Subsequent expectations, about personalized study paths and self-monitoring during engagement in study programs, were influenced by each participant's motivation for postgraduate study as well as developing self-as-researcher constructions. Participants' expectations of their study programs and experiences of their paths were also influenced by their prior research backgrounds.

ORGANIZING SELF AND STUDIES

Once participants had decided to enter the postgraduate path, decisions about where to study, what course to select, how to fund study, and what type of enrolment to select were easier for some than others. Other important considerations involved organizing personal commitments and community commitments throughout the duration of their studies.

Institutional Choice and Enrolment Patterns

Life-path circumstances and personal choice influenced choice of university and type of enrolment. No students reported difficulty in gaining access to postgraduate study. Significantly, one participant disclosed that particular universities were eager to enrol Indigenous postgraduates.

A student who was employed in a university generally undertook his/her studies at the same institution. One participant, however, had been

warned not to do so. A few participants chose specific institutions because particular academics would be available as supervisors, rather than because of the reputation of the university.

In contrast, two participants did select a particular university because of its reputation in their discipline area, they explained *we thought we were doing the right thing*. They later found that the university did not have as good a reputation as they thought, either from their perspective, (based on their negative experiences), or that of colleagues.

For a few participants geographic location, that is, home area and/or preference for a rural location, underpinned university choice. Others had limited university choice because courses in their chosen field of study were only offered in a few locations. In this circumstance one participant chose the university closest to their home base, while the other was influenced by perceived supervisory expertise.

Course Selection

All participants except one continued their studies in their undergraduate disciplines. A few participants changed focus within a discipline. For instance, shifting focus from nursing to health promotion or using education expertise within another disciplinary setting. This change resulted from changed perceptions about the usefulness of disciplines, *health promotion is more useful to the Aboriginal community than education*. Significantly, no participants were engaged in Indigenous cultural studies programs.

Patterns in course selection showed that undergraduate pass degree students entered postgraduate studies according to either one of three optional paths. One path involved proceeding to master's of letters

programs, followed by master's by research programs, and thence to a PhD program. A second optional path involved proceeding to master's by coursework programs and thence to a PhD program. While the third path involved engagement in master's by research programs followed by a PhD program.

Bachelor honours students proceeded to a PhD with the exception of one who first embarked on a master's by research course but subsequently changed to a PhD.

Funding for Study

Participants efforts to find funding for their studies revealed complex, 'messy' stories. Funding sources included APRA's, university scholarships, and Abstudy. All participants except two worked either full-time or part-time (regularly or intermittently), as they pursued their studies. Some were employed in universities, some in government departments, some in other types of employment, and one was working on a fixed term project related to his/her proposed thesis topic³⁷.

Significantly, some worked because of financial necessity, while others continued with their careers and framed their studies to correspond with work-related matters. That is, thesis/project topics were chosen to correspond with needed/valuable work-place matters. One academic explains the thinking and the procedure:

³⁷ This student had deferred postgraduate studies for this particular purpose, that is, being able to establish networks, use the project findings to increase knowledge of the topic, and also use the data as a basis for his/her proposed thesis.

You have to do that I guess because one, I can't afford to study full-time. I want to continue to study. For me to do that effectively, it's got to be tied into my job to allow me to continue to study. And that's why I do it so I can build it in to my job. You know, it can be part of my job description as doing and participating in research.

Those who availed themselves of 'normal' funding sources such as APRA's or Abstudy disclosed mainly tangled stories. Only two participants, (one an APRA holder and the other an Abstudy recipient) were satisfied with funding arrangements.

The degree of satisfaction for the APRA holder was enhanced by supplementary departmental assistance for research and research-related activities. One Abstudy recipient's satisfaction related to the fact that he/she was funded in accord with 'prior 1994' determinations which were of a higher order than 'post 1994' Abstudy determinations. At that time, persons undertaking research degrees were allocated a higher level of funding. Nevertheless, this participant still worked part-time (intermittently), to fund her studies.

A few students alternated between university scholarships and Abstudy because of changing Abstudy determinations, that is post 1994 conditions. One participant explained her reasoning:

Just in terms of the funding, I think for me, my experience that going to an institution, is that with all the cut backs in Abstudy, especially at the postgraduate rate, I decided to apply for a university postgraduate scholarship.

This participant felt that his/her relationship with his/her supervisor was subsequently negatively affected by the supervisor's increased "accountability" workload when he/she was on university funding. The participant consequently reverted to Abstudy because holding a university scholarship *seemed to put a higher demand on the supervisor/student relationship.* A few other participants who availed

themselves of Abstudy stated they soon found the funding levels inadequate and, consequently, found full-time employment.

Participants who were forced to work disclosed different attitudes to their circumstances. One academic felt that the combination of work and study was beneficial in the sense that *I have a sound understanding of where students sit ... being a student assists me ... as Director.* Another academic felt that *being a staff member makes things easier* because of access to departmental facilities. Students who preferred not to work but were forced to do so felt that the quality of their research suffered. One participant stated *I could have done more.*

Significantly, a few of the students who worked part-time used these financial requirement episodes as opportunities to increase their skills and knowledge in their careers and as researchers. For instance, one student who worked as a part-time tutor during a B.A honours program attested that the experience *really helped me to understand how you transfer knowledge in a Western European academic institutional setting.* In another instance, a master's by research student who participated in several short-term research projects stated that skills learned substantially increased his/her research capability.

Continual concern about funding for studies affected students psychologically and mentally. One student explained *that's a bit of a distraction from the thesis writing as well in terms of remaining connected.*

Personal and Community Preparatory Issues

Before entering their study paths, participants carefully organized their personal *commitments*. Priority was given to three fundamental considerations, personal/family issues, Indigenous community obligations, and personal mental preparation. Personal/family considerations affected about fifty percent of this group and added to the cost of their studies. Otherwise, all participants took great care in planning for fulfilment of community responsibilities.

Organizing personal and family issues involved arranging/hiring full-time baby-sitters as well as 'after school' baby-sitters/support for school-age children. The ways in which participants fulfilled their community responsibilities during engagement in studies were many and varied. Approaches to this universal Indigenous cultural mandate reflected differing dimensions of definitions of community service.

Those working as academics fulfilled community responsibilities as part of their work, as did some government employees. Others were fulfilling community responsibilities through their topic-related thesis/project activity, or through community education, or providing special community services.

Examples proffered encompassed research within an Indigenous community such as *community education about research* while conducting fieldwork, *training [community] research assistants* in basic research procedures such as *collecting information about sites* as part of land claims. Two participants assisted a local Indigenous community *to establish a commonwealth development employment project*. Yet another participant continued a previously established ongoing community service, that of *archival searches for*

[geographically] remote community people ... finding information for people.

Many participants had spent quite a few years thinking about their proposed thesis/project topics prior to enrolling in their study programs. Those who had laid this groundwork found that it saved them 'thinking time' during their formal study period. The entire group stated, either implicitly or explicitly, that *organizing your mind* was an important part of personal preparation for study.

Participants were very aware that their minds would be used *in a different way*, through *developing a topic*, and *holding [within one's mind] developing ideas about a topic*. They were also aware that they would need to organize their minds through storing different sets of information for easy mental retrieval. Those who had not developed the ability to rapidly *switch mind-sets* realized the practicality of such a skill, especially when involved in more than one project. (This issue is revisited in Chapter Five.) Students who had not mentally prepared themselves found that their time-to-degree was lengthened.

PERSONALIZED STUDY PATHS

Participants were engaged in a variety of paths, (study programs), within which they were learning elements of the research process. Although the paths were different, the stages and sequence of the path were similar. Commonalities included Instructional Arrangements, Program Content, Resource Provision, and Learning Conditions and Progress. Although most participants said they were enjoying learning research they disclosed that their paths were affected by a range of learning obstructions and interferences, in varying ways and to varying degrees.

Instructional Arrangements

Having enrolled in their programs participants started their journeys in company with their supervisors/course co-ordinators. A variety of instructional arrangements were evident, a single supervisor, a principal supervisor and a co-supervisor, three supervisors, or a supervisory panel. Supervisors were either assigned by universities or selected by participants. Participants stated they would have preferred to select their own supervisors/course co-ordinators.

Master's of letters and master's by coursework students were assigned their supervisors/course co-ordinators, likewise one third of master's by research and PhD students were also assigned their supervisors. Two of the PhD participants were assigned supervisory panels. Other master's by research and PhD's chose their supervisors. One PhD student, however, who chose his/her supervisor was assigned a co-supervisor while others arranged Indigenous persons³⁸ as co-supervisors through official university channels. Yet another PhD student chose three supervisors, one of whom was an overseas *very respected* academic.

Within the above-noted formulaic constitution of supervisory arrangements, many participants took care to include Indigenous knowledge experts to ensure that their research would have an acceptable Indigenous knowledge base/perspective. Most participants stated they would have preferred an Indigenous supervisor but few *were available*. One participant had an Indigenous supervisor, *with the right expertise*, and experience in her proposed field of enquiry. Yet others

³⁸ One person was located at another university while the other was drawn from a local community as a valued Indigenous knowledge expert.

arranged community Cultural Reference Groups from local Indigenous community members with culturally appropriate expertise.

Sixty percent of participants also arranged either one or several mentors to assist them in their studies. In cultural terms, mentors were either Indigenous or, a mix of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons. Some participants made these arrangements early in their programs, while some did so later in their studies.

Another strategy constituted enlisting the aid of tutors. Two master's students who enlisted the aid of tutors to facilitate their paths found them invaluable. The tutors acted as mentors, and also assisted in needed skills development, and guidance through the research process. One student explained the value of the arrangement:

I sort of explained to him about ... this is the first time I've come into contact with this kind of stuff and even ... And I sort of talked about it, you know, I really need someone either to sit down and just bounce off what I've read so that, you know, say this is what I've read, this is what I understand, is this right?

It needs to be noted, however, that a few AEU directors believed that students at this level ought not to need tutors. Notwithstanding, the majority of participants felt that non-Indigenous supervisors would lack Indigenous cultural knowledge expertise as well as lack sufficiently comprehensive understanding of Indigenous daily cultural practices. One participant's perceptions accurately reflects the essence of the perception:

... I still need to have that contact because she's one of the ... to me she's a major part, because I can talk [about] things with her that she'd understand, that nobody else [non-Indigenous persons] would.

Even so, one participant felt that supervisory expertise in one's field of enquiry was of primary importance, that is, *one who actually knows the field*. Given prevailing perceptions about non-Indigenous supervisory expertise, participants thus looked for supervisors who had respected credentials and proven community endorsed experience in researching Indigenous issues.

Other preferred supervisory qualities constituted methodological expertise as well as shared understandings and experiences of 'cultural barriers' faced by marginalized sectors of Australian society. For example, a supervisor who had *personal experience of racism and being marginalized* was considered to have useful supervisory traits. One participant's thinking behind his/her supervisory choice adequately reflects other participants' views:

She is ... she's not ... so she's a multi-cultural background which I felt OK it wasn't Aboriginal but it was better than ... she would have a greater understanding of where I was coming from ... Than somebody who wasn't ... who didn't have anything to do with racism of any of those issues that are issues for us ... And, I knew that she was quite involved in some of the Aboriginal issues, and particularly, in the education area. So I figured that at least with where I would feel that I could express my views and ...

Furthermore, one participant felt that supervisors who were *one step removed from the Australian context [that is, non Anglo Celtic Australian backgrounds]* helps a bit because they tend to be more objective. This same participant added that another benefit of having a non-Indigenous supervisor meant that *there's no black politics, there's none of that cultural baggage*. Notably, two participants cautioned that one ought not *to allow yourself to be taken over by a supervisor*.

Mentors were considered valuable because they were only indirectly involved in study programs and participants thus felt more comfortable

in discussing diverse aspects of their programs with them. One participant felt that his/her mentor was valuable because *he just inspires [me] to write*. Other participants attested that Indigenous mentors not only assisted them to clarify their thinking but contributed a fundamental but vital Indigenous perspective. Importantly, many participants attested that communication of ideas was easier with Indigenous mentors because of broad but common culturally based ways of communication.

In contrast, one participant had a formalized institutional mentoring arrangement in place as a result of an ARC research grant requirement. He/she felt the arrangement was invaluable, *it's been a wonderful process, you've got an off-sider all the time to question or to say ... "this is the way we do things"*. This participant added that regular meetings and advice saved *lots of trial and error*.

Settling In

Although all participants expected they would be given instruction about their programs (including institutional, departmental and supervisory arrangements and requirements) during their first or second meetings with supervisors, it did not happen. Of the few participants who did go to university scheduled general orientation seminars only one found them helpful, the others adjudged them unhelpful because they were *too general*.

A precis of participants' collective expectations about orientation to their programs provides insights into their anticipated 'issues for clarification'. Participants had four fundamental expectations. First, they anticipated they would be given a broad overview of their program content and sequence, academic requirements and expectations such as

disciplinary conventions and protocols; procedures for monitoring progress, and anticipated learning outcomes in regard to where their individual qualification would situate them in academia.

Second, participants anticipated that discussion would take place about such things as their study aims and objectives; cultural perspectives, aspirations, and commitment; prior research background and prior skills development level; perceived skills development required; knowledge and understanding of the research process; knowledge of academic conventions; as well as perceptions about intended research topic, methodology and requirements for submitting research proposals.

Third, participants had expected that space would be available to ask questions that might be of concern to them. For instance, space to ask questions such as the difference between the study requirements for a master's thesis/project and a PhD thesis.

Fourth, participants also anticipated that they would either be given a reading list, or at the very least be given verbal or written guidelines on sources of information about both their topics and intended methodologies.

The fact that their individual orientation sessions did not fulfil their expectations was an unsettling situation for participants. They did not know the direction of their paths or have a time-line of predictable learning events. They were especially concerned that they did not know what they would encounter on their learning paths. Many summed up the situation in six words, *you're left to sink or swim*. This same comment was either specifically stated or implied by the majority of participants. One PhD student commented that *PhD's [programs] were less structured than B.A. honours*.

Participants were particularly surprised that discussion did not take place about their aims, skills level, aspirations, and perceptions about desired skills development. Those who were independent learners, (mainly those with prior postgraduate experience or who had public service experience), found it easier to proceed. They read postgraduate program rules and regulations and related literature, to help them find a way to proceed on their paths. Others waited, hoping information would be forthcoming, in some cases it was eventually provided and, in other cases, it was not.

One young participant never really got organized and blamed himself/herself for not asking questions of his/her assigned non-Indigenous supervisor. The situation related to the admixture of Indigenous protocols of respect for teachers and Elders together with a lack of assertiveness. However, he/she further revealed that later in the relationship when questions such as how to order and present his/her project papers as a co-ordinated whole were asked, they were not satisfactorily answered. Older participants who *spoke up* state that when they did so, their questions were often not satisfactorily answered.

It was at this stage of their paths that master's students realized most supervisors had a number of fundamental pre-conceived expectations about their academic grounding, that they had been *prepared for postgraduate studies, were independent learners* and that they *could write*. Correspondingly, significant gaps in undergraduate study were noted at this time, that is, *lack of preparation for postgraduate studies, and lack of formalized instruction in writing, both essays and research reports*.

However, one student was pleasantly surprised by the fact that his/her university did not make assumptions about student's academic backgrounds. He/she recounts the experience:

They haven't taken it for granted that you know how to do a research assignment. They've asked us ... "OK well, what about this, what about that area". And you say look I'm sorry I don't know about how you actually do a dissertation, how you research for a dissertation or something like that. And they'll sit there and they'll tell you about it.

Although some participants were satisfied with their supervisory arrangements consistent with their preconceived notions of supervisory expertise, others were not. Lack of understanding of Indigenous knowledge traditions as well as Indigenous cultural protocols and daily cultural practice were cited as an ongoing basic and *frustrating* problem.

The degree of satisfaction with the supervisor affected supervisor-student frequency of contact, in a few cases. Notably, five participants, (one quarter of the group), changed supervisory arrangements during their programs. Reasons given for changes were *breakdown in relations* over methodological approach, problems with cultural communication, conflict over *confidentiality issues* concerning handling of fieldwork data, and lack of cultural sensitivity.

Nevertheless, some participants found their supervisory arrangements were helpful to them. Valued supervisory assistance was perceived as being *supportive*, allowing students' space to develop their own ideas about their topics/projects, giving *guidance when needed*, *trust*, and being *understanding of* participants' perspectives.

Even so, despite the fact that one master's by research participant found his/her supervisor better than anticipated in terms of quality of training and support, cultural communication was a hindrance. In particular, differing perspectives on data analysis and interpretation were an ongoing problem. As a result, considerable time was spent on differential cultural explanation, the participant explained, *and then you*

try and explain it to him or get the point across and ... it takes a little bit longer sometimes, and a deal of patience.

One PhD student was not very happy about the fact that he/she was not able to contact his/her supervisor, (having chosen the university specifically for the supervisor's expertise), continually being relegated to contact and discussion with his/her co-supervisor. A few students were very dissatisfied with their supervisory arrangements, hence the five aforementioned changes in supervisory arrangements. These students attested that supervisory lack of cultural sensitivity seriously affected their learning conditions and progress. One participant explained his/her experiences:

My first supervisor knew nothing about Aboriginal issues and would quite happily admit that I think. And that person .. quite, quite openly and I think was unaware of the - what would you call it - the structural racism underlying as practice - but tried to steer me away from looking at Indigenous issues towards looking at policy issues with an Indigenous content I suppose. That doesn't quite capture it, but anyway.

This participant added *I was really floundering for a while there, I was having enormous trouble ... it must of been close to a year I think.* The participant subsequently changed supervisors and was much happier with his/her arrangement, having found a supervisor *who's got good knowledge of Indigenous issues and good working relationships with Indigenous people.*

Patterns of supervisory contact changed for participants as they proceeded with their programs. For some, contact was once per week or once per month in the early stages of their programs. Contact time gradually decreased to once per fortnight and on an 'as required' basis later in their paths.

One master's by coursework student stated he/she *hardly spoke* to his/her course co-ordinator, but instead communicated with his/her lecturers. One master of literature student only had contact with his/her supervisor *four times in the first year* of his/her program, and felt he/she *needed more* contact time. The situation was remedied when the participant overcame his/her *lack of confidence* and began to speak up.

Two external students, attending the same campus, found that a lack of university resources and services, that is, e-mail provision, affected their supervisory contact time. Because the university lacked funds, they funded their own e-mail connections and usage but, were disconcerted by frequent 'service' interruptions. Moreover, they added that telephone contact was mutually constraining through lack of funding, stating that supervisors have *financial constraints as well, ... he can't just ring up and talk to us.*

Furthermore, these two external students also implied that their university had a high student-supervisor ratio which constrained contact time. One stated that he/she felt empathy with supervisors and their workloads, while the other maintained that supervisors did not know *how to organize their time* effectively.

In summary, at this stage of their research journey most participants faced two fundamental learning constraints, quality of supervisory arrangements and lack of program orientation. In other words, participants were embarking on an uncharted journey without 'quality' trackers/guides and without road maps. The situation resulted in additional workloads for students, together with enormous psychological pressures.

Program Content: Learning Research

An overview of participants' individualized program content shows us what they were learning. Sixty percent of participants were receiving the research training components promised in university guidelines, in varying ways and to varying degrees. However, for forty percent of participants this was not the case, particularly in the area of professional development and careers orientation.

All participants stated that Indigenous perspectives were not formally factored into program components. That is, Indigenous perspectives were absent in research units, research skills seminars, and professional develop development and careers orientation. Many participants thus spent time filling this content gap by drawing on their prior experience, personal reflections, and/or discussion with knowledgeable others.

The postgraduate diploma student had learned how to conduct interviews as part of a large research endeavour organized by 'other' persons. The master's of literature students and the master's by coursework student were engaged in learning the process of research.

The learning process involved undertaking research units, choosing a topic to study, writing a research proposal, collecting information from the literature and/or people, and then writing up their findings in approximately 20,000 word dissertations/projects. Supervisors supplied students with methodologies considered appropriate to their research. However, one master's of literature student was not receiving guidance in how to write-up his/her dissertation.

Master's by research students were engaged in a similar learning process to the master's of literature students, but presentation of their findings required writing a 50,000 word thesis. Students were either

guided in their choice of methodologies or choose their own. One student was receiving a thorough grounding in careers orientation and professional development but the other four master's by research students were either receiving minimal orientation or, were not/had not received, any form of careers orientation/professional development.

PhD students were likewise involved in the sequential research process but presentation of their research findings involved writing 100,000 word theses. Students choose their own methodologies which were subject to approval by their supervisors. Those with B.A. honours had already received careers orientation/professional development training. Other PhD students, similar to master's by research students, were either receiving minimal careers orientation or, were not/had not received any form of careers orientation/professional development.

Discussion of experiences of engagement in research skills units and professional and careers development training follows. But, experiences in learning research through engagement in the knowledge production process is taken up in Chapter Five.

Research Skills Development

Most participants learned research skills, (through required research units), as part of their postgraduate programs. The postgraduate diploma student had not taken a research unit, master's of literature and master's by coursework students had undertaken one unit, and master's by research students had undertaken one to three research units. Participants asserted that university failure to include Indigenous perspectives, particularly with regard to ethics and field protocols, was a serious omission for both Indigenous and mainstream students.

Further opportunity for learning research skills was also provided through the regularly scheduled Research Skills Seminars offered at all Australian university campuses. But most participants did not take up these opportunities for a variety of reasons.

Some PhD's who had completed a bachelor honours program stated they had a sound grasp of the theoretical base, academic conventions, and associated research practices of their disciplines. One member of this set of students had broadened his/her research base during undergraduate studies by taking research units from a variety of other disciplines *because I knew there were other kinds of research around.*

Of the set of students who learned research skills as part of their postgraduate programs, all but one had completed at least one research unit, while a few had taken as many as three. Participant experiences showed that research units were delivered in two main ways. The one was specifically related to proposed thesis/project topic, and the other focused on research methodology in a more 'general' way.

Consequently, the level of research skills learned varied considerably within the group. Some participants felt the units were useful but others thought differently. Notably, some stated that *in retrospect it was the most valuable course I've done.* One young participant attested that his/her research unit *was a good course because it gave me an idea if I wanted to go on with my studies.* That is, course content provided him/her with clues about *what to expect.*

Participants who had undertaken more than one research unit derived greater benefit than those who had only undertaken one unit. One master's by research student's experience in three units, (one on general research methodology, one on quantitative methods, and one on qualitative methods) illustrates the perceived benefits:

The coursework material gave me an introduction I guess to what research is, and research methodology, and how you choose your topic and what sort of data you collect. How you go about doing things basically ... I really didn't know what research was in the beginning and I knew that it's something that you go out and study and you write up a paper - but what are the processes, how do you go about doing it. So it took me a while to get a grasp on how to do things, and then things started to come together for me in that subject.

Benefits derived from the other two units were noted as *learning how to write-up questionnaires, how to run focus groups, how to collate the data, what programs you use [research software], to try and make things a little easier.* Even so, this participant further stated *but I guess I still had a very vague understanding of what it all meant until I actually started to participate in the research.*

Another master's by research student who undertook two research units stated *it took me twelve months to get my head around all the different research theories* in the one research unit undertaken. He/she added that the experience of specifically relating the units to his/her thesis was valuable because it saved time and *that was two chapters of my thesis done*, the methodology and the literature review.

One former master's by coursework student felt that his/her experience in the one research unit undertaken was inadequate because it did not prepare him for his PhD, *it didn't really familiarize me with the research method itself.* This participant added *its only when I was admitted to the PhD program that I went out myself and bought specific publications on how to conduct research at the PhD level.*

Another former master's by coursework student attested that he/she was only given a *skeleton understanding of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research.* He/she added that when

questioned about the lack of depth, *the lecturer said that I didn't really need to know that for this kind of master's*. This participant was likewise filling this theory gap during his/her PhD studies.

Reading theory caused particular problems for three students, mainly because of the academic language. One participant explained the nature of the problem, *it was a different language ... people don't talk about research methodology and all this sort of thing you know*. He/she found that the scheduled monthly research seminars provided by his/her university (for all research degree students), significantly improved her knowledge of research theory and practice.

Other participants stated that it was difficult to find time to attend the many regularly scheduled research skills seminars provided by their universities, especially when seminars were scheduled during the work day. Moreover, while some participants questioned the usefulness of these seminars in that they lacked an Indigenous perspective, others did find them useful.

Notwithstanding, the potential benefits of these seminars were seen as arguable on the grounds that *Aboriginals have different ways of doing things*. For this reason one AEU set up a staff research training initiative in 1997 (funded by DEETYA) to assist in the training of the majority of Unit staff who were also undertaking postgraduate studies. Other participants who were not familiar with Indigenous research ethics, protocols and interview methods had to take a sidetrack to fill these procedural gaps themselves, one participant explained *both on a practical level and on an intellectual level*.

Those who had received an adequate Western theoretical grounding stated that lack of training in *the practice of research* was a serious oversight, causing them time-consuming difficulties in the practical application of their skills when entering the field.

Otherwise, several participants felt that including *discussion time* within the framework of research units would have facilitated greater understanding of this unfamiliar area. For instance, discussion on issues such as questioning whether *research is a good thing*, or whether *the recipients of research are grateful for it or should be grateful if they are not*, as well as *traditional knowledge bases and authority structures*.

Yet others felt that more flexible scheduling of research skills seminars would have been more useful to them. While some felt that knowledge and training in research software would have been beneficial. While one master's student cautioned against sharing subjects with other students to prevent *marks* being lowered. The emphatic caution is reiterated here, *I advise everybody not to share an essay with anybody else, don't do it*.

Three other participants suggested that the learning path for Indigenous postgraduates could be made easier by course inclusions such as orality to literacy, autonomous learning, negotiation skills, and philosophy. Learning benefits were perceived as assisting students in their approaches to their research, enhancing independent learner ability, increasing confidence to effectively conduct research involving fieldwork, and enhanced capacity for a broadened perspective in knowledge construction endeavours inasmuch as *most people often can't recognize the philosophical basis of their own disciplines*.

Research Software

Technological skill development varied within the group. While almost all participants had already acquired basic competency in computer skills, (word processing, ability to use e-mail, CD ROM software and the internet), many were not aware of the various kinds of research software available. Only one master's by research student was receiving a formalized introduction to research software. No other participants had been exposed to this aspect of professional research skills development.

The one student who was being nurtured stated her training increased her efficiency as a researcher, giving her an idea of *what programs are there and how easy it is sometimes to do things*. Two PhD students only became aware of the way in which technology could advance their research endeavours, toward the end of their journeys. Consequently, the two took a sidetrack (extending their studies) to fill this learning gap because they considered the *technical expertize* would not only assist in their *knowledge production* but was also *a valuable investment for the future both for themselves and so that they could teach others [the skills]*.

Professional Development/Careers Orientation

The eleven participants who were involved in research degree programs³⁹ reveal two experiential polar extremes in the professional development and careers orientation strand of their programs. One

³⁹ Under Australian postgraduate guidelines professional development/careers orientation training only applies to research degree students, as previously mentioned in Chapter Three.

master's by research student was receiving extensive training while others were receiving little or no training.

Notwithstanding, a few participants joined non-Indigenous professional associations during this time. Importantly, participants stated that this strand of program content needed an Indigenous component which was not provided, except in the case of the aforementioned master's by research student, albeit on a limited basis.

It needs to be noted that six of the eleven research degree participants were employed in universities. And, also that, three of the five participants who had undertaken bachelor honours programs had already received some training in professional development and careers orientation and socialization into disciplinary culture. The disparity in training appeared to arise from institutional factors rather than whether students began their honours in their second or fourth years. Notwithstanding, whether these circumstances (relating to prevailing employment and prior qualifications), influenced the level of program content provided is unknown.

The above-mentioned master's by research student was being carefully nurtured in a comprehensive range of professional/careers activities. Two PhD students were receiving limited socialization training through staff interaction at tea-breaks, when on campus. One other PhD student was assisted in the preparation of a monograph. But, the other seven participants were not receiving any form of professional/careers training.

The student who was being nurtured explains the depth of his/her training, which was being provided through the formalized mentor process previously mentioned. A precis of the content of this participant's professional development/careers orientation training

points up deficiencies in program provision for most other research degree students⁴⁰:

experience in conducting a pilot study, experience in preparing 'funding for research' submissions, publicising a thesis in progress, learning about the relative value and reputations of relevant refereed journals, experience in writing articles for refereed journals, experience in extracting articles from a thesis in progress, writing papers for presentation at conferences, experience in organizing and conducting both a national and an international Indigenous conference, attending and presenting papers at national and international Indigenous conferences at home and at overseas venues, participating in short term international Indigenous professional exchange programs, and experience in using a comprehensive range of research software.

The two participants who were receiving experience in academic socialization asserted they would have preferred *more time to be spent on other things*, that is, professional development framed around *helping build the capacity of individual Aboriginal researchers to be able to do the sort of work that we want to*. Furthermore, the two students felt they were obstructed (*by being discouraged*) in individual initiatives in professional development. One explained his/her perception of the situation, *it was seen as a diversion from what I was needing to do, rather than a complementary strategy to enhance my development*.

Examples given were supervisor's lack of interest and subsequent lack of training in preparing submissions for research funding, supervisor's failure to respond to requested assistance in learning how to write for journals, and departmental hesitancy in providing funding for conference attendance. However, in the latter case the university did provide funding after one event. One participant explained:

⁴⁰ This participant was employed in a faculty, not an AEU. It is not known whether this fact may, or may not, be related to the depth of training provided.

So, it wasn't until we came back and we said to them that, you know, the conference was really worthwhile, these are the skills that we got out of it, and those sorts of things, then we were able to get some retrospective funding, for the conference. So I suppose that was really heartening in a way, but it was quite frustrating trying to come up with the resources in the first place.

All participants expressed awareness of the need to publish but maintained that their busy work schedules hindered them in this activity. Nevertheless, many participants stated they were not formally encouraged to write. Notably, a few former B.A. honours students did publish during the course of their studies. One AEU director asserted that one way of providing publishing opportunities would be to *at the end of every year publish a set of papers from the school here, this set of Offices*, incorporating the writings of both undergraduates and postgraduates.

Several participants were attempting to inject an Indigenous perspective into their programs by *Indigenizing their disciplines* through convincing academia to include *an Indigenous perspective*. They asserted that their views were mainly *not well-received* and, further that, their universities were *gate-keeping against new ideas*.

Some participants, particularly those with prior postgraduate experience, had carefully thought about the prevailing theoretical basis and research direction/approach of their disciplines and, were reflecting on how an Indigenous perspective might be included. (This issue is revisited in Chapter Five.)

One PhD student implied that professional development training ought to be framed around the requirements of equipping an Indigenous researcher with the skills needed for that task. He/she prescribed a

tentative list of eight fundamental skills needed to become an Indigenous researcher:

I would sort of tentatively say a person ... skilled in the fundamentals of the research process who has the ... ready capacity to publish papers in their own including grant funding, ... peak organizations, and also the politics of the research process. So, it's again multi-faceted, multi-skilled, but... you know you're talking about people at a level who can independently or with others take on a specific research project from the outset and carry it through to its completion, produce the findings in an acceptable format - who can use various technologies and, most importantly I think, one who understands the nature of ... people. I know that's pretty broad, the purpose and reasons for undertaking that research and doesn't do the research in a vacuum or for the research dollars.

A few other participants believed that professional development ought to include learning how to *organize themselves and their time*. In a slightly differing vein a few AEU staff believed that professional development and careers orientation ought to include *training in lecturing* and also, *how to supervise* postgraduate students.

Furthermore, participants had definite views about the value of Indigenous socialization procedures and the form such training ought to take. Importantly, involvement with the Indigenous Community was perceived as an essential component.

One PhD student commented that *a university can never teach you how to behave as an Indigenous researcher, it can only teach you research skills*. The participant added that *like they [universities] can't fill that gap but they can make people aware that the gap exists*. For this reason it was suggested that professional development ought to include community training by way of short-term visits (*about a week or so*) into the various Indigenous communities, both *urban and traditional*.

Significantly, participants asserted that community involvement not only fulfilled cultural obligations but, was fundamental in establishing professional reputations because levels of community involvement affected community opinions about their status and hence their reputations as Indigenous academics.

Other ideas proffered for inclusion of an Indigenous socialization perspective encompassed recognition that Indigenous students needed to learn how to write in appropriate styles for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous journals and other publications. Participants were thus implying that supervisors needed to be aware of the existence of professional Indigenous networks as well as relevant literary vehicles commonly used for information distribution to the various Indigenous communities.

Also, recognition of the fact that Indigenous academic reputations were enhanced through participation in various local, regional, state, national, and international Indigenous committees. Another aspect of this activity involved the ethical responsibility of monitoring the activities of 'others' within these frameworks, that is, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers.

Participants also expressed definite views about Indigenous scholarship practice. Most stated that they were committed to producing *quality research* using a *collaborative approach* that would result in beneficial outcomes. To this end one participant stated that training in *what a researcher does on a day-to-day basis* would be invaluable.

Resource Provision

Access to resources was easier for some postgraduates than others. Resources available to this group varied across the range of universities and campuses. The forty percent of participants who were university staff members had greater access to resources than those who were not employed in universities.

Seven areas of resource provision which affected their learning experiences were university infrastructure, finding office space within which to work and furnishing it with associated equipment, access to and provision of equipment, funding for fieldwork, AEU Support for postgraduates, networking, and residual funding for conference and seminar attendance. I now give an explanation of these seven areas of resource provision.

First, participants were generally satisfied with university library facilities and level of departmental support. Most stated that they received local university postgraduate journals which contained relevant information. Notwithstanding, those students researching Indigenous communities found it necessary to travel to either the Mitchell library in Sydney or the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. The latter two activities added to participants' study costs.

Second, those employed in universities had well-resourced office space as well as access to departmental facilities. Non-university employed participants tell differing stories. Two PhD students were allocated well-resourced office space including computers and easy access to departmental facilities such as the e-mail and internet.

A few other PhD's had difficulty in either finding office space and/or furnishing office space. One participant stated *I had to fend for myself*, to find furnishings for her allocated office. Another PhD student stated that she *did not realize that it would take so long*, adding that *my office was not set up - two months after I came here*. Participants found this circumstance not only time-consuming but *frustrating*.

Master's students were not allocated office space and thus studied at home. One master's of letters student was not happy with this situation, commenting *I've noticed a lot of international students that are at my level and have their own rooms*. Similarly, external students, be they master's or PhD's, were not allocated office space during their scheduled university contact time. One PhD student attested that not having a place to work affected his/her contact time and efficiency level as well as the amount of work that could be accomplished during the contact time.

Third, for non-staff students, access to and provision of 'reliable' equipment such as computers, not only varied between universities but between departments within the same university. Some PhD's were allocated 'reliable' (meaning sufficient memory and/or up-dated software), computing facilities while others were not. This caused difficulty for students because it meant they were forced to work on their own computers at their homes.

Many students considered it necessary to purchase their own *home* computers, thus adding to the costs of their studies. One participant believed that Abstudy ought to review its policy and provide some assistance in this area, particularly for software. Three PhD students studying at the same university were provided with e-mail and internet access but felt that non-access to outside telephone calls hindered their capacity for networking. The two external students who were attending

the same campus had to fund their own connections to e-mail and the internet, as already stated.

Fourth, most participants involved in fieldwork activity as part of their research endeavours experienced difficulty in accessing funding for field-related activity such as research software, travel, and transcribing. Lack of funding for these items and activities added to students' study costs. A few participants asserted there was need for a data-base of both national and international funding agencies.

Nevertheless, a few students who were staff members did have access to annual research funds and thus their paths were easier. Moreover, the path was even easier for the few staff members who were successful in their submissions to various funding agencies such as the ARC (1 student), National Health and Medical Research Centre and other Health agencies (1 student), DEETYA (1 student) and one other unnamed funding agency (1 student).

The path was also easier for one full-time PhD student who was not working but attending a well-resourced university. Notably, within this group of participants, only university staff were successful 'applications for funding'. This issue is revisited in Chapter Five.

One participant asserted that AIATSIIS should play a greater role in assisting postgraduate students in funding their research. One master's student believed that *certain specific interest* funding agencies *were biased* in the way they processed funding submissions, that is, access to funding was *political*.

This same participant believed that as a consequence of such political action, *effective [community] research* was often hindered, and further that, particular researchers ran the risk of being side-lined. For the

aforementioned reasons this student perceived it was better not to become involved with such kinds of agencies, because, *they can't influence it [the research] and they can't impact on it, and they can't affect it.*

Fifth, all participants, across the range of universities and campuses, asserted that their AEU's were *not providing specific services for postgraduate students.* The issue relates to the level of funding allocated to AEU's. Many participants adopted a pragmatic attitude, stating that *undergraduates deserved priority* over postgraduates in financial 'scale of need' situations. Nevertheless, those participants who were employed in AEU's did enjoy networking opportunities in locations where AEU staff were in sufficient numbers and *were close.*

A few others, however, felt that since Indigenous postgraduates suffered *extreme social and academic isolation,* AEU's ought to be providing *some form of specifically tailored service* to alleviate their difficult situations. Suggestions proffered included *networking opportunities,* as well as organizing guest speakers *from among the community of Indigenous scholars* and *a short course ... in just coping with racism in the university environment, or, recognizing racism, or racism in academia - stuff like that.*

Sixth, participant perceptions and experiences in networking uncovered a complex phenomenon. Significantly, networking was considered valuable by all participants. Particularly because of lack of Indigenous history in the area and also, the implied mental agony of writing/translating an oral tradition into a literate tradition.

Some set out on their learning paths with previously established networks, while others were in the process of establishing and/or broadening their networks. A few students, mainly younger ones or

those only recently involved in further studies, did not belong to a networking system and did not really know how to establish one.

One participant asserted that he/she became aware during the course of his/her studies that *you need different groups at different stages of your program* because *you need to discuss different things* related to what you were learning.

Another participant, who had a large established national network, attested that the practical reality of networking with other busy people is that *it is very difficult to contact people*. Another participant believed that the internet would solve this problem, thus he/she was *encouraging everybody I know to get on the internet because I think it will be a way of staying in touch*. Significantly, many participants suggested that a national Indigenous conference would be beneficial for both exchanging ideas and networking.

At the time of writing recently established networking mechanisms such as the *Indigenous Australian Higher Education Association*, the *National Indigenous Student Network*, and the *CAPA Indigenous Postgraduate Association* were not being utilized because they were in their developmental stages of operation. Significantly, departmental support mechanisms such as thesis writing seminars or thesis development seminars were not utilized as additional avenues for networking. Reasons for not doing so were not offered.

The seventh resource provision issue raised by participants related to funding for attendance at conferences and seminars. The graduate diploma student and the two master's of literature students were not provided with opportunities to attend conferences or seminars, nor did they arrange such opportunities for themselves.

Those who had attended conferences, (mainly master's by coursework, master's by research, and PhD's), were either provided with the opportunity by their departments, or as part of their work-related responsibilities, or participants themselves arranged their own opportunities. Types of conferences and seminars attended encompassed local, regional, national, and international levels, both within Australia and overseas. Some participants presented papers within these venues, some received supervisory assistance to prepare papers but, others did not.

Approximately one quarter of the group, mainly master's by research and PhD students, attended at least one international conference and/or one national conference as well as various other seminars and workshops. Other participants attended local or regional seminars and workshops. Notably, master's of literature students and the one graduate diploma student had not attended any form of seminar or conference other than research skills seminars.

Participants asserted that attending conferences and seminars enabled them to contribute knowledge through presenting papers and participating in discussion and debates, to acquire knowledge through hearing what others had to say, and to build networks through meeting people. One example of the value of networking was provided by a participant who stated that his/her network assisted in *finding a field site* for his/her research.

External students indicated that they were disadvantaged across all areas of resource provision. And, further that they *bought more books* because they couldn't readily use them within university libraries because of distance factors. All the aforementioned factors added to the cost of their studies. One student commented that if his university

had had *reciprocal arrangements with another university* located in his/her home town, the path would have been easier.

Having presented participant accounts of their educational backgrounds, preparation for and, entry into their various individualized postgraduate programs, I now summarise the chapter findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Participants' accounts of their educational backgrounds and experiences of program 'content' offered in this chapter provided insights into their social world of learning research within Australian universities. Lack of a Sense of Place and the absence of tracks to follow were dominant features of their experiences. Categories used to organize the information were derived from the participants themselves and included Indigenous postgraduates: becoming researchers, organizing self and studies, and personalized study paths.

The chapter findings form the basis of the developing picture of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates learning research. In particular, information that can now be added to the picture encompasses motivation for learning research, study aims, the ways in which learning paths were organized, and student experiences of prescribed program content. Insights into personally organized instructional arrangements and perspectives on program content can now also be added to the developing descriptive conceptualization.

I now turn to Chapter Five where I explore this group of Indigenous postgraduates' experiences in learning the process of 'doing research'.

CHAPTER FIVE
SOCIAL WORLD:
THE PROCESS TOWARDS RESEARCH

OVERVIEW

A comprehensive description of participants' views of their dynamic social world of learning research is continued in this chapter. To learn the research process is to walk the path of becoming a researcher in varying ways, ending up with varying degrees of research expertise. Aspects of the path involve the learning continuum/sequence of the research process.

Parts of the descriptive picture are painted in by exploring participants' experiences of Thesis/Project Topic Selection, the Information Collection Process: Preparation, and the Information Collection Process: Books and People. The chapter concludes with a chapter Summary.

INTRODUCTION

Reading the story of this group of Indigenous postgraduates' experiences in learning to do research opens the door to a hitherto uncharted world of new stepping stones for Indigenous students. Learning the process of research, in accordance with prescribed academic processes and procedures, involved continually balancing culture and academia to ensure personal cultural safety in spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical/practical levels of consciousness.

As in Chapter Four, for confidentiality reasons, educational path and employment details are frequently couched in vague terms. And, for ease of reading, direct quotes from participants are noted in italics.

THESIS/PROJECT TOPIC SELECTION

Selecting research topics posed socio-political, personal and cultural dilemmas for participants. Notwithstanding, choice in research topics set the path for individualized learning activities including knowledge acquisition and research skills development on this section of their paths.

Selecting Topics for Enquiry

Thesis/project topic choice showed that this group of students responded to community concerns, matters of personal interest, and aspects of Australian society which impact on the collective Indigenous community. Most selected their own topics but one was asked by an Indigenous community to do a specific research task on local culture.

Two deliberately chose culturally sensitive issues. This latter issue pertains to the politics and ethics of research and research protocols, these are discussed later in this chapter. Access to funding was also an affective factor in selection of topics for research and in research approaches used.

Thesis/project topic choice encompassed Indigenous men's health, Indigenous women's issues, women and work, Indigenous sexuality, ethno-history, the culture and history of a particular Indigenous community, Indigenous educational history, institutionalized Indigenous education issues such as 'learning' and educational 'success'. Three quarters of the group focused solely on the Indigenous community, while one quarter included both Indigenous and other socio-cultural groups within the focus of their research, and two were not involved in researching Australian issues.

All participants were involved in basic research and for many, *racism* constituted an underlying theme. Disciplinary requirements of 'originality' in research endeavours were easily fulfilled inasmuch as all participants were engaged in either opening up new areas of enquiry, or approaching existing enquiry areas from a 'new' perspective.

Factors which influenced participant choice in thesis/project topics arose from local Indigenous community needs, personal interest in filling perceived Indigenous knowledge gaps, and/or work related needs. For example, public service employees could only receive the benefit of study leave if their research topics served to increase knowledge about issues related to their employment area. Many university staff also selected their research topics to serve work related needs. Notably, some participants were engaged in at least two projects (and a few as many as three or four), during the course of their studies.

Two PhD students experienced some difficulty with their supervisors over perceptions about their intended areas of research. These tensions resulted in mental and emotional constraints over study aims and perceived practical benefits of their research. That is, differences in perceptions about the perceived research benefits for the Indigenous community that was the focus of their individual research projects. These students believed that their Department was *gate-keeping against new ideas* and was therefore *deficient in their [academic] practice*.

One of these students attested that he/she was never able to resolve differing perceptions about the nature of his/her research and proposed methodology with his/her supervisory panel. As noted earlier, this participant changed universities. Another PhD student was quite concerned when *my supervisor tried to steer me away from researching Indigenous issues*, the supervisor was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the participant consequently changed supervisors.

The two participants who were researching culturally sensitive issues did so for two differing reasons. The implied meaning of culturally sensitive is taken to mean issues which various/particular Indigenous communities' wish to remain confidential, or issues which ought not to be discussed in the public domain because *some people are not ready to hear about them*.

One participant decided upon his/her topic because he/she felt the time had come to openly raise awareness of the particular issue through discussion and debate, thus opening up a previously *silent area* of historical *structured socio-cultural practice*. The other chose a culturally sensitive issue because of personal interest in the historical role and lifestyle of a particular segment of the Indigenous community. This young participant focused on an overseas group of Indigenous persons because of his/her age and lack of research experience. He/she

explained her thinking and the socio-cultural ramifications of her strategy:

... other students will sort of cut me down for why am I doing this, and not doing stuff on Aboriginal people. But, I feel that I'm not experienced enough to come to my community and, write about my community because of all the ... you know you get cut down for something ... I've got to be experienced in my field before I go out and interview, you know, my community ... if I write about something it might offend a tribe and then I'll get, you know, I want to be experienced - to know - and have those skills to go out and enter the community ... and interview, and I don't feel that I've got that experience yet.

Some participants had determined their thesis/project topic prior to entry, as already stated. A few, however, selected their topics early in their studies. Nevertheless, a few participants changed their topics for various reasons including personal difficulty with an area of enquiry and changed employment circumstances.

For instance, during the first year of his/her program one PhD changed from fieldwork to documentary analysis because of lack of funding coupled with the need to balance work/study time considerations. Another PhD changed topics because he/she found that although the topic was worthwhile, it was becoming too psychologically affective, in other words, *too close to home*. Consequently, this participant began to question his/her ability to set aside *personal bias* and *stand back*.

Another participant changed jobs and consequently changed topics to serve the needs of his/her 'new' employment situation. He/she explained his/her reasoning:

You have to do that I guess because one, I can't afford to study full-time. I want to continue to study. For me to do that effectively, it's got to be tied into my job to allow me to continue to study. And that's why I do it so I can build it in to my job. You know, it can be part of my job description as

doing and participating in research. So I can do that, and also the information that's gained from this ... these two research projects is going to be valuable for our future programs supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in ----.

Those participants who were employed in universities found it easier to access funds than other participants. They were able to access staff funds as well as the range of other available funding bodies. Funding bodies applied to were the ARC (both general purpose grants and Indigenous grants), AIATSIS, DEETYA, and various health agencies. Notably, it was university staff who were successful in their submissions for funding. Significantly, a few participants believed that AIATSIS *should play a greater role* in assisting Indigenous postgraduates with their research.

Of the other participants, only one full-time PhD received funding assistance, and that was from his/her disciplinary department. Other participants financed their research by working part-time. Otherwise, full-time employees (including university staff), who had been unsuccessful in accessing funding paid for their fieldwork themselves.

Methodological Base

Master's of letters students were *given* methodologies, master's by research students were guided in their choice of methodologies but, PhD students were required to select their own methodologies, as noted earlier. Supervisory expertise and receptiveness to Indigenous perspectives was a critical factor in methodological choice. Significantly, the process of methodological decision-making caused some participants to re-examine their direction in construction of self-as-researcher.

Two master's students and two PhD students used documentary analysis for their research while all others were involved in fieldwork. All participants engaged in fieldwork activity used qualitative approaches. One participant's reasoning is indicative of other participants' views:

For me there was never any doubt as to how I was going to do it. And I suppose I automatically headed in the direction of qualitative because it's part of the way I work anyway, and it sort of comes naturally. Consulting with people and so on have been so much a part of my work for the previous few years that it was just sort of what I did.

In contrast, another PhD was planning to use a qualitative methodology as an alternative to *the positivist approach which does in fact support the status quo*, so that greater insights could be gained from potential Indigenous participants' perspectives.

Most participants used ethnography (anthropological or sociological), while a few used a case study approach (single or multiple), and one used action research, and yet another used self-as-subject. Ethnography was mainly chosen because most participants were involved in descriptive research because they were opening up new areas for enquiry.

Regardless of methodological choice, the majority of participants were committed to a collaborative approach incorporating the perspectives of those persons involved in their various research endeavours. Importantly, participants' base-line intention encompassed the goal of *writing our own story in our own way*.

Criteria for methodological choice revealed four sets of attitudes toward *the Indigenization of Theory*. These encompassed differing ways to modify/adapt existing Western theory to suit Indigenous researcher

needs. One set of participants subscribed to the view that *I'll use the [Western] methodologies as long as they suit what I'm doing ... but if I started to see it as an issue I'd do something about it.*

The second set were of the view that *I'll use 'that' methodology but I will place an Indigenous perspective on it.* For one participant an Indigenous perspective strategically translated into asking, and searching for, answers to questions that were important to the Indigenous people concerned. Another participant believed that an Indigenous perspective related to researcher interpretative considerations, that is, applying Indigenous criteria when interpreting the research findings and, also, in written presentation of the findings.

The third attitudinal approach to Indigenization of theory reflected the view that *it was the process of research* that needed Indigenization *rather than the methodology.* For some participants this strategy translated into using Indigenous protocols, Indigenous methods (for instance, in interviews), and presenting interviewee's perspectives when reporting any research findings. (The issue of Indigenous methods is revisited later in this chapter.)

The fourth set of participants believed that *we need our own [Indigenous] paradigm* but until one was devised, modifying existing Western methodologies was the only realistic course of action. Significantly, one participant emphasised that *you need to be totally familiar with accepted [Western] methodologies before you can attempt to bring in something new* because you need to get some imprimatur on what you are actually trying to say about new directions.

Two master's students and two PhD's took a long time to decide where to locate (in disciplinary terms) their enquiries. One master's student believed that his/her research would be served better through a cross-

disciplinary approach but was unsure of how his/her supervisor would react. One PhD student, however, was having difficulty in finding an 'accepted' methodology wherein he/she could ask the questions that he/she believed were fundamental to his/her research. He/she explained the quandary:

I have found a degree of difficulty in coming to grips with the various theoretical paradigms because I propose essentially they don't really speak to me about what I'd like to be saying in my research. The only theoretical position which I have any sort of easy familiarity with in terms of content is the feminist approach which doesn't actually get a tick from the established theoretical approaches ... so my basic problems at this time are, how do I, how does my thinking fit with what western research ... methodologies and theories accept as the basis for conducting research.

The participant concluded that:

I think I'll have to do a lot more reading ... research before I can get to the point where I feel confident saying this, that, or the other methodology or, this, that, or the other theory is totally inappropriate in its usefulness in this area - this part of my research. It really is alien at this stage.

The dilemma remained unresolved because while he/she was deciding, funding and time considerations caused a change to documentary analysis. Two other PhD students experienced major conflicts with their supervisors over methodological choice. Notably, these two students had taken the unusual step of traveling overseas to consult with the originator of their preferred methodology. Ongoing tensions over a long period of time resulted in the two students changing universities.

For some participants the process of methodological decision-making raised awareness of the need for reflection on precisely where they located themselves, theoretically. Significantly, participants described themselves as *Aboriginal first* and then 'whatever' second.

For instance, one young master's student asked herself the question, *am I an historian writing from a feminist perspective ... or a feminist writing history?* He/she decided on the former position. In contrast, one master's student and an older PhD student 'knew' they were educators and that all methodologies were tools to be used to facilitate a research task. Yet other students located themselves firmly within their chosen disciplines, each one having a strong 'love' of the broad parameters of their respective disciplines.

Research Approach

Two main research approaches were employed by this group of postgraduates. While most used a single researcher approach, a few used a joint approach, and one used a quasi-joint approach. In the latter situation the participant's project papers (as part of a master's by coursework program), were being used as the basis for a joint work-related project.

Involvement in joint projects caused tremendous emotional difficulties for those concerned, except in the case of the above-noted quasi-joint approach. One PhD student attested that when involved in joint approaches *it was important to set the ground rules* at the outset.

Another PhD participant maintained that even though the ground rules had been set at the outset of the research, the others involved in the research endeavour kept trying to *change the ground rules*. In other words, the participant was involved in a *power struggle* regarding the direction of the research and the way in which it was to be conducted. Tensions over this issue resulted in delays in entering the field and subsequent lengthened duration of the research process.

The postgraduate diploma student who had conducted interviews as part of a large joint project, believed that he/she *had been used* to supply information which was gained in a questionable way and which could be used for questionable purposes. He/she was experiencing considerable trauma from the experience. This student was blaming self for being *too trusting at the outset*, that is, he/she ought to have taken steps to learn more about the nature and purpose of the project prior to becoming involved in it.

Narrowing the Topic/Manageability

Because almost all participants were engaged in opening up new areas for enquiry, they found it necessary to narrow their topics to make them manageable within the time-frames of their study programs. Some participants received supervisory guidance at this time while others did not. The narrowing process hinged on perceptions about the nature and perceived value of their research.

The process of 'narrowing of the focus' caused considerable mental gymnastics for most participants. One provided an example of the intricacies of his/her procedure:

Yes, and it's one of those things where you sort of, in your mind you shuffle it around and you bring it all in and then you throw all the cards again. And you fiddle and you move them around a bit and then you pull it all in and then you try to think, am I going to use this, does this have any meaning for me ... yes it does. You know, like it's ... given that it's the closer I feel I'm going down the track sometimes the further away ... It's hard to explain, it's really hard to explain.

Research that was inter-related to work circumstances and area of enquiry revealed two main trends. A few students utilized a staged

process approach wherein they prioritised aspects of the topic into a *number of phases*, phase one constituting their program topic for enquiry. University staff who were involved in large projects, focused on an aspect of the task for their thesis/project topic, planning to add the findings to the larger project, as previously mentioned.

Participants who were involved in local community historical research (oral history), faced other 'focussing' considerations. One PhD student decided that the boundary of his/her research was a particular piece of land, and then focused on *the changing patterns* of the land and the people who had inter-acted with that piece of land. In contrast, one masters by research decided to focus on a *sense of place* and had not yet decided on the boundary of the topic. He/she explained the issues framing his/her developmental thinking:

Well I see, I guess I see it ... where it cuts off - this is where I haven't set a boundary also ... What I've just sort of focused on, is the history of the place. I haven't brought that into the contemporary issues. So I probably ... what I was looking at is, maybe at the end of the protection era, but I don't know about that yet. Do we look at that, or do we look at 1967, or do we look at any points. It all depends on ... I guess it all depends on the end research of those oral histories ... Because what else has been since significant since that? What has caused dramatic changes to people, and people's lives. If you get events then that have sort of shaped and changed people's lives and perceptions and ideas about the community.

Participants, however, were of the same opinion that the fundamental consideration in the narrowing process revolved around *what message will I be getting across in this thesis so that it can help cultural survival*, immediately or in the long term. Given that most participants were committed *to research as a collaborative process*, they were mindful of their 'collaborative participants' opinions during the narrowing process.

Research Proposals and Approval

All participants, except the diploma student, were required to write research proposals. Some master's students were given assistance in this process but PhD students, in accordance with prevailing postgraduate practice, were not. However, even though most PhD's were given *sample* proposals as guidelines, many found the process *extremely difficult*, thus constituting a learning constraint.

Experiences in departmental procedural approval for research proposals revealed two main occurrences. Whereas most participants stated they had *no problems gaining approval* for their proposed research task, a few experienced difficulty causing constraining time delays for them.

One of the participants who chose a culturally sensitive topic attested that the university *got cold feet ... 12 months down the track* and requested that he/she *change the research focus*. The participant did amend the topic but eventually changed universities, preferring *a more receptive place*. Another participant discovered eighteen months into his/her program that that his/her proposal had not been approved although he/she had been lead to believe otherwise. Valuable effort and time was thus lost through supervisory *slackness*.

INFORMATION COLLECTION PROCESS: PREPARATION

Taking steps to ensure that the 'proper' groundwork was laid prior to engagement in the research process was uppermost in the minds of most participants. Preparatory measures included establishing personal study schedules, acquiring information from books (doing a literature review), and organizing entry into the field (pre-fieldwork preparations).

Personal Schedules

Organizing study-work schedules so that adequate time could be given to each was a primary task for participants. A feature of this organizational procedure involved incorporating ways to facilitate mind-shifts between study and work activities. Awareness of personal attitudes toward fieldwork and preparing one's mind for the venture also formed part of this self-organization phase.

The rhythm of time spent on studies was affected by work schedules for all except the three students who were not employed while studying. Nevertheless, many participants devoted time to their studies almost every day including weekends. A few students set aside one day each weekend as well as one period of time during weekdays.

Some academics were able to avail themselves of university 30% research leave loading time. In those universities where research loading was conditional upon 'time in the job', (usually three years), this employment feature was only available to those with at least that amount of time in the job.

Two universities, however, waived this condition for AEU staff undertaking postgraduate studies. AEU directors (two campuses were involved) were thus able to exercise flexibility as they co-operatively scheduled work-study time allocations for staff engaged in postgraduate studies.

One PhD student expressed the strong opinion that universities ought *to be more supportive* of Indigenous staff who were trying to upgrade their professional qualifications. He/she added that prevailing conditions for

research loading were inappropriate for Indigenous staff, particularly in light of the fact that Indigenous staff contracts were usually short-term.

University staff who did not have access to university leave loading mainly worked at home during the week as well as during weekends. As noted earlier, when work requirements intensified, many extended their study programs and consequently, their time-to-degree time lines. Those employed in the public service were only able to have time off for study if their thesis/project topic was directly *related to their work* as previously mentioned. Time-off consisted of time to attend university scheduled 'block' seminars.

Strategies to facilitate mind-shifts between work-study activities were varied. Some participants who were working full-time accomplished the mind-shift separation by only working on their studies *at home* and conversely only doing work-related projects at work. One participant who was involved in four different projects allocated *one day per week* to each one. Other participants used different computers to readily facilitate mind-shifts. One university staff member who was engaged in PhD studies provided an insight into the intricacies of his/her schedule by explaining that:

I guess in a way, I try to actually divorce the roles in that sense. You see, like I don't ... I do all my work, my PhD stuff at home - I have a different computer altogether, a PC this is a Mac [computer in the office], so there's no way I can ever ... put the two ... Yes, and see if I want to do something on my PhD I got to go home because it's not here. I've made that decision quite deliberately, 'cause I see that as my personal, that's my personal life.

This same participant also shared the reality of her work-study daily life, further explaining that:

OK, I'll go home and I'll have my walk, and, you know, have my tea and what have you. But then, it's ... I can't really read [lack of concentration from mental tiredness] ... So, I can do something that's a fairly manual task. Just doing corrections and I'm typing them in, or whatever, then that's fine, I can do that kind of stuff, and go through it. But otherwise, what I do is, I go to bed at say 10, and get up at 4. And then, I'll put in 2 and a half hours, or whatever, on reading and stuff before I get ready to come to work. So, that has altered my patterns there, directly as a result of this work, this job, because its ... full-on.

One master's of literature student who was not working but did not have work-space allocated at his/her university, had difficulty working at home. He/she stated that if her AEU or department had set aside space, his/her study path would have been considerably easier.

Even though establishing work schedules provided an 'order' to work-study life, participants' attitudes to their individual study programs and approaching fieldwork caused them to take steps to psychologically prepare themselves, by adopting positive approaches to both their studies and their fieldwork. Attitudinal approaches to engagement in both study programs and fieldwork ranged from being reasonably *confident* to *being scared of it*. It was generally believed that one should *recognize ones strengths and weaknesses*, benefiting from the one while improving the other.

Information From Books - The Literature Review

All participants anticipated that they would receive supervisory assistance by way of reading lists and guided 'reading' approaches to their respective literature reviews. Supervised reading assistance came for some, but not for others. Ease of access to information varied according to research topic and enrolment status.

Those participants who were provided with reading lists found it easier to start their information acquisition path. One master's student provided examples of the valuable guidance given by his/her supervisor:

So you know he actually ... could say off the top of his head which kinds of books I need to be reading, what kinds of articles I needed to be reading ... If there's anything new coming into the system ... these sorts of things. You know, "you really need to read this, and look at this and consider this". So that was ... it really helps ... somebody's [who has] got that particular field of expertise.

The masters by research student who was being nurtured received assistance with reading from his/her formalized mentor, making a considerable difference to the smoothness of his/her path. He/she explained the mentor's involvement:

... to talk about it and to find out how we're going. So for example like the literature review I had it written up and so I wrote it up and said 'well what do you think' you know. 'Oh yeah, OK then' you know maybe make these comments and then change it.

Those who did not receive either reading lists drew on their prior research experience, personal background knowledge, and also, their networks (both personal and professional) to assist them in their quests for information. Moreover, those who had not yet developed *the capacity to determine what's relevant and what's not relevant* asserted they needed supervisory assistance in guided reading at this stage of their paths. One student explained the ramifications of lack of assistance, *you can spend so much time, wasted time, going round and round in circles.*

One young master's of literature student was particularly disadvantaged in his/her information collection process through lack of supervisory guidance in both discerning where to locate information as well as

guided reading of information. Time to degree for this student was subsequently affected. The student, however, reasoned that *he is a shy man and doesn't know how to treat me.*

Most on-campus students were satisfied with their respective libraries. In contrast, one participant had to resort to extensive use of inter-library loans and other information sources, resulting in time-delays and additional costing for studies. He/she explained the situation *I've had to send inter-library loans, and I've gotten some from over in America, sent to inter-library loans. So, I just go to the CD-ROM.*

External students either bought more books or accessed the internet. One external master's student who was utilizing the internet for his/her literature review (because there was little Australian information available), attested that the fact that his/her university's *server is notoriously slow* affected the time taken to complete his/her literature review. This participant outlined the kinds of difficulties he/she faced:

OK, it's a freebie, I'm allowed up to six hours a week, and that's stupid, I mean, some weekends I'm on it longer than six hours so, I'm going to get a bill sooner or later. Because, once you go ... Once you go outside that particular server and you have to go outside the server, you use that as your basis and you go off different directions. Now I'm essentially getting information from England, I'm getting information from America ... so that ... I'm out of the server so, all the time, out of the server, I'm going to get a phone bill for that.

Participants engaged in local Indigenous community research found it necessary to make several trips to the AIATSIS facility in Canberra as well as the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Costs of studies were consequently increased. Underlying reasons for intermittent trips rested in the fact that certain issues raised in interviews required further reference.

Moreover, since participants did not wish to *poke around in other people's business*, *permission* to access specific information held by AIATSIS was only contemplated when the need arose. Two participants found that although a considerable amount of information existed on the communities they were researching, it was not directly related to their respective research endeavours. A similar situation occurred in relation to material in local archives.

Inasmuch as little Australian Indigenous authored information was available, participants searched in a variety of places for 'appropriate reference groups' for their research endeavours. Reasons and criteria for choice in reference groups were many and varied.

Importantly, some participants raised the issue of 'Indigenous political correctness in research' and its relationship to the selection of appropriate reference groups within the framework of Indigenous scholars' research. In other words, some scholars felt that Indigenous scholars should use only Indigenous sources, be they national or international.

Others, however, did not share this view, emphasizing that the quality of the information was more important than the cultural background of the author. As noted in Chapter One, the issue has both national and international dimensions. One PhD student summarized the prevailing conceptual situation:

And, I think, at times too, there is an idea that often - or, a viewpoint that emerges - where it's assumed that if you're using anything other than an Indigenous writer or, theorist or, philosopher then there is ... that there is something basically, fundamentally, wrong with what you're doing.

He/she explained the reasoning behind his/her perception that such an approach was counterproductive:

I think we have to be careful with that because we are living in a world now where we're living through new forms of colonisation [for example, the mind] and, we have to be wary of that and there's that intellectual and sociological [implications] ...

This participant believed that one should look to a particular experience, for example racism and/or oppression, rather than focusing on ethnic origin. Reasons given for this strategy were explained as follows:

I'm not going to walk away from that because I think we need all the weaponry that we can get in terms of bringing ourselves into a place where we are more able to have equitable access and participation.

Some educators utilized available Australian non-Indigenous materials. The reasoning underpinning the 'Australian approach' was grounded in commonality in experience and subsequent application to the research task *in hand*. One PhD student explained his/her position:

I would rather go for the Australian experience, rather than what ... is called the Indigenous experience, because I don't know that ... I know that there is a commonality but, I don't know that ... that you can just apply it.

But, one master's by research student used *Negroes* as a reference group because *they have done a lot on literacy*. Another participant used *Afro-American literature* as a source because of their experiences of, and theoretical developments in, the *construction of racism*.

In contrast, some participants stated that other Indigenous Peoples were the most appropriate reference group. Two, however, attested otherwise inasmuch as other Indigenous Groups' particular historical, socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances were totally different to

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and such Groups thus had a *different experience of Colonization*.

One of the students who had used his/her professional national and international networks to find information *was amazed* when non-Indigenous researchers in his/her field sent a large amount of 'confidential' pools of data to him/her. This data had been collected by them during fieldwork expeditions but, had not used for culturally sensitive reasons. These researchers had *coded [the sensitive material] in foreign languages* for confidentiality reasons. This participant was overwhelmed by the moral and political responsibility involved now that he/she had become the keeper of these confidential pools of data.

Regardless of reasons and criteria for reference groups, participants' primary concern revolved around *the credibility of where the literature comes from, who's writing it, what is the agenda?* One master's student emphasized that the value of the literature review rested *in knowing what's there [available 'reputable' information] and knowing what's not there so you know what to look for* as part of the research task.

Organizing Entry to the Field

Although participants were engaged in a variety of modes of gathering information/doing fieldwork two main preparatory tasks were undertaken prior to engagement in the process. Preparatory tasks consisted of acquiring appropriate and adequate personal background knowledge of the topic, and site selection (both physical and abstract boundaries) including information about the site.

Personal Knowledge of the Topic

Participants' personal background knowledge of their individual topics was considered of primary importance in setting the context for their research. Degree of pre-program preparation affected time-on-task at this stage of their individual paths. Significantly, the degree of prior preparation appeared to be related to individual inner-driven intense personal commitment to a topic and/or challenging research question, rather than to any other underlying researcher patterns such as age, and/or academic experience, and/or previous research experience.

Those who had decided upon their topics prior to entering their programs were able to quickly embark on their information collection tasks. Their preparation had consisted of laying the contextual groundwork (through reading, establishing personal contacts at selected sites, and mental preparation), for their research. Those who had not previously laid the groundwork had to take the time to do so, thus spending more time-on-task.

A few participants went to extraordinary lengths to ensure they were familiar with their research contexts. For example, one PhD student who had previously journeyed overseas decided to locate his/her research in a particular country there, and thus incorporated *a one year intensive language program* within his/her study schedule.

Another unusual example involved another PhD who was using documentary analysis for his/her research. This participant decided that a period of study overseas would better assist in providing *a balanced view* of his/her research focus. The reasoning was premised on the notion that *you need to have a reasonable understanding of both sides of the coin.*

The participant applied for and received an overseas scholarship to study the context first-hand and, also, to upgrade professional development skills in ethnography and oral history, his/her studies were consequently deferred. Two important outcomes resulted from the sidetrack.

The participant believed that not only was the quality of the research improved but, his/her experiences in 'other areas' were broadened and, therefore, invaluable to his/her development as a researcher. The category 'other areas' included other/differing experiences of racism and oppression in a variety of socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances.

Site Selection and Preparation

Participants were aware that considerable time and care needed to be taken to prepare for entry to the information collection process. Following *Indigenous protocols* was considered fundamental to this procedure. Preparatory activity encompassed site selection, establishing relationships with appropriate contacts at proposed sites, exploring the socio-cultural and socio-political situated context of sites, and generally attending to logistical issues including travel costs, relevant equipment, and timing of visitations.

One participant's comments accurately reflected the groups' collective reasoning about the importance of careful preparation, *just because I'm Aboriginal it doesn't mean to say entree immediately into community ... it doesn't work like that.* One experienced researcher maintained that engagement in a national project required *approximately two months* preparation.

Site choice was perceived as being *very important* inasmuch as it would affect the degree of access to information and, therefore, the quality of information received. Lack of a comprehensive set of academic guidelines encompassing *Indigenous community expectations* and reciprocal *Indigenous researcher* responsibilities posed problems for many in this group of students. Consequently, participants individually constructed a set of protocols by drawing on their learned cultural traditions, prior experience, communicating with knowledgeable Indigenous persons, and reading literature on ethics and protocols.

Common patterns in protocols encompassed hierarchical communication procedures through first contacting local Elders and Community Councils, compliance with Indigenous introduction protocols, adherence to Indigenous *talking* and *asking* protocols, respecting local customs, conforming with Indigenous giving and receiving protocols, respecting local knowledge traditions and heritage, and co-operatively establishing procedures for intellectual property rights.

Where possible participants selected sites close to their home base for ease of access. Others, however, found it necessary to travel to particular relevant information-rich areas which added to the cost of their research endeavours. Three others relocated to areas for ease of access, one interrupting his/her career by changing jobs to do so. For one PhD student, site choice was affected by the amount of available published information relating to his/her research task. That is, site choice corresponded to the place offering the greatest amount of published information.

Master's students mainly stayed close to home-base while a proportionately greater number of PhD students were involved in a broader geographic spread of sites. One participant who was conducting a national level research endeavour stated that site selection

at this level had definite political undertones. He/she provided an illustrative example:

So, as the author of this document I have to choose which area to go to do, and some people say 'oh you know you didn't come here, you missed us out, we're not good enough'. ... this is before I get down to the actual field research of speaking with people, I need to be aware [of the politics].

Whereas some participants were assisted by their supervisors in this preparatory process, others were not. Those with prior research experience fared better on this stage of their paths than others without such experience. Notwithstanding, those with networks drew on this resource to assist them with finding suitable sites, establishing contacts at sites, and for discussion and general brainstorming. One PhD student secured a position on a pertinent national committee as a means of increasing his/her professional network at this stage of his/her path.

Procedures for establishing relationships with contacts varied depending on the scale of geographic boundaries. Those involved in research across several sites in different geographic areas initiated contact via the telephone, ensuring that Indigenous protocols were followed during this process. That is, procedural conformity to hierarchical communication processes, receiving permission to research from Elders and local community councils, and then contacting relevant organizations and persons. Those involved in local community research generally initiated contact through visitations, taking care to follow Indigenous protocols.

The intricacies of *knowing what to look for* in pre-field preparation were succinctly explained by one participant within the context of fundamental issues underpinning intercultural communication between researchers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) involved in joint projects. His/her explanation of 'pre-field preparation procedures' delivered to

non-Indigenous joint research team colleagues is reproduced below. The monologue included the practical socio-cultural and socio-political realities of establishing contacts within site boundaries, viz:

So, all this working out ... the Aboriginal protocols or, where I would go, and who I would see. I told the people here that I had to be aware of local politics at any place that I go to. You know, this family might be running the Aboriginal medical service therefore, these three families don't go there. I mean, it's like that in ----. You know, it's just a fact of life.

This participant related that his/her colleagues were surprised at the revelation, *and they were sort of amazed and I said "well, you shouldn't be amazed because that's how it is"*. This participant also emphasized the significance of local community politics and its relationship to the practical reality of collecting information. Particularly, when scheduling group meetings and interviews given that members of one group may not be 'in communication' with members of another local group. His/her monologue continued:

Some families in some towns dominate the Land Council, you know. And this sets up factions and I said "that's just par for the course". So, my first priority was establishing who to talk to, and I had to be aware of 'perhaps this person is a very good contact, but they may belong to this family who does not ... you know, who runs the medical service and, therefore, this other person is a good contact'. You know, does not speak ... so I had to find out all that.

Another PhD student, as a result of his/her field experiences, believed that specific training needed to be given in how to access the field rather than just presuming that they [students] were going to pick it up as they went along. He/she explained the circumstances within which he/she entered the field:

It was the idea that you went out with your notebook and your pair of sneakers and off you went and did your fieldwork. And even to the extent of location of field work. I mean you were on your own, there was not the amount of formality that

there should have been in assistance of postgraduates in selecting sites for their field work, setting up networks of contacts that would assist them during that very long period in the field.

Although the fieldwork *went well*, this participant was aware that *everything may not have gone well*. For this reason he/she attested that supervisors ought to screen sites or at least be more active in the process of site selection as well as the process of establishing contacts at sites.

In a similar vein two other PhD students stated that students needed to be aware that information collection *in remote sites affects all facets of study*. That is, inasmuch as remote sites do not have 'normal' telecommunication services, communication is correspondingly negatively affected. Examples given included difficulty in maintaining supervisory contact, networking, library facilities, and having ready access to any form of information.

Participants involved in joint research ventures, as alluded to earlier, faced a particular set of interactive working relationship issues. Examples provided encompassed joint decision-making about timing of entry to the field, collective decision-making in preparing interview questions, and procedures for conducting interviews. Tensions about any or all of these issues hindered pre-field preparation.

The importance of pre-field preparation was illustrated by one participant who was involved in culturally sensitive research. He/she found that within almost all communities contacted, *conflicting views about a social practice [that he/she was researching] existed*. The situation alerted the participant to the socio-cultural and socio-political issues that he/she would potentially face when in the field. And also, to

the fact that great diplomacy and *courage* together with the capacity to *endure hurt* would need to be developed as psychological safeguards.

Logistical issues consisted of checking tape recorders, purchasing batteries, and seeking/finding transcribing assistance and scheduling visitations. Those who were involved in research across several sites scheduled 'first' visitations at this stage of their paths. However, participants involved in local research scheduled introductory sessions for the purposes of establishing relationships at this time. Planning trips to distant libraries were also scheduled and arranged during this planning phase.

Importantly, participants who had not already begun daily record keeping, did so as part of the planning process. One PhD student explained the purpose, form, and practical benefits of keeping records as *a chronological expression* of me working through the program:

I keep a diary, I started it from day one and it contains not only my thoughts on a particular day about the program, but also the administrative contact that I've had with the university, the copies of the correspondence that go backwards and forwards between myself and ---- [the university], my supervisors, costs associated with the purchase of literature or whatever. And also, I suppose things that I haven't been able to achieve that I wanted to.

He/she also explained additional kinds of records that were regularly up-dated for ease of reference. Such as correspondence from the university, literature searches, thesis plans, and networking contacts. Whereas some found the record-keeping activity *enjoyable*, others regarded it merely as a necessary part of doing research.

Notwithstanding, having and/or developing the skills of organizing both time and record-keeping abilities were considered fundamental characteristics of researchers. Notably, many participants with prior

public service experience as well as educators had already developed these skills. One former B.A. honours student stated that these skills had been learned as part of undergraduate training.

THE INFORMATION COLLECTION PROCESS: BOOKS AND PEOPLE

The information collection process was either conducted in the field and/or through access to information in books, that is, documentary analysis. Both processual experiences were affected the availability of information (both books and people), as well as degree of supervisory guidance.

Information Collection: Books

The four participants involved in documentary analysis found their paths especially lonely since their learning world consisted of themselves and books. Both the degree and quality of supervisory guidance were fundamental factors in rate of student progress and acquisition of research skills in this type of research endeavour.

Whereas one PhD student received satisfactory supervisory assistance, the other three had different experiences. One master's student who had a mentor attested that the mentor played a significant role in the rate of progress on his/her path. Supervisory assistance mainly came toward the end of his/her path by way of guidance in presentation of the research findings.

One PhD and one master's student who were not receiving 'quality' supervisory guidance found their paths especially difficult. The fact that both had neither mentors nor networks, exacerbated their individual

situations. The PhD student drew on prior experience as a means of mapping his/her path.

The master's student became increasingly upset and *confused*. Visits to his/her supervisor left him/her *worried* and *nervous* and *lonely* because he/she *did not know what was expected*, nor did he/she have any idea of how to either *start* or *how to do the structure of the thesis*. He/she explained the emotional trauma resulting from the situation:

Yeah, and got no-one to talk to me about ... if I'm on the right track or if I'm biased or stuff like that ... I don't know how he [the supervisor] feels about my writing, whether I can explain to him what I'm doing.

This participant outlined the kind of guidance he/she believed would have greatly assisted his/her progress at this time:

Oh, someone who I could sit down casually and talk about bits and pieces, like the points of a chapter, we can go into it, you know just have a ... to get ideas, to find ideas, to make ... give myself ideas. Discuss something that I found out ... discuss the research techniques, sort of have a casual approach to it and, to feel like I can just go anytime and have a chat to the person. To feel comfortable about saying stuff to them... Yeah and got an open mind to other cultures, beliefs, ideas and yeah.

The master's student further explained how lack of supervisory guidance affected his/her rate of progress and emotional well-being:

Last year I was so excited about doing my thesis and stuff but, now that it's finally here I'm a bit scared and I don't really know where I'm going and I can't write anything. I'm not ... I can't sit down and I don't know how to write what I'm supposed to be writing and I just ... I sit and I just can't do it. I'm looking at my paper ...

For the latter two students, lack of supervisory assistance at this stage of their research paths significantly hindered their practical application

of learned research skills, acquisition of further research skills by way of learning how to structure a thesis, individual rate of progress, and importantly, affected their enjoyment of the process.

Information Collection: People

Fieldwork activity was conducted on five geographic levels encompassing local sites, and across several sites including regional, national and international locations, as previously noted. Regardless of field location common experiential processual phases encompassed an information collection phase, an information processing phase, and an information analysis phase. The three phases are inter-related but they are treated separately here for ease of understanding.

It needs to be noted that at the time of interviewing, four of the fifteen participants involved in fieldwork had entered the field. Most had completed their literature reviews prior to entry, but a few had not. Moreover, one master's by research student had already conducted a Pilot Study but others had not planned to do so.

Information Collection Phase

The information collection phase of the research process consisted of establishing a responsive fieldwork climate, finding project participants, conducting interviews, and for some, participant observation activity. Attention to both Indigenous and academic researcher protocols and ethics underpinned participants' field behaviour.

Fieldwork Climate

Having previously prepared the groundwork for entry to the information collection process, most participants found settling in to the site much easier. Even though pre-field relationships had been established, the practical reality of establishing face-to-face on-site relationships was a different matter. All participants, including experienced researchers, entered the field with a degree of trepidation.

Participants asserted that a primary task constituted ensuring that pertinent project participants understood their intention of collaborative research and, also, that agreements were reached about ownership of knowledge arrangements. In other words, participants took steps to ensure that their project participants understood that they were *not just coming and taking and going*.

Notwithstanding, the phenomenon of an Indigenous researcher (as a principal researcher), doing research in an Indigenous community was a new experience for many participants as well as the Indigenous communities involved in their research activities. One participant concisely summed up the situation, *they [the community people] don't know what to do with us*.

The issue relates to social space and social place and corresponding compliance with Indigenous protocols and conventions for behavioural practice. Supervisors' lack of knowledge of Indigenous customs and protocols meant that participants had to devise their own strategies at this stage of their paths. Participants thus drew on learned cultural practices and/or Indigenous mentors and networks to devise strategies to guide their behaviour within this 'new' situation.

One master's student described his/her experiences of the interaction between self as Indigenous researcher and local Indigenous communities:

And, when they see a black person coming into their communities and they're researching in there, I mean, it's a whole new world for them. They are looking at us, we get a little bit more I think respect [than non-Indigenous researchers] ... I think we're taken on face value initially, until we prove ourselves either good or bad in terms of our research.

Other participants disclosed that they had experienced similar circumstances. Moreover, they revealed that they had on occasion received *negative flow-on* arising from former performances of non-Indigenous researchers in their disciplinary field. In a similar situation, one participant who was involved in a joint research project with non-Indigenous researchers disclosed that he/she received criticism and complaints about his/her colleagues' disrespectful behaviour from a local community.

Participants attested that the reality of such circumstances meant increased isolation for them, *you are isolated because our people generally speaking are very, very suspicious of research as a product of history*. One master's student explained the consequent psychological effects:

That again is another part of the isolation factor because even your community is looking at you differently. And that's another issue that we seem to be always confronting when we go out into the field. Oh, well I do.

For the above-cited reasons, participants were careful of the way in which they established on-site relationships. One masters student who was involved in a single case study, visited his/her site five times before embarking on the information collection process *just to visit*

them, socially at first, before I started the research. He/she added that during these visits the process of the research was also explained, *and then talking them through about the things I might be doing.*

One other master's student did likewise. In contrast, however, his/her procedure consisted of waiting until being invited to explain:

I could not go up to an old lady and say "I want you to tell me about your history". I really 'ad to approach it in a way that I sat down and had a cup of tea and talked generally with them for a length of time. Possibly three/four initial meetings with them, before they asked me what I was doing. Before they even allowed me to do what I was doing.

Significantly, it was at this stage of their paths that a few participants arranged/established local Cultural Reference Groups. Collaborative action with these Reference Groups formed the basis of a twofold information collection strategy. First, Cultural Reference Groups assessed the cultural reliability of any information gathered. Second, these Reference Groups acted as the 'approving authority' for information subsequently documented for public dissemination.

Some participants' stated that they adopted a *distanced* researcher stance coupled with adherence to Indigenous protocols as an underpinning principle of their 'professional' researcher conduct while in the field. While those involved in 'participant observation' attested they were careful *not to be intrusive* but, rather, part of the scene. Most participants stated that they enjoyed a *receptive* fieldwork climate.

Notwithstanding, two other participants stated that tense *local community dynamics* (local *Indigenous politics* and local *inter-family rivalry*), made their information collection process harder. While one master's student who was conducting research at two community sites, attested that one was very helpful while the other was less so. This

participant was of the opinion that the nature of his/her employment circumstances was the underlying cause behind the one community's less helpful interpersonal interaction.

Furthermore, the one participant who advertized his/her *culturally sensitive* research project via Indigenous Community Meetings attested that he/she often faced *hostile and angry* individuals.

Information Collection Procedures

Participants mainly invited/selected their project participants by random sampling. Sampling configurations were devised in response to numbers of potential project participants available. In most cases, small numbers of potential participants limited researchers to random sampling techniques.

One master's student crystallized the reality *I mean there's a limit of groups so you just get what you get, and that's sort of it*. 'Limiting' examples included small numbers of older persons in local Indigenous communities, small numbers of specific students in educational situations, and small numbers of specific groups of persons in health related research. In contrast, one PhD student who was not limited by small numbers of potential participants utilized purposeful sampling and case studies so that *a more representative view* of her research focus could be analyzed.

Steps to eliminate bias concerning information collected included interviewing one or more persons together to clarify issues, having a non-Indigenous person interview a group of non-Indigenous students, and consulting with Cultural Reference Groups.

Interviewing Strategies

While most participants gathered information through interviews (both individual and group), four students had also been involved in participant observation, and one in action research. Most participants used semi-structured interviews but a few used unstructured and one used structured interviews.

Structured and semi-structured interviews were utilized in situations where specific information was being sought while unstructured interviews were mainly used in historically-based local community research. Participants implied that they received supervisory assistance in both organizing and structuring interview procedures.

Participants involved in semi-structured interviews stated they devised 'interview guidelines' to facilitate them. One master's student explained his/her 'methods approach', *so basically what I did was develop a bit of a scenario from the literature...the pro forma* for a set of questions that were then 'tested' within a Pilot Study. He/she further explained the procedure, *then I wrote down information, ticked off areas that were covered, areas that weren't covered, I then asked questions.*

One other master's student commented that he/she used unstructured interviews so that he/she could see *the big picture* adding that *I see the research as leading me instead of me leading the research.* This same participant attested that case studies were not appropriate for culture and heritage research because the approach *shifted the focus from the community to individuals* within the community.

In contrast, the graduate diploma student who was seeking to learn interview skills (via participation as an interviewer within the framework of a large-scale project) was required to use structured questions. He/she believed that the structured *questions were loaded*, thus serving the interests of bureaucracy rather than the interviewees. As previously mentioned, this student was mortified over his/her part in the project and less concerned with the fact that valuable research skills had been learned.

The participant who conducted interviews in a foreign language attested that he/she did not experience any particular difficulties. The other participant who was upgrading research skills overseas attested that he/she used hand signs and other non-verbal means of communication to gain information when in a foreign community.

The Interviewing Process

Flexibility in interview scheduling was considered a fundamental aspect of collecting information. One PhD explained his/her reasoning:

I always try to be very flexible. I always make sure I don't try and put too many interviews too close together because you know sometimes you get somebody going and ... you don't want to stop them because the information you're getting is really important.

One master's student involved in local community research substantiated the need for such flexibility stating that he/she often spent *as long as two and three hours and you don't want to leave*. Another important reason for flexibility in scheduling interviews was noted as arising from the fact that when conducting group interviews and/or meetings *somebody will want to talk to you after it - on their own - they*

won't want to say it in front of the group, but they'll come [on their own].

Participants attested they were mindful of complying with both Indigenous Cultural as well as university ethical/confidentiality requirements. At the outset of the interviewing process participants utilized consent forms and, also, informed interviewees that withdrawal at any time was an option. One PhD student explained her opening procedure:

And I start of by saying if there's anything they don't wish to answer then feel free to say just, 'can we go on with the next question'. And I suppose - I suppose because people know that I'm not doing it, it's confidential, and people know that I'm not doing it - gratuitously or, what's that word, voyeuristically. People have been really open and really co-operative.

Participants attested they also obtained interviewees' permission before taping interviews. They discovered that time spent explaining the reason for taping set the scene for a smooth process. One PhD student explained his/her procedure:

I've always talked to people about taping beforehand, I've always told them what I'm going to do with the tapes and that they will be destroyed at the end of, you know, whatever, and I have always told them that if they don't wish the tapes to go on - that the tapes are there purely and simply for my memory, my recall, so that I don't get their messages wrong.

This participant added that *on a couple of occasions I have been asked to turn the tape off, and I've always done that.* In these instances, the request had arisen because of discussion of particularly sensitive topics and/or for confidentiality reasons.

One master's student stated that it was at this beginning point in the research process that one really discovered the inter-relationship

between developmental *effort* and quality of information received. He/she commented that *how much effort I put into developing that rapport dictates how much information I will eventually get from the research.*

One fundamental *active listening* consideration within the framework of interviews was delineated as allocating sufficient time and space for interviewees to tell their story, *the need to sit back and not to allow time to be the controller of the situation.* The issue relates to respect for both people's time and their stories, this same participant commented on the ramifications of this form of disrespect, *if there's a level of disrespect shown in not accepting that, then you're wiped.* She added that she had learned the hard way, the problem arising from institutional time constraints:

Trying to push ahead with my project and finding that these old people were saying to me "hey stop girl, go back, sit down and look in the mirror".

Another fundamental *active listening* consideration concerned *level of silence* when *interviewing community people.* One participant commented that *respecting and obeying that silence is an important factor in developing good rapport with the interviewee.*

The issue pertains to 'silence' as a communication mechanism, a common practice in the various Australian Indigenous communities. Explaining this communication practice to outsiders/non-Indigenous persons, is a matter for personal discretion and so will not be further explained here. However, the issue is one which requires future discussion by Indigenous scholars.

Younger women disclosed that they were more comfortable in research situations with women than men. While one older PhD student attested

that Indigenous protocols required men and women be interviewed in separate groupings unless, and until, specific situations dictated otherwise.

The one master's student who was *given a structure* discovered the practical reality of following it was difficult, particularly in the area of interview questions. This master's student explained his/her experiences and the coping strategy devised in response:

What I found helped extremely well for me, in terms of research, was that I needed to not structure questions. I needed not to make those questions directive questions, at community level.

Two reasons were given for this change in tactical approach. One reason related to the fact that the participant recognized that space needed to be provided for interviewees to *tell their own story* in their own way even if they are wandering off into areas that aren't necessarily of value to the research.

Secondly, this same participant discovered that *directive* questions affected her community status and reputation. For instance, conformity with the conventional Western interview practice of positioning self as 'not a knower of anything' for the purposes of 'having an audio-taped account' was considered *ridiculous* by community women. She further explained that:

... and there have been many cases where I've been in to talk to women, and especially about the social structures and stuff like that within communities, where they've said to me "hey come on ----, you know, how dare you ask me that question?"

Although this student explained that she had stated that 'for the purposes of record-keeping certain information needs to be recorded' these community persons found it strange that a person who already

knows/has knowledge would be asking such questions. In other words, situating self as 'not a knower' leaves interviewees with the impression that 'you as learner have not learned previously taught important cultural lessons'.

As a result this student was placed in a situation where she ran the risk of being classed as 'not worthy of further cultural learning'. The student concluded that certain Western forms of interviewing (structured/directive questions) are inappropriate for Indigenous researchers researching at the local Indigenous community in particular situations. That is, *the complexity of communication between an Aboriginal person and Aboriginal interviewees* does not readily fit conventional Western research communication patterns.

In a differing vein one PhD student *clashed* with his/her supervisor over the sequential flow of processual arrangements and scheduling of interviews during engagement in 'participant observation' activity. This participant believed that the better way to proceed was 'participant observation' while writing the literature review and, then conducting interviews within the community.

The supervisor apparently believed that the three activities ought to be conducted simultaneously. Unresolved tensions over this and other issues were reported as ongoing, resulting in a change in universities. It needs to be noted that both parties were emotionally concerned and saddened over this circumstance.

Another PhD student who was involved in local community research discovered that when attempting to discuss race relations with non-Indigenous persons *they close up ... it's like they pretend that Aboriginal people don't exist, it's that nihilism*. This participant was *hopeful* of finding non-Indigenous people who *will be more open*.

Although interviewing was considered *a basic [research] tool*, it was also recognized as a *complex communication* interaction. The need to both learn and practise interviewing skills was considered a fundamental aspect of the research process. It was generally believed that to be a good interviewer one needed to develop listening skills, the capacity to reflect on the material as it was being given, attune to the interviewee, understand the meaning of silence when interviewing Indigenous persons, and have a good memory.

Information Processing Phase

The information processing phase consisted of transcribing interviews and vetting transcripts with interviewees and where applicable, with Cultural Reference Groups. Participants implied that minimal supervisory assistance was necessary and/or received at this stage of their paths.

Participants implied that they processed information as soon as they received it. Some employed transcribers but others transcribed the information themselves by various means. Once information had been transcribed participants vetted the contents with interviewees prior to analysis.

Transcribing was noted as being a long laborious process, *it is a little bit annoying ... it's time-consuming if you've got to do it yourself ... because you're not quick enough [on the computer]*. One master's and one PhD student transcribed information by hand. Another PhD student used a transcribing machine to do the transcription task. While one master's student co-opted a family member as a transcriber, paying her a fee for the assistance. Some participants commented that funding

assistance for transcribing would have made a considerable difference to their research time-frames and, also, fieldwork costs.

Procedures for vetting information were remarkably similar, providing evidence of the notion that the various Indigenous protocols share significantly similar features. Rather than sending printed transcripts for interviewees to vet, participants stated they personally sat with interviewees and scrutinized transcripts. One PhD explained his/her procedure and the reasoning behind it:

I strongly believe that the relationship is the key to getting the information that you really want. Well not the information that you want, but that you are really after. And that is why it's absolutely critical to be able to sit there and to be going through it ... and you can pick up where somebody's a bit - you'll see it, you'll see it in the face ... if somebody's not really happy or, they don't really get something, which gives you that, you know, you can then work on that within the group sort of thing.

Participants cautioned against relying on interviewees to vet information through reading transcripts on their own, *if you just send something back or, just asked that group to go over there and read it, you tend to get back "Oh, yes, that's alright, yep"*. In other words, participants asserted that satisfactory vetting can only be guaranteed in face-to-face situations. One PhD student crystallized the issue and the ramifications of not personally vetting information with interviewees:

And because often people don't have those sort of reading skills anyway to go off and read it, they'll play the old game of "well what do you think she really wants to know?". "Is this what she wants us to say, yeah, alright, she's a nice lady we'll agree with her", you know. But, if you're sitting there and sort of, you know, you get to be able to read people's faces and say "something not quite right there, eh?" And just tease it out.

Those involved in local Indigenous community research also noted that it was during the vetting phase that *additional recall* often transpired, adding to both the richness and amount of data collected.

Community Interaction

Participants stated they were mindful of fulfilling Indigenous Giving and Receiving protocols during this, and all other, phases of their research engagement. This activity constituted an Obligation additional to that of Community 'Responsibilities and Obligations', previously mentioned in Chapter Four.

In this case the protocols mainly constituted passing information, discussion of topical issues, and discussion of aspect of research such as cultural property issues, ethics in research, and the role and function of various research roles such as research assistants, assistant researchers, and principal researchers. Notably, a few participants assumed the role of 'information storage holder', at the requests of local communities.

Importantly, it was during this phase of their research paths that some participants became aware of a need for local Indigenous community education about research in general and research practices in particular. This awareness had arisen from 'various incidents' witnessed⁴¹ in local Indigenous communities as well as within the framework of general discussions about research.

Suggested instructional areas were noted as the meaning and purpose of research; the generalized benefits of research; the phases in the research

⁴¹ In the interests of confidentiality, these occurrences are not noted in this text.

process; the role and function of researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous; and practical assistance in constructing guidelines containing criteria for both selecting and assessing individual researchers. One PhD firmly believed that community education about research was one way, among others, that would contribute to *building community capacity to grow ... to make them strong* and also, to build community *social capital*.

Information Analysis Phase

The information analysis phase consisted of categorizing and then analyzing the collected information. Simultaneously, participants attested they were preparing their minds in order to present the information in a culturally integral way within an acceptable format in compliance with disciplinary academic conventions. The nature and degree of supervisory assistance varied among participants.

Participants implied that information analysis was difficult in that it was an intricate process requiring focused attention to detail and relevance, to ensure they were answering their research focus questions. Analysis involved first coding/grouping the data by categories or themes and then presenting it in an orderly format to convey the message of the research findings. One master's by research student explained the way in which he/she categorized collected information:

...all the information was transcribed and then from that all the key issues were underlined, then it was all grouped and tagged and that's the stage that was sort of like [coding] ... and now its just - I've started to pull it out into groups. I've got groups that fit into educational, to cultural, to ... [whatever].

In compliance with ethical procedures, participants stated that extraneous information was set aside, and would either be returned to relevant persons and communities, or destroyed. In one instance one master's by research student complied with a community request to store/be the keeper of the information. Further details of analytical procedures are taken up in Chapter Six under the heading, Writing Knowledge.

The nature and degree of supervisory interaction was considered of utmost importance at this stage of participants' paths. Adequate discussion time together with shared perceptions about the nature of the research task were deemed fundamental. Shared perceptions about the *meaning and purpose of research* and therefore, what constituted *science*, in the broad sense, was also considered important at this stage of their paths.

Some participants who received satisfactory discussion time stated that they experienced difficulty in intercultural communication particularly in perceptions about the meaning contained in segments of data. As previously noted in Chapter Four, subsequent discussion and explanation not only took time but, required a great deal of patience and did not always result in understanding one another's points of view.

The issue relates to perceptions about 'cause and effect' issues as part of analysis and interpretation of a social and/or historical event. For example, the interplay of forces such as racism, marginalization, spirituality, and how they affect people's lives and subsequent reactive strategies people adopted to cope with a situation. Further, spiritual persons do not separate church and state, nor do they analyse situations according to cause and effect but, rather, the spiritual cause behind the physical cause behind the physical effect.

Another PhD student was experiencing tensions with his/her supervisors over the *meaning and purpose of research* and therefore, what constituted *science*, and consequently, what constituted *evidence*. As previously noted, this student changed universities over this situation and, also, other unresolved differences. The few participants, both master's and PhD's, who did not receive adequate discussion time were left on their own to independently wend their own way through their data.

One PhD handled the dilemma by having an Aboriginal academic incorporated into his/her supervisory formula. The participant attested that resultant discussion time clarified his/her approach and thinking. In particular, discussion centred on *the meaning of the concept* being used, and to subsequent reflection on the question of *why it is [was] being used?* And, also, this participant required to think about intended use of proposed concepts through answering the question, *how is it actually going to support the study in terms of integrating a model into your framework?*

In a differing vein, two unforeseen occurrences worthy of mention related to 'categorization of knowledge' and 'differing opinions about a social practice'. In both instances, the participants believed that if Indigenous supervisors, mentors, and/or Elders were guiding the research, they would have benefited from critical Indigenous cultural guidance. They both attested that their paths would have been easier as a result.

In one instance, a master's student who was engaged in comparative research incorporating two local Indigenous communities discovered that certain information was classified as secret in one place but not in the other. His/her dilemma thus related to deciding on what information could thus be used in the comparative research endeavour.

In the other instance, a PhD student stated that whereas local community professionals asserted a 'social practice' existed, the broader Community asserted otherwise. Moreover, in cases where the broader local Community asserted that the 'social practice' did exist, they attributed its historical background to causes (for instance, the coming of the white man), other than that found in the literature or other sources of information. This participant's dilemma revolved around how to firstly gain access to interviewees and subsequently document *truth in research*.

Indigenous Knowledge Experts

In their efforts to tell a true story, participants looked to Indigenous Elders as knowledge experts. The search for Indigenous knowledge experts raised the issue of who is, and who is not, an Elder. Those participants involved in local Indigenous community research implied that they followed Community determinations.

Those involved in other non-community based research ventures followed other criteria for determining Indigenous knowledge expertise. Specifically, they followed their own cultural groups' criteria for determining Elders, as well as looking to Indigenous persons' possessing expertise in particular knowledge areas.

For example, one master's student cautioned that *age by itself does not define an Elder*. He/she added that *my Elders are people of spirituality ...I look to see who I respect in education, both male and female, but only in spirituality in school*. A few other participants reflected this same view. The comments imply that in certain sectors of contemporary Australian society, participants perceive that Elders ought

to possess the qualities of spiritual knowledge grounded in practical cultural application coupled with expertise in a 'professional' field.

Leaving the Field

Most participants spent twelve months in the field while a few stayed for eighteen months. Leaving the field protocols differed depending on fieldwork site. Significantly, Indigenous communities require conformity with formal leaving protocols, but universities do not have a similar formal protocol. However, universities do have an unwritten expectation that fieldwork departure follow conventional Western etiquette.

Participants implied that fieldwork ventures needed to culminate in fulfilment of Indigenous 'leaving' protocols. In other words, leaving the field' entailed *leaving something for the Community*. Basically, *the something*, constituted community service while in the field (activities performed as part of giving and receiving), as well as the eventual documented research findings in the form of a thesis/dissertation.

Discovering/knowing that Indigenous leaving protocols do exist and require fulfilment, provides an example of the sort of cultural information that participants had to either already know, or discover for themselves. Regardless of the location of field sites, participants implied that they complied with the obligatory protocols in various appropriate ways.

For those participants who were engaged in fieldwork at their home community sites, ongoing interaction followed their normal channels. Those who were involved in 'other' sites including overseas locations,

attested they maintained intermittent but continuing contact with some of their project participants after they had left the field.

Participants stated that supervisory contact was irregular at this stage of their paths, being mainly based on need, as previously noted in Chapter Four. Those with established networks implied that a greater amount of time was spent in interactive discussion with them.

Despite unforeseen fieldwork happenings, fieldwork pressures, supervisory cultural communication and 'other' difficulties, as well as pressures from busy work schedules, participants stated that they enjoyed learning the process of doing research. Moreover, they attested that they especially enjoyed the interaction with Indigenous communities and/or individuals.

Having presented participants' accounts of their experiences in learning the research process, I now summarise the chapter findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, participants have provided accounts of their experiences in both preparation for, and engagement in, the research process. Commitment to Indigenous identity construction/knowledge production framed on Indigenous *ways of doing things* formed the basis of participants' approach. Innovative thought by way of devising culturally appropriate initiatives and strategies emerged as a primary feature of participants' *modus operandi*.

Categories used to organize the information were thesis/ project topic selection, the information collection process; preparation, and the information collection process: books and people.

The chapter findings constitute information that can now be added to the developing picture of the social world of Indigenous postgraduates learning research. In particular, the picture can now incorporate information concerning the way in which they put their research skills into practice through the data collection process. Insights into the forms of knowledge they were producing can also be added to the developing descriptive picture.

I now turn to Chapter Six where I explore participants' views on writing knowledge, learning environment, university methods of monitoring progress and thesis examination procedures, and their perceptions about the learning outcomes of their program engagement.