An Investigation into the Support Provided to Indigenous Postgraduate Students in Australia

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Education degree at the University of New England, October 2008.

I certify that I am the sole author and that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degrees.
I certify that to the best of my knowledge that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people who helped this thesis come to life. First of all, to the 55 Indigenous postgraduate students who participated in the research, thank you for providing me with such valuable information and for sharing your stories. I pray that I have done justice to your words. To the Indigenous Support Unit staff members who helped in recruiting these participants, your assistance is very much appreciated.

The warmest thanks go to my two supervisors – Professor Anne-Katrin Eckermann and Dr Jan Connelly. Professor Eckermann continued to supervise me after she retired - for this I feel honoured and extremely privileged. She shared her wisdom, demonstrated patience and offered guidance from start to finish. Dr Connelly came on board around the half-way point and has enriched this research by offering ongoing support. Thank you both for believing in the importance of this research.

To Dr Jonathan Makuwira who wrote 'Michelle I dare you to do a Doctorate' during my final submission for my Masters Degree, what a challenge you delivered. Thank you for being a wonderful sounding board and support mechanism throughout my Doctorate.

A big thank you also goes to Dr Rhonda Coopes who provided me with ongoing academic advice and encouragement. Rhonda, I was fortunate to have you in my corner. Thank you for the substantial amount of time you made available to me, I truly appreciate it.

Thank you also to the staff at the University of New England. I would particularly like to thank Thea Harris, Sue Whale, Dr Inga Brasche and Dr Neil Harrison for providing me with support through different stages of this learning journey.

Last of all I would also like to thank my wonderful family. To my father Ralph Trudgett who passed away in 2002, I hope I have done our Wiradjuri ancestors proud. To Ness,

thank you for ensuring that ‘cabin fever’ didn’t set in and for making all those cups of tea. To my beautiful sister Sam, thank you for your contagious laugh and smile. You always know how to brighten my day. Finally, the world’s biggest thank you goes to my mother, Dr Sandra Trudgett, who has supported me in more ways than I could ever describe. Her own academic and life achievements have provided me with the best role model I could possibly have asked for. Mum, this one is for you!

ABSTRACT

Postgraduate participation and completion rates for Indigenous Australians are considerably lower than those of non-Indigenous people in Australia. This inquiry examines the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students. Fifty-five Indigenous postgraduate students located throughout Australia participated in this research. A qualitative study using the interpretivist paradigm was conducted – enabling an exploration of the support mechanisms that Indigenous postgraduate students currently have, or desire but do not have. The support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students was shown to be inadequate. Indigenous Support Units have played a key role in supporting Indigenous postgraduate students; however, they are reaching only half of their potential clientele. Universities have otherwise failed to consider Indigenous postgraduate students as a group that require culturally appropriate support mechanisms. Indigenous Australians must be better supported in order to address the disparity in participation and completion rates compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

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ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSEG	Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme
APA	Australian Postgraduate Award
ASGS	Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme
ATAS	Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme
ATF	Aboriginal Task Force
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
BIITE	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
CAPA	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations
CTEC	Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission
DCW	Department of Community Welfare
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HELP	Higher Education Loan Programme
IASU	Indigenous Academic Support Unit
ICRE	Indigenous Centre for Excellence Research
IHEAC	Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council
ISU	Indigenous Support Unit
IT	Information Technology
ITAS	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee
NIPAAC	National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation
NT	Northern Territory
PG	Postgraduate
SAE	Standard Australian English
SAIKS	School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems

SAIT	South Australian Institute of Technology
WAACHE	West Australian Aboriginal Council on Higher Education
WUPA	Wollongong University Postgraduate Association

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Indigenous Australians - will be used to refer to both Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. For the purpose of this research, the definition of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander will be based on the *New South Wales Land Rights Act (1983)* definition, which states that an Aboriginal person is someone who is of Aboriginal descent, identifies as being Aboriginal and is recognized as Aboriginal by the Aboriginal community where they live (Langton 1993:29; Weir 2000:5). It is, however, important to note that Indigenous Australians 'are not one homogenous group' (Coopes 2007:205). Indigenous communities and cultures are 'diverse and pluralistic' (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994:4; Langton 1993:11). The life experiences and educational outcomes of Indigenous people are varied, therefore making the task of avoiding stereotypical descriptors important, but occasionally challenging.

Postgraduate - the definition of postgraduate as provided by Weir (2000:1) will be utilised:

> 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.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction

Indigenous Australians are under-represented in education across all levels. Most notably, Indigenous participation in higher education is shown to be proportionally much lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians. In order to understand the reasons underpinning such disparity this inquiry concentrates on the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students. The inquiry takes its theoretical perspective from the concept of colonialism, as its consequences continue to impact on Indigenous Australians in higher education. Other theoretical themes under discussion are institutional racism; structural violence; culture shock; cultural violence and cultural safety.

The recently elected Rudd Government has created an environment that signifies hope and change for Indigenous people in Australia. This inquiry offers an archive that can contribute to positive changes. It raises the awareness of one aspect of the socio-economic position of Indigenous Australians by entering the debate on Indigenous participation in higher education and identifying contributing factors sustaining the under-representation of Indigenous Australians in education across all levels.

1.1 Statement of Problem and Rationale

Indigenous Australians are the most socially and economically disadvantaged of any group of people in Australia (Craven 1999; DEET 1990; DEST 2002; Gale 1998; Jordan 1985; McConaghy 1998b; NAEC 1986; Paradies 2005; WUPA 2002). Such disadvantage is associated with poverty that 'is intergenerational and the intersection of the issues creates a matrix that is difficult to unravel' (Coopes 2007:9). Indigenous Australians often experience 'high rates of unemployment, low income, sub-standard

housing, and a high burden of ill-health and mortality including a life expectancy that is 20 years less than other Australians' (Paradies 2005:1-2). An unfortunate reality is that most Indigenous Australians die before the age of 65 years (Macklin 2008). These factors are not coincidental to the disproportionate levels of education visible between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Swain (2005:4) explains, 'education is a reliable indicator of income growth and employment opportunities.' Coopes (2007:9) supports Swain's statement that the:

> Lack of education leads to poorer employment opportunities and lower incomes, which in turn exacerbate problems of overcrowded and inadequate housing and poor health. Health problems, poor housing conditions and poverty in turn make pursuit of educational qualifications a challenge that is difficult to overcome.

Hence education is multi-faceted and impacts on other areas of people's lives. Education fulfils a crucial role. Swain (2005:2) specifically notes that education 'helps us become aware of individual identity and at the same time, builds group identity'. This was an important factor to consider in the inquiry.

This research sets out to investigate the forms of support offered to postgraduate Indigenous Australian students. It will offer insights into issues both internal and external to higher education institutions that enable or constrain Indigenous students' sustained engagement in postgraduate study. The first step in this process is to provide an overview of Indigenous student participation statistics across Australia.

1.2 Representation of Indigenous Australians in Higher Education

While Indigenous Australians are under-represented in all levels of enrolments and completions in higher education (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2006a), this inquiry is concerned with only one specific cohort - Indigenous postgraduate students.

In order to create a better understanding of the broader higher education context, data pertaining to both undergraduate and postgraduate students will be examined. Figure 1.1

illustrates the decline in the overall percentage of Indigenous Australians accessing higher education in Australia between 1997 and 2004.

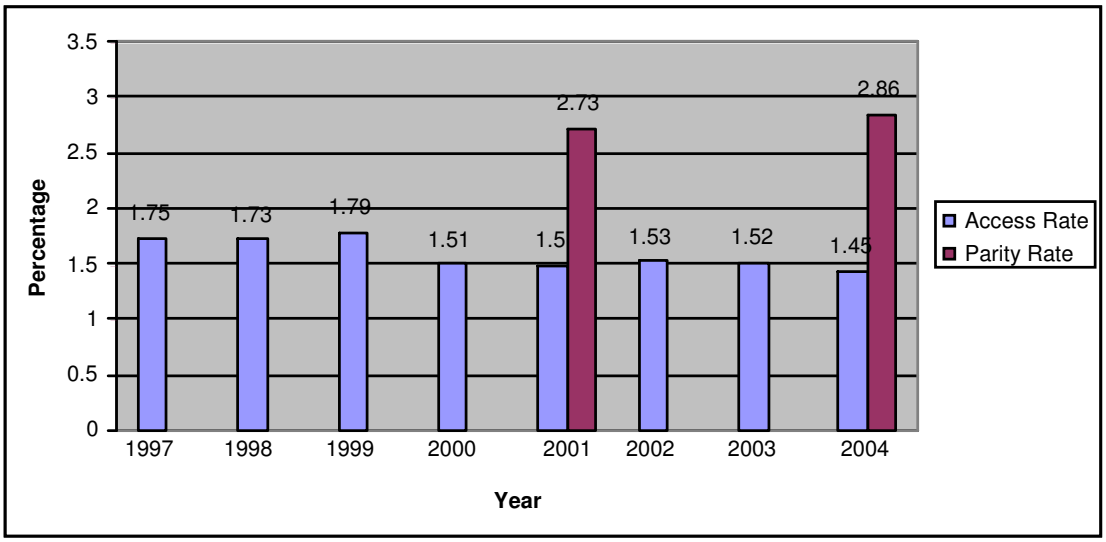

Figure 1.1 Indigenous student access rate 1997-2004 and parity rate, 2001 and 2004, Australia (DEST 2006a:94)

Upon further analysis it is also evident in Figure 1.1 that the parity rate increased from 2.73% in 2001 to 2.86% in 2004. The Department of Education, Science and Training (2006a:181) defines the parity rate as:

> The proportion (%) of Australian students that would be expected to be Indigenous, if Indigenous people were represented according to their proportion of the higher education aged population.

DEST (2005:85) noted that the 1.52% access rate of Indigenous students in 2003, illustrated in Figure 1.1, is well below the 2.5% rate they declared as the 'indicator of equality between Indigenous and all domestic students'.

Contrary to some contemporary assumptions these data indicate that the inequality in higher education for Indigenous Australians has worsened in recent years. During the years in question (1997-2004), Indigenous higher education was impacted by policies of the conservative Howard government and, in particular, by Commonwealth funding cuts. Regardless of the drivers of the data, the downward trend in student access rates suggests

that support mechanisms available to Indigenous students are either not working, not readily accessible or not available.

The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation report of 2002 stated:

> The minimum benchmark for the proportion of total enrolled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate students, in research and coursework courses, should be 2%, to reflect an equitable proportion of the Australian population. Further, it is NIPAAC's view that for self-determination and self-management to be realised in Indigenous communities, and for Indigenous disadvantage to be effectively addressed, the minimum benchmark must be exceeded (NIPAAC 2002:3).

Indigenous Australians comprise 2.5% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a). It can therefore be argued that the 2% benchmark set by NIPAAC (2002) is underestimated, and that the 2.5% benchmark indicated by the ABS (2008) and DEST (2005) is a more realistic target to address equality in tertiary education. Importantly, this benchmark should be considered as a minimum indicator across both undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

The number of Indigenous people enrolled in higher education had dropped from 8,871 in 2002 to 8,370 in 2005 (AVCC 2006b). In 2003 the number of commencing higher education Indigenous students declined by 3.2% (DEST 2005). This is notably higher than the 2.4% decline rate of commencing non-Indigenous domestic students (DEST 2005).

It is reasonable to presume that the completion rate of Indigenous students may be more reliable as it is more constant; whereas participation rates can change almost daily from one institution to the next. Table 1.1 illustrates both enrolments and completion statistics for Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students in 2003. Both undergraduate and postgraduate courses are included to provide a broad perspective on this problem.

Table 1.1 Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education participation (enrolments) and completions 2003 (AVCC 2006a:5)

Level of study	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	Enrolments	Completions	Enrolments	Completions
Doctorate	182	12	30,671	4,048
Masters	504	120	78,798	19,590
Honours	94	38	11,627	8,523
Grad. Diploma/Certificate	393	137	36,084	23,929
Bachelors	5,364	698	498,526	95,606
Associate Degree	206	56	1,907	371
Other	2,245	130	29,148	3,745
Total	**8,988**	**1,191**	**686,761**	**155,812**

The information pertaining to postgraduate qualifications is of particular interest. Table 1.1 indicates that in 2003 only 12 Indigenous Australians completed Doctorate qualifications. Interestingly 182 Indigenous people were enrolled in Doctorate programs. Similarly, there were 30,671 non-Indigenous people also enrolled in Doctorates, whilst 4,048 non-Indigenous people completed Doctorates (AVCC 2006a).

There is clearly a gap between enrolments and completions, however, definitive reasons are subject to conjecture. It might be inferred that many students enrol in doctoral study but do not complete the degree, however, this would need to be assessed against long-term statistical data in order to be considered conclusive. It is also worth noting that doctoral research takes three to four years of full-time study, significantly longer than most Masters degrees, which usually require one to two years of full-time study. The statistics provided in Table 1.1 should be read with this fact in mind, nevertheless they still denote a rate of withdrawal or failure to complete that is of significance.

An alternate means to build an understanding of the disproportionate participation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is to examine parity statistics. Table 1.2 provides figures for Indigenous students to achieve parity in higher education with non-Indigenous students in proportion to their populations. The number of Indigenous students would need to increase by 282% to achieve equal representation to non-

Indigenous students in Doctoral programs; 414% in Masters Degrees; 144% at Honours level; and 229% at Graduate Diploma/Certificate level (AVCC 2006a).

Table 1.2 Indigenous higher education participation rates – current and at full parity for 2003 population aged 15+ (AVCC 2006a:7)

Level of study	*Current Indigenous participation number*	*Parity participation number*	*% increase needed for parity*
Doctorate	182	695	282%
Masters	504	2,593	414%
Honours	94	234	144%
Grad Diploma/Certificate	393	1,293	229%
Bachelors	5,364	11,546	115%
Assoc Degree	206	40	-81%
Other	2,245	821	-63%
Total	**8,988**	**17,221**	**92%**

It is also interesting to note from the statistics provided in Table 1.2 that the parity level between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at Bachelor Degree level is 115%, however, Associate Degrees and other awards are both in the negatives, indicating that Indigenous people participate at a greater rate (percentage based) than their non-Indigenous counterparts at this educational level. The key reason for this may be the heavy focus placed on bridging courses and block release programs. Such programs will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Two.

Table 1.3 extends this logic by listing all Indigenous higher education enrolments, commencements and completions for the years 2001 and 2004. It can be calculated that in 2001, a total of 145 Indigenous Australians achieved postgraduate qualifications. It also demonstrates a steady growth in Indigenous postgraduate success with 170 completions in 2004 (AVCC 2006a).

Table 1.3 Indigenous higher education enrolments, commencements and completions 2001 and 2004 (AVCC 2006a:8)

Level of study	*Enrolments*		*Commencements*		*Completions*	
	2001	**2004**	**2001**	**2004**	**2001**	**2004**
Doctorate	131	209	29	47	8	12
Masters by Research	124	135	45	51	12	16
Masters by Coursework	289	448	125	202	84	104
Honours	98	96	31	19	41	38

NIPAAC (2002:3) has argued that it is essential for Indigenous Australians to be involved in postgraduate education and research to 'achieve equity in social and economic indicators' for Indigenous Australians. Postgraduate involvement has the potential to lead to better employment opportunities and build knowledge - both internal and external to the university environment (NIPAAC 2002).

The differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participation may seem complex; however the simple reality is that Indigenous Australians do not have a high participation rate in higher education at any level. Degrees at the highest level, such as doctorates, are a very new phenomenon to Indigenous education in Australia. The fact that in 2004 only 12 people achieved this qualification reinforces this argument. The reason why only 12 Indigenous candidates submitted and achieved their Doctorate award is of prime concern in this inquiry.

The higher education sector has implemented numerous programs and policies designed to increase Indigenous participation in education. It is claimed, however, that many of these are doomed to fail as they 'operate in ways that are alien to, or disempowering of Aboriginal people due to the sole focus on course content and the cultural perspectives of non Aboriginal educators' (Abdullah & Stringer 1997:ii). This problem is a fundamental challenge to the higher education sector. Abdullah and Stringer (1997:3) suggest a way staff could better support Indigenous students would be to:

> [Develop] a set of protocols that ensure teaching, research and development processes are consistent with Aboriginal terms of reference, as well as normal University criteria for academic acceptability.

This suggestion has the potential to encourage the development of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges within higher education. Whilst Indigenous Support Unit staff members could play an important role in developing such processes and terms of reference, it is not a clear cut process and would be difficult to implement across the board. Of particular importance in this research is the impact it has on Indigenous postgraduate students.

1.3 Barriers Indigenous Australians face in their attempt to Participate in Education

Twenty-two years ago the National Aboriginal Education Committee (no longer in existence) identified Indigenous Australians as 'the most starkly under represented group in tertiary education in Australia' (NAEC 1986:1). This remains the case today as illustrated in the statistics cited previously.

In 2002, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee Advisory Group on Indigenous Higher Education made the following statement:

> …there is no more important an issue facing Australian higher education than the participation and whole-hearted involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the sector (DEST 2002:1).

NIPAAC (2002:18) identifies the following circumstances that present as barriers to Indigenous postgraduate participation:

a. The number of Indigenous academics is very low. Such academics act as role models and provide vital support networks for Indigenous postgraduate students.
b. Indigenous Australians are often not in a position to be able to financially afford postgraduate education. Families are often not in a position to be able to assist with such a financial burden.
c. Indigenous people as a group are socio-economically disadvantaged. This is evident through factors such as poor health, inadequate housing, unemployment and low participation in primary and secondary school. Such factors combine to make the reality of postgraduate education rather grim.

d. Indigenous Australians often have community and family commitments that make it difficult to undertake postgraduate studies.
e. Information technology access is often limited, particularly in remote communities.
f. The absence of Indigenous knowledge, combined with both institutionalized and overt forms of racism in higher education, deter Indigenous Australians from seeking postgraduate education.

NIPAAC (2002:4) further explains:

> The barriers to participation are multi-layered, relating to the socio-economic disadvantage and political marginalisation faced by Indigenous peoples in wider society, as well as in education. The barriers to participation are also multifaceted in that they cross the political, cultural, social and economic spheres.

Over the last 35 years universities throughout Australia have attempted to overcome such barriers and inequalities in education by developing and implementing Indigenous Support Units (ISUs). ISUs are also referred to as Indigenous Higher Education Centres or Aboriginal Education Centres. These Units/Centres fulfil similar roles and were established with the intention of improving Indigenous education in Australia. The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST 2006a:np) describes the role of such Centres:

> [They] provide support to Indigenous students, further Indigenous academic studies, create a network of Indigenous students and academics and provide an Indigenous presence on university campuses.

This inquiry sets out to examine the roles, responsibilities and support mechanisms offered to Indigenous postgraduate students by ISUs; together with other forms of support available to these students. The barriers to participation identified by NIPAAC (2002) are used as a framework to examine the various support mechanisms.

1.4 Significance of the problem

The problem this inquiry addresses is highly significant to Australia. It has been established that Indigenous Australians' participation in higher education is considerably

lower than participation rates of non-Indigenous people. This is clearly evident when assessing Indigenous post-graduate participation and completion rates. DEST (2007b:118) explains:

> The Indigenous proportion of the higher education student population has not increased since 2001. The parity rate indicates that participation would need to have been more than double this proportion for equity. The margin between participation and parity rates has increased from 1.46 percentage points in 2001 to 1.73 percentage points in 2005, indicating that there has been a widening of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

It is essential that this problem be addressed accordingly. Such changes are vital to the quest for self-determination for Indigenous Australians. CAPA (1997:33) explain:

> Self determination will never be a reality until Indigenous people have the right to determine their own priorities and allocate their resources accordingly.

This inquiry will offer a series of recommendations. If higher education institutions, and in particular ISUs, choose to adopt them a positive result may emerge that could impact not only Indigenous Australians, but also Australian society in general. Education is the key to the future - but for this to work the transition point is now.

Indigenous advancement towards obtaining postgraduate qualifications must be accomplished if true reconciliation in Australia is ever to be achieved. It is imperative that Indigenous Australians gain tertiary qualifications at the highest level. The most effective method of ensuring a long-term solution to Indigenous participation is to determine, examine, challenge and redefine the support mechanisms that are designed to assist Indigenous postgraduate students. This is the fundamental purpose of this thesis.

1.5 The research questions

There are many different angles from which the research could have been approached. It was narrowed down to concentrate specifically on the nature of the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students. The following four research questions frame the investigation:

1. What is the nature of the support services available to Indigenous postgraduate students within higher education institutions and do these differ from those provided to Indigenous undergraduate students?
2. What specific support services do Indigenous postgraduate students indicate that they need but do not have?
3. What structures are in place for supervising Indigenous postgraduate students and how effective are these structures?
4. What is the nature of, and how beneficial is, the support that is available to Indigenous postgraduate students outside the higher education institution?

1.6 Assumptions, limitations and delimitations

There are several factors that require consideration as they have the potential to influence the inquiry. Such factors relate to assumptions and limitations.

A core assumption made in this research is that Indigenous Australians are not a single monolithic or homogenous group.

> A wide range of diversity exists among Indigenous people just as among non-Indigenous people. Across Australia, differences exist in relationships, links with the land, language, occupations, class and gender (Partington 1998:2).
>
> Australia was a multicultural society long before migrants arrived. It is estimated that over 500 language groups held title to land prior to colonisation (Moreton-Robinson 2003:31).

It is necessary to acknowledge this diversity amongst Indigenous Australians; the participants who assisted in this research represent considerable diversity in relation to their Indigenous identities – and thus provide representation across many Indigenous groups.

One objective of the research was to ensure collection of data from both rural and urban-based Indigenous people (this is explained more thoroughly in the methodology section at Chapter 3). A potential limitation in the inquiry could have been the issue of geographic remoteness of potential participants. To avoid this issue an online questionnaire was

utilised; this effectively circumvented geographic location from adversely impacting the availability of participants.

Additionally, socio-economic barriers were a key consideration to address when referring to Indigenous participation in tertiary education. Unfortunately, these are not the only limitations or barriers. Cultural difference and, in particular, 'the failure of the non-Indigenous education system to embrace Indigenous knowledges and cultures' were other key reasons that required consideration (NIPAAC 2002:9).

1.7 The research context – recruitment of participants

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England was provided with an outline of the research and all ethical considerations that applied to the inquiry. The protocol of the inquiry conformed to the National Health and Medical Research Council *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) and *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (2003). The process of recruiting participants commenced after ethics approval was granted.

In order to address the four research questions outlined in section 1.5, Indigenous postgraduate students were recruited as participants for this study. Participants were identified with the assistance of the ISUs. A total of 55 Indigenous Australians who were either enrolled in, or had recently completed, postgraduate qualifications participated in the research. The voices of the participants were central to the research.

A questionnaire was identified as the most appropriate data collection tool (refer to Appendix 1). It was distributed through a snowball sampling technique which was conducted with the assistance of ISUs. The internet was utilised throughout most phases of the research, including the distribution of questionnaire and data collection. Communication via the internet proved to be a powerful tool, with 70.9% of participants

responding to the questionnaire electronically (via e-mail), while 29.1% returned their completed questionnaires by regular post.

It was communicated to all participants that I (the researcher) was an Indigenous postgraduate student - a descendent of the Wiradjuri nation - whose interest in the support that we as postgraduate students receive, prompted the inquiry. Perhaps this common linkage resulted in a greater participant response than if I had been a non-Indigenous researcher - whilst this is not definitive it is likely to be the case. Thus there was a reciprocal aspect of positive learning underpinning this inquiry as the participants offered me valuable assistance by sharing their insights, knowledge and time, and therefore allowed this inquiry to flourish. Without their voices this research would not have developed. It was also my intent to assist other Indigenous postgraduate students by conducting the inquiry and creating an avenue through which better support mechanisms could be implemented in the future.

There will be more detailed discussion on the recruitment process of the participants in Chapter Three, along with an account of how the inquiry relates to the personal positioning of the researcher.

1.8 Theoretical Perspective

Theory is an important component of any academic inquiry. As noted by Durham and Kellner (2006), it provides a means to view and focus on specific subject matter:

> All social theories are perspectives that center attention on phenomena and their connections to the broader society and a wide range of institutions, discourses, and practices. As optics, or ways of seeing, they illuminate part of the social and cultural field, but may ignore or leave in darkness other dimensions. Consequently, constantly expanding one's theoretical perspectives and horizons helps to illuminate multiple dimensions of our cultural environment, providing richer and more complex understandings of our sociocultural life (Durham & Kellner 2006:xii).

The social theory that best illuminates the dimensions of this inquiry is colonialism. It provides a theoretical perspective, or cultural lens, to explain why Indigenous

Australians' lives have been, and continue to be, severely impacted by its consequences; and, most importantly, why Indigenous Australians have not had the same educational opportunities as non-Indigenous Australians (refer to Chapter Two).

Colonialism as a theoretical perspective offers an explanation, but certainly not an excuse, for the significant divide, in terms of social and economic factors, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two notes that racism and prejudice are primarily responsible for such divisions and it is therefore appropriate to characterize the nature of the leading cause of such divisions – colonialism.

Colonialism may present in different forms. References to colonialism frequently mention the physical act of having one's land colonised, or as Indigenous Australians tend to refer to it – invaded. It is, however, just as important to realise that colonialism also manifests in the minds of the colonised. Alatas (1977:17) notes these factors in his definition of colonialism:

> Not only as an extension of sovereignty and control by one nation and its government over another, but… control of the mind of the conquered and the subordinated.

McConaghy (1998:3) applies Alatas's view in an Australian context:

> Australian colonialism consists of practices which are violent on many levels, including the physical, the psychic, the symbolic and the epistemic.

Acknowledging colonialism as a vital part of Australia's history provides this inquiry with a platform upon which to interpret and analyse the data. It is essential to understand that Indigenous Australians have been subjected to a status of 'the other' and, as a consequence, have been provided with significantly less opportunities than non-Indigenous people in Australia. The lack of educational opportunities is certainly one of the greatest legacies of colonialism, reflected in the reviewed literature and in aspects of the data analysis.

In investigating the support available to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia, colonialism acts as a catalyst to explain why aspects of the support may be insufficient.

Stemming from this, colonialism provides an interpretive framework for the inquiry – particularly as it impacts, and often denies, the inclusion of Indigenous Knowledges in Western academic institutions - an important component that will evolve throughout the inquiry.

1.9 Overview of the Research

Chapter One has raised the issue of Indigenous people being the most socially and economically disadvantaged group in Australia. Indigenous Australians are also shown to be the most under-represented group at all levels of education in Australia. It is in higher education that the greatest levels of disparity exist. This chapter maintained that, as a group of people, Indigenous Australians need to significantly increase postgraduate completions in order to realise self-determination. It raises the issue of the importance of an inquiry such as this to research the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia. A set of research questions was posed and a brief explanation of the recruitment process for participants was provided.

Chapter Two provides the theoretical framework for the inquiry, beginning with an overview of Indigenous education in Australia. This is followed by an exploration of support systems currently in place in higher education and government policy in respect to the implementation of these support structures. Indigenous research and Knowledges are discussed, with particular emphasis placed on views held by many Indigenous scholars about Indigenous research and in whose hands it should be conducted.

Chapter Three details the methodological approach underpinning the research. This section also offers insight into the researcher's background and the epistemological approach taken in the inquiry. A discussion on why the interpretivist paradigm best suits this research is provided, followed by a detailed description of the recruitment process of the 55 Indigenous postgraduate students who participated in this research. The appropriateness of a questionnaire as the primary data collection tool for this inquiry is

also considered. The reasons why an in-depth exploration and triangulation were suitable for this research are provided at the conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter Four presents first level data. It details participant demographics and presents a collation of their responses to questions about the support within higher education institutions - academic based support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students such as postgraduate supervision, and the nature and functions of Indigenous Support Units and Indigenous postgraduate support groups.

Chapter Five presents second level data pertaining to the different types of non-academic support available to Indigenous postgraduate students. The support provided by the families and communities of Indigenous postgraduate students is explored, followed by an examination of financial support such as ABSTUDY, HECS, Scholarships and conference funding. The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) is also examined. Other issues that Indigenous postgraduate students may experience that present as non-supportive, such as isolation, time constraints and the lack of recognition of Indigenous knowledges, will conclude this section of the data presentation.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the findings by addressing the four research questions (identified in Section 1.5) in detail and offers insights into what support currently exists, how it functions both positively and negatively and what alternative support could be envisaged. Implications of the research emerge from this analysis and offer further understandings of the role played by colonisation, cultural shock, cultural violence and cultural safety - major theoretical themes of the inquiry - in the inequity of engagement of Indigenous people in education in general, and in higher education specifically.

Finally, Chapter Seven offers an overview of the nature of the inequalities that Indigenous postgraduate students face in higher education. It also details a list of recommendations informed by the outcomes of this research to improve the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students, and gives suggestions for future research.

The primary focus of this inquiry is to gather data on the types of support that are fundamental to ensuring Indigenous postgraduate enrolments progress to completions. Only when this completion rate is significantly increased will Australia's Indigenous higher educational participation statistics shift from their present inequitable stance to that of being equitable.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature review is divided into three main areas: an overview of Indigenous Australian education; support systems in higher education; and Indigenous research and knowledges.

In providing an overview of Indigenous Australian education, section 2.1 examines literature pertaining to Australia's history from the beginning of European invasion. Colonisation is examined for its overarching and devastating ramifications for Australia's Indigenous communities. The discussion begins with the implications of the acquisition of the land through the doctrine of *terra nullius.* It then describes the decimation and loss of culture and language, and finally the policies and practices of racial exclusion and alienation leading to Indigenous disenfranchisement from educational institutions. A discussion on relevant government policies and practices, such as assimilation, is then provided.

When examining a concept as broad as Indigenous education, it is important that a historical account be provided. The reviewed literature demonstrates that Indigenous Australians have experienced many injustices as a result of colonisation. It is necessary to understand these factors and their influence on the current situation to fully appreciate their key impact on the current state of Indigenous education.

Throughout the historical shifts of policy and practices and their impact on Indigenous communities, the themes of cultural violence, structural violence, scientific racism and institutional racism emerge. In relation to education the notion of cultural shock is

particularly evident. An in-depth discussion of these theoretical concepts is presented in this chapter.

The review focuses on issues related to the deficit model of education. This is followed by an examination of the patterns of disengagement from education by Indigenous people in Australia including the under-representation of Indigenous students at the postgraduate educational level.

Section 2.2 focuses on what the literature reveals about the current support systems in higher education. It is critical to examine the various types of support systems available to Indigenous Australians participating in higher education in order to fully understand which of these mechanisms are effective and which are not. Those support mechanisms in higher education that warrant investigation include Indigenous Support Units; officially sanctioned support specific to Indigenous postgraduate students such as financial assistance, tutoring and supervision; the support from Indigenous staff in higher education or the lack thereof. In addition there is a need to investigate other support mechanisms suggested in the literature that are not readily apparent, such as support that would result from raising the cultural awareness of education personnel; issues relating to cultural safety; the effects of isolation on Indigenous postgraduate students; Indigenous voices in higher education; and the role of Indigenous families and communities.

Section 2.3 discusses the socio-political environment that Indigenous Australians currently experience. Under the rule of the former neo-liberal government (1996-2007) led by Prime Minister Howard, relationships between the Federal government and Indigenous Australians deteriorated significantly. However, the newly elected Rudd Government is perceived as being capable of offering Indigenous people a sense of hope through change. It is therefore appropriate to mention Government initiatives such as the Northern Territory Intervention, the Apology to the Stolen Generations, and the 2020 Summit.

Section 2.4 examines Indigenous research and knowledge. Whilst Indigenous knowledge is ancient at its core, a review of the literature shows that Indigenous research is a relatively new phenomenon in the tertiary education sector. There is an emerging argument that stems from the literature, which shows that many Indigenous scholars believe that Indigenous knowledge and research belongs in the hands of Indigenous Australians. It is argued in this section that a necessary condition for this to occur is greater numbers of Indigenous Australians completing postgraduate qualifications.

Finally, a summary of the literature reviewed in this chapter is provided in section 2.5.

2.1 Overview of Indigenous Australian Education

2.1.1 Historical Perspective

2.1.1.1 Colonisation

'Colonisation' is a term widely used in literature pertaining to Australian history. Literature that specifically discusses the European invasion of Australia, as it is often described, routinely refers to this term. Colonisation is explored here to provide a historical account of social and economic conditions that Indigenous Australians have experienced over the last 220 years. Understandably, there is an underpinning degree of anger that is often evident when such writings are penned by Indigenous Australians. Such anger stems from the belief that colonisation deprived Indigenous people of their cultural heritage and economic independence (Pittock & Lippman 1974).

Indigenous people in Australia have adapted to their environment over the past 40,000+ years (Eckermann et al. 2006; Griffiths 2006). Such adaptation incorporated a 'unique social, cultural, religious and economic way of life' (Eckermann et al. 2006:4). When Europeans invaded the land in 1788, they too possessed a 'unique social, cultural, religious and economic way of life' (Eckermann et al. 2006:4). Though unique within

their respective realms, these 'ways of life' differed tremendously when compared to each other. Eckermann et al. (2006) argue that this directly resulted in culture clash, culture conflict and culture shock. The European culture won the initial battle as they had greater numbers of, and more lethal, weapons. From that moment on, Australia was effectively colonised by the European "invaders" (Eckermann et al. 2006).

Since 1788, historical colonisation patterns in Australia have remained remarkably similar to other colonised nations throughout the world (Eckermann 1998). Though the actual process of colonialism was not identical from one nation to the next, colonialism always placed the 'original inhabitants and the newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history' (Loomba 1998:2).

Loomba (1998) explains the impact of colonialism in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada:

> White settlers were historically the agents of colonial rule, and their own subsequent development – cultural as well as economic – does not simply align them with other colonised peoples. No matter what their differences with the mother country, white populations here were not subject to the genocide, economic exploitation, cultural decimation and political exclusion felt by Indigenous peoples or by other colonies (Loomba 1998:9-10).

Conflicting attitudes and perceptions were embedded in relations between the colonisers and Indigenous people in Australia (Eckermann 1998). Literature identifies the colonisers' claim and belief that they had a right to appropriate land as one of the main reasons behind such conflict.

Markus (1994:20) explains that the land in Australia was 'seized without consultation or compensation: the British government neither entered into treaties nor made any provision for the disposed.' Captain James Cook falsely acquired Australia through the doctrine of *terra nullius* and by disregarding official instructions from the British crown to follow formal protocol (Bennett 1999; Craven & Rigney 1999; Markus 1994; McGrath 1995; Reynolds 1989; Reynolds 1996; Rigney 2003).

The term *terra nullius* derives from Latin and means 'empty land' (Holland 1996:99) or 'land belonging to no-one' (Craven & Rigney 1999:46). The doctrine points out that there were no 'civilised inhabitants' and therefore the land was claimed as 'uninhabited' (Eckermann et al. 2006; Rigney 2003). Moreton-Robinson (2003:33) adds:

> The premise of colonisation that Australia belonged to no one informed the relationship between Indigenous people and the nation state from its very inception and continues to do so.

Mudrooroo (1995:221) claims the term '*terra nullius* may be the only Latin that Indigenous people know, except perhaps for a few more obscure legal phrases gained by experience of the courts.' The doctrine of *terra nullius* has been constantly challenged by Indigenous Australians (Smith, L.T. 2001). Eckermann et al. (2006:5) rightly claim that the classification of identifying Australia as *terra nullius* was based on 'extreme ethnocentrism combined with scientific racism, incorporated into the British/European legal codes.'

Rigney (2003:74) comments on the European claim that there were 'no civilised inhabitants':

> Civilised in this context meant that Aboriginal peoples were categorised as not 'civil' as they possessed no means of governance that matched the halls of Westminster.

Of course, at the time, Indigenous people would have had no knowledge of the halls of Westminster. Conversely, the British entourage knew nothing of the laws/lores of the Indigenous peoples whose country they had formally begun to invade. Rigney (2003:74-75) explains the legal implications of the relationship between governance and *terra nullius*:

> In a strange twist of fate brought about by the legal fiction of terra nullius, Australian nationalism, constitutional governance and identity was established without regard or inclusion of Indigenous systems of governance and inherent jurisdiction over education. The denial of Indigenous governance practices is the origins of future citizenry rights injustices for Indigenous peoples.

With numerous researchers such as Eckermann et al. (2006), Markus (1994), Reynolds (1989, 1996) and Rigney (2003) commenting on the doctrine of *terra nullius*, it can be argued that this would be one of, if not the most, examined pieces of law in Australia's

history. Despite it being commonly accepted that the doctrine of *terra nullius* was a false and misleading doctrine to begin with, no real strategies or laws, apart from Mabo, have been implemented to adequately acknowledge the past injustice.

The history of colonisation in Australia, from the invasion by Cook and the doctrine of *terra nullius*, are all consequences of colonialism. Colonialism may be defined as 'the act of taking land, colonising people and establishing the colony' (Crow 2003:8). Burton (1995:143) asserts 'exploitation is, of course, what colonialism was and is all about'. Said (1989:207) refers to colonised people being thought of as inferior. In the case of Australia, it is the Indigenous Australians who are considered to be 'inferior' by the Westerners whose laws govern the continent.

Arguably one of the most significant consequences of colonialism has been the dispossession of Indigenous Australians. Coopes (2007:iii) discusses the impacts of colonialism and dispossession and their ongoing legacy:

> Colonialism and associated dispossession are identified as the main contributors to historical and contemporary marginalisation of Aboriginal people in Australia. Inherent in colonialism were scientific racism, institutional racism, structural violence and cultural violence. These remain embedded in the fabric of Australian society and continue to influence not only the daily lives, but also the long term life chances of Aboriginal people.

Western ideologies wrongly assumed superiority to a point, and in a manner that disregarded Indigenous ways of viewing the world. Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies were ignored by the invading regime. Woods (1998:53-54) explains how colonialism positioned Western culture, ideals and knowledges over that of Indigenous Australia:

> The British in their ignorance, invaded Australia without recognising the highly developed religion nor the education and skills of the traditional doctors, lawyers, teachers, geographers, chemists, botanists, astronomers, philosophers, theologians and other clever people.

Another means by which colonialism assumed superiority of Western thinking over Indigenous thinking was through Social Darwinism, which was the dominant discourse during the early stages of colonialism in Australia. Layton (2000:58) cites the thoughts of Rowley (1970:6,59):

> Aboriginal people were regarded as survivors of a lower stage of human evolution, an 'inferior race "fading away" in the face of western culture', and were doomed to 'die out.'

These thoughts are echoed in the literature of renowned Australian historian Henry Reynolds (1996:xi) who also proposed that colonists expected Indigenous Australians to 'die out.' It is therefore understandable that Tripcony (2002a:35) identifies survival as 'the first major success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'

The use of stereotypes have assisted the colonisers to empower themselves by creating a series of labels and stigmas for Indigenous Australians. In turn, this created a situation where Indigenous Australians become the 'other'. McConaghy (1998b:5) explains that the 'us' and 'them' construction has 'a long and influential history within Australian educational discourses'. This is sometimes referred to as 'Othering' (McConaghy 1998a:347) or 'Otherness' (Said 1989:213) and has pervaded all levels of Australian society from the moment Westerners arrived through to more contemporary times, under the umbrella of neo-colonialism.

Colonialism is responsible for occupying more than just land, as people's minds are also susceptible to being colonised (Nandy 1983). The legacy of colonialism is sometimes discrete and can manifest itself in the psyche of Indigenous people without consciousness. Take, for instance, the feeling of shame that is prevalent throughout Indigenous Australia; a feeling many Indigenous people associate with. McConaghy (1998b:11) refers to shame as 'one of the most successful of the colonial strategies of discipline and control.' It instils in people 'a sense of responsibility for their own oppression' (McConaghy 1998b:11). Further:

> when the oppressive acts which cause shame are exposed, the sense of responsibility for complicity in one's own oppression can be used to take responsibility for one's own liberation (McConaghy 1998b:11).

Indigenous Australians have attempted to speak back to the oppressors in past years - challenging their colonising ideas, methods, behaviours and ways. The political and social arena is loaded with examples of people 'speaking back' and demanding change and rights for all Indigenous Australians. Land rights is perhaps the area that has

attracted the most interest in speaking back, as Indigenous people reclaim their autonomy and make land claims. In 1969-1970 the issue of land rights in Australia began to draw international interest, with visitors coming from America, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Britain to lend their support to the cause. Around the same time, Prime Minister McMahon allocated the lease of land to Aboriginal communities to use for specific purposes (Lippmann 1996). However, it was made overtly clear that this lease arrangement did not constitute land rights and that Indigenous Australians would continue to have no legal ownership to such land. In protest of this denial of land rights, a group of Indigenous Australians established an Aboriginal 'tent embassy'. They camped on the lawn of Parliament House in Canberra until it was destroyed by the police six months later (Lippmann 1996). Replicating this form of protest, other Aboriginal tent embassies have emerged over the past decades – all represent the same message which is land rights for Aboriginal people.

In recent history, prominent Indigenous leaders continue to challenge the powers inherent in the legacy of colonialism that denies Indigenous Australians many rights: land rights being a right that always remains high on the agenda. In 1997, Noel Pearson of the Cape York Land Council criticised the Howard Government's native title legislation. What was most significant about this event was the publicity given to Pearson's challenge and the method of reply by former Prime Minster Howard who thought it was necessary to defend his legislation on talk back radio, clearly illustrating the 'changed nature of Aboriginal participation within the political system' (Bennett 1999:43). This event signified that the Federal Government could no longer discard the fact that Indigenous Australians were publicly demanding the recognition of land rights, and that the Prime Minister was required to address the demand in a public arena.

There are countless other examples where Indigenous people have actively challenged colonialist thinking. These forms of activism have on some occasions led to positive social and political change, whilst others have not led to the outcome desired by Indigenous people, nevertheless the voices have been there and they register the Indigenous communities active participation in their destiny. Regardless of whether their

plight was deemed successful, all Indigenous people involved have acted as agents of social change and their roles remain an integral and significant challenge to the legacy of colonisation in Australia.

The literature on colonialism in the Australian context is complex and vast. The commentary presented here cannot do justice to the many features of it that permeate the lives of contemporary Australian people. From the discussion presented here colonialism can be seen to have born from Western attitudes, values and practices that have significantly impacted negatively on Indigenous Australians. Its legacy is entrenched in racism, discrimination and oppression. It is so well inculcated into the Australian mindscape that many of its manifestation, such as Indigenous people's feelings of shame, are often not questioned and have a tendency now to be viewed by Australian society as characteristics of Indigenous people and not as a construct of colonialism.

2.1.1.2 Assimilation

When the government concluded that Indigenous people in Australia were not going to 'die out' they set about assimilating Indigenous people into mainstream Australian society (Anti-Discrimination Board 2003; Layton 2000). The assimilation policy was evident in Australia between 1951 and 1965 (Eckermann et al. 2006). The ideology behind the policy was:

> …that all Aborigines shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties (Lippmann 1981:38, 1996:25-26).

Assimilation is a manifestation of colonialism. The process of making the 'other', according to Westerners, more like 'us' (McConaghy 1998a, 1998b; Said 1989) is the crux of assimilation.

Perhaps, the late Kath Walker (as she was then known and later referred to as Oodgeroo Noonuccal) provided the most accurate account of assimilation. In 1962 she stated the following:

> Assimilation means the swallowing up by a majority group of a minority group. My people, the Aboriginal people are the minority group and they can only be assimilated by the final wiping out of this minority group. Now it is not our desire to have this happen, they have tried hard to do this, but is has not been successful and we feel that this is the most inhuman way of bringing my people forward (Walker as cited in Attwood & Markus 1999:188).

Clearly the views and expectations of previous governments in relation to assimilation sat in contrast to those of Indigenous Australians. Assimilation policies aimed to reform Indigenous Australians so that they became 'instant whites, keeping only their outward appearance and skin colour' (Lippmann 1996:26). During this assimilation policy period, in 1962, Indigenous Australians were finally permitted to vote in federal elections, dependent on State, and their legal classification (Rigney 2003). Rigney (2003:75) argues that 'the assimilation period saw the end of formal exclusion of Indigenous peoples from Australian society.' Brennan (1998), however, points out that Indigenous Australians have been excluded from mainstream culture since colonisation.

Government actions and policies, such as dispossession, colonisation and assimilation, have continued to dictate the lives of Indigenous Australians and have done so without consent (Rigney 2003). In 1962 *The Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander League* referred to government policies, such as assimilation and protection, as being simply a 'smokescreen for cruel racial discrimination' (Attwood & Markus 1999:193). Every Act between the 1890s and the 1960s that has been imposed on Indigenous Australians is an example of 'institutional racism embedded in cultural violence' (Eckermann et al. 2006:22). These concepts are discussed later in this chapter.

In 1968 Charles Perkins made the following statement in a letter to the Australian, relating to his experience as an Indigenous person who had recently graduated from Sydney University:

> This conveniently puts me into a situation where I must, according to official policy, forget my people, my background, my former obligations. I am now "white." I therefore am not supposed to voice my opinion on the scandalous situation Aboriginal people are in nor am I entitled to speak any longer as a "legal Aboriginal." All this because I have received my degree and am in a position to voice my opinion. Or could it be that I, and others like me, could influence the unacceptable social-racial status quo in Australia? (Perkins as cited in Attwood & Markus 1999:242).

The Australian Government wanted to assimilate Indigenous people into mainstream Australian society, but failed to give ample consideration to the fact that Indigenous people may empower themselves through the means of education. As we can see, Indigenous pioneers of Western education (such as Charles Perkins) used their qualifications to challenge the reigning powers.

During 1967, a national referendum was commissioned and overwhelmingly passed. It asked whether sections 127 and 51(xxvi) of the constitution should be changed, allowing the federal government to pass laws relating to Indigenous Australians (Bin-Sallik 2003; Rigney 2003). It also meant that Indigenous Australians were finally recognised as citizens and were included in the census (Bin-Sallik 2003; Eckermann 1998; Rigney 2001; Scrimgeour 2001), however the process of asking whether non-Indigenous Australians agreed to Indigenous Australians having legal rights in their own land was hugely ironic (Smith, L.T. 2001).

Like most government policies, the 1967 referendum has its supporters and critics. It is important to this research, in that it had a direct impact on Indigenous education. On a positive note, it is claimed that it shifted perceptions from the colonial education offered by missionaries that was based on the foundations of 'Christianise and civilise', to policy and content changes initiated by the Federal government (Rigney 2003:75). Bin-Sallik (2003:22) comments:

> The overwhelming support for change led to the introduction of special education schemes for Indigenous Australians to redress the 179 years of denial and exclusion. However, no attempts were made to consult with Indigenous people and work with them to develop and implement appropriate strategies leading to specific programs.

It could be argued then that the 1967 referendum was full of contradiction. The Australian Government was legally recognising rights of Indigenous Australians yet, as indicated by Bin-Sallik (2003), it was disregarding the rights of Indigenous people to assist with key decision-making processes that directly impacted them. The negative view of the situation illustrates yet another example of enacted colonialism.

Despite legally entitling Indigenous people to the same rights as non-Indigenous Australians, the 1967 referendum was not all positive. Scholars, including Lipmann (1994), argue that the referendum gave false hope and was unsuccessful in improving the conditions facing many Indigenous Australians (Rigney 2003). Similarly, L.T. Smith (2001) states that constitutional changes resulting from the referendum did not radically transform the lives of Indigenous Australians. Rigney (2003:75) further explains that 'Indigenous languages, cultures and systems of education were to be assimilated and absorbed through equal citizenship rights held in trust by the federal and state governments.' Injustices associated with citizenship rights were prevalent through discriminatory beliefs and practices (Rigney 2003).

In reviewing the literature, it is clear that commentators on the referendum did not share a general consensus that it overwhelmingly improved conditions for Indigenous Australians. Some researchers saw positive outcomes, whilst others acknowledged the intent but that little changed. Moreover, there is significant disagreement amongst scholars as to when Indigenous circumstances significantly improved, although many, including Moreton-Robinson (2006), identified the 1970s as a period where change became highly evident. Moreton-Robinson describes the 1970s as a 'historico-political field' in reference to Indigenous sovereignty and rights 'because a new Indigenous subject emerged in history to challenge the myth of patriarchal White sovereignty through counter-narrative' (Moreton-Robinson 2006:390).

Although the call for Indigenous sovereignty and resistance existed prior to the 1970s, it was however, at this time that massive campaigns surrounding the discourse of Indigenous rights and sovereignty was clearly evident through the media and demonstrations (Moreton-Robinson 2006). Many scholars have discussed Indigenous sovereignty, despite the fact that at first contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people it was not ceded (Rigney 2003). Eruption of rights discourses in the 1970s was influenced by both national and global agendas (Moreton-Robinson 2006).

In 1972 the newly elected Whitlam Government introduced a range of new policies that attempted to shift away from assimilation. One notable shift was towards multiculturalism which was promoted as the new national policy for Australia in 1972, in complete contradiction to the former White Australia Policy it replaced (Moreton-Robinson 2006) and in essence a strong move away from colonialism.

A self-determination policy for Indigenous Australians was also introduced (Bin-Sallik 2003; Coopes 2007; Eckermann 1998). This was accompanied by the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 'which led to the implementation of programs in education, health, legal aid, medical care and housing, in consultation with Indigenous Australians' (Bin-Sallik 2003:23). It can be reasonably argued that this was the era when Indigenous Australians were finally given some degree of accountability, recognition and voice for Indigenous-related matters and is clearly a positive outcome.

Despite this, the significant changes introduced by the Whitlam government were not successful in effectively resolving the past issues of colonialism and assimilation – social and economic disadvantage and discrimination remain a common part of the lives of Indigenous Australians even today. Nevertheless, the shift in policy created new opportunities for Indigenous Australians; however availing themselves of these opportunities was not easy. In the process of transition to being legally recognised as Australian citizens, many negative and sometimes devastating barriers were continuing to be encountered by Indigenous Australians. Of note and to be discussed at length further in relation to engagement in western education are the concepts of *cultural shock*, *cultural violence*, *structural violence*, and *scientific and institutional racism*.

This aspect of Australian history is omitted from the curriculum in many schools today. Chances are that in circumstances where there are Indigenous teachers in Australian classrooms, either these teachers or their parents were not recognised as Australian citizens at the time they were born. The value of Indigenous education in classrooms in some parts of Australia has, however, changed with time. For instance, in 2005 the Minister for Education and Training in New South Wales approved the Graduate Teacher

Standards of the NSW Institute of Teachers, which specified that Aboriginal education be introduced as an essential requirement for all teacher education programs (NSW Institute of Teachers 2008).

> Development, design, delivery and evaluation of teacher education programs will require consultation and ongoing liaison with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and communities. Appropriately qualified Aboriginal people (teachers, lecturers, educators and/or community members) should be consulted with in the design of Aboriginal cultural content and desirably involved in its delivery (NSW Institute of Teachers 2008:3).

This is a positive step for all Indigenous Australians – particularly as the policy emphasises involvement from various sectors of Indigenous communities; however it should be noted that this is an example of a single government policy statement and that the actual practices that emerge from this policy, and other similar ones, would vary enormously from one school to the next, despite the fact that they constitute a mandatory requirement.

2.1.1.3 Culture Shock

Prior to examining the concept of 'culture shock', it is important to note the fluidity of the term 'culture.' The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1994:3) points out that:

> Cultures are elusive, complex and contested practices and attributes which defy simple definitions… What constitutes 'culture' is diverse, and that 'cultures' are extraordinarily hybrid and change over time that they are heterogeneous and differentiated.

Nakata (1995:50) explains that 'the acceptance of a universal term such as culture is problematic because it stands to omit the array of other factors that contribute to "the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia"' (as cited in Scrimgeour 2001:34). Whilst acknowledging the truth in such a statement, it is also essential to point out that culture is a term that is unavoidable when discussing Indigenous issues. For that reason, culture will be treated as a term requiring careful consideration.

The term 'culture shock' was coined by Kalervo Oberg (Eckermann et al. 2006; Sonn, Bishop & Humphries 2000). It was introduced in 1958 to describe the 'anxiety produced

when a person moves to a completely new environment' (Guanipa 1998:1). Eckermann et al. (2006:105) further explain culture shock:

> A loss of familiar signs and symbols including words, gestures, facial expressions, customs or norms can result in confusion, disorientation, misunderstandings, conflict, stress and anxiety.

Guanipa (1998) refers to culture shock in the context of relocating to a new country. Whilst this definition has a broad context, it can also be relevant without moving to a new country. Eckermann et al. (2006:107) explain that the pressures on people who relocate to a new country differ significantly to that of Indigenous Australians, 'whose right it is to be culturally distinct is rarely recognised within the dominant social institutions.' Hence, the theory that culture shock is a direct result of relocation is a valid, though not essential, component of culture shock.

More accurately, Eckermann et al. (2006:4) explain culture shock:

> It is that feeling of uneasiness, anxiety, and stress that arises when suddenly all our familiar cues, language, interpersonal relationships, tastes and actions appear to be out of place, suspect or even inappropriate, and we must reassess our behaviour in the light of foreign expectations.

There are several phases of culture shock. Eckermann et al. (2006:106) cite the phases of culture shock identified by Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001:8):

1. The 'honeymoon phase' – with emphasis on the initial reactions of euphoria, enchantment, fascination and enthusiasm;
2. the crisis, characterised by feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anxiety and anger;
3. the recovery, including crisis resolution and culture learning; and finally
4. adjustment, reflecting enjoyment of and functional competence in the new environment.

It is, however, important to note that not everyone will experience each of these phases of culture shock because it is a personal experience that differs from one person to the next (Eckermann et al. 2006). In reality, Indigenous postgraduate students may experience elements of the 'honeymoon phase', often being the first in their family to attend university (refer to section 2.1.2.3), however the isolation and loneliness of being 'alone' in this environment (refer to section 2.2.2.3) may lead them into the crisis of phase two. The level of recovery and adjustment noted in phases three and four above are less pronounced. The lower participation and completion rates of Indigenous students (refer

to section 1.2) may be an indication that this group does not progress through these stages at the same rate as they experience the first two phases.

2.1.1.4 Cultural violence and structural violence

Eckermann et al. (2006:13) cite Galtung's (1990:291) definition of cultural violence:

> By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by our religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science… - that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence.

Further, Rigney (1997:114) quotes Scheurich and Young (1997):

> When any group within a large, complex civilisation significantly dominates other groups for hundreds of years, the ways of the dominant group (its epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies), not only become the dominant ways of that civilisation but also these ways become so deeply embedded that they typically are seen as "natural" or appropriate norms rather than as historically evolved social constructions.

Indigenous Australians suffered severe forms of violence as a direct result of the process of colonisation (Coopes 2007; Eckermann et al. 2006). Racism and economic greed by non-Indigenous people often resulted in the forced displacement of Indigenous Australians. In addition, Indigenous spiritual traditions were often disregarded through Christianity, whilst disease and war were responsible for the death of many Indigenous people. Alcohol, disease, sexual abuse and economic exploitation were also responsible for the dislocation and dehumanisation of many Indigenous people in Australia (Eckermann et al. 2006). Eckermann et al. (2006) illustrate this diagrammatically in Figure 2.1.

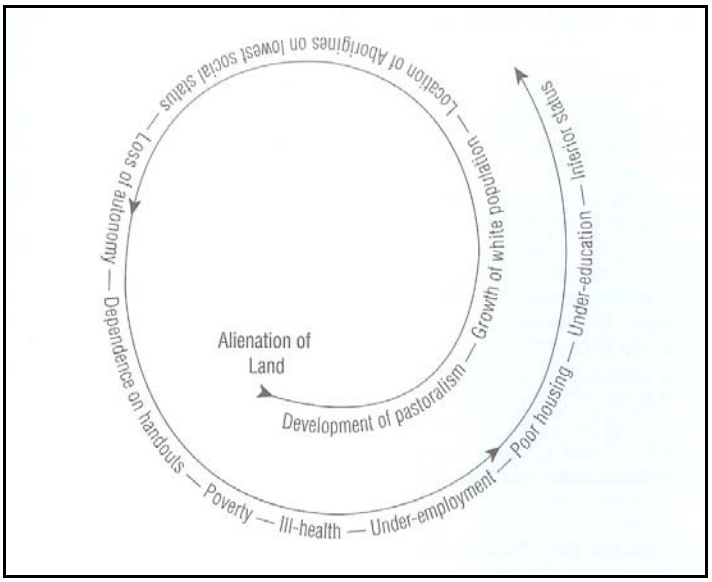

Figure 2.1 The spiral of cultural violence (Eckermann et al. 2006:21)

At the centre of Figure 2.1 we have the alienation of land, arguably one of the biggest factors associated with the spiral of cultural violence. With land at the core of Indigenous society, it is appropriate for Eckermann et al. (2006) to place it at the centre of the diagram. Other factors of Indigenous people's lives are represented in the remainder of the spiral, eventually leading to inferior status.

It is now appropriate to analyse literature pertaining to structural violence, a term first applied in sociological discourse by Johan Galtung in 1969 (Coopes 2007). Structural violence can be defined as 'violence inherent in the social order, which is maintained by social differential access to resources and life chances, poverty and discrimination/racism' (Eckermann et al. 2006:64). Structural violence occurs when people are denied of their basic needs (Galtung 1990) and it exists in three main forms. Firstly, it can manifest itself as physical violence, reflective of life expectancy amongst a certain group of people at a given time. Secondly, it may present as psychological violence as indicated in patterns of alienation. Finally, it can present as systematic frustration of aspiration which occurs when 'the predominant social order denies one category of persons access to the prerequisites of effective participation in a system developed and controlled by powerful interest groups' (Eckermann 1998:304; Eckermann

et al. 2006:64). Eckermann et al. (2006:65) identify systematic frustration as 'one of the most invidious forms of structural violence.' It is also a strong indicator of the current situation for many Indigenous Australians.

The following passage provided by Coopes (2007:44) explains how structural violence manifests itself in terms of education:

> Structural violence in the form of denial of appropriate education is a particularly effective way of preventing Aboriginal people from developing the tools to function in mainstream society. Inadequate education also limits people's ability to call attention to the exploitation and repression which have been an integral part of Australian Aboriginal history since 1788.

Structural violence is present in Australian society and is embedded in education as are scientific racism and institutional racism.

2.1.1.5 Scientific racism and institutional racism

The literature reviewed indicates that racism has had a significant impact on the lives of Indigenous Australians. It is important to investigate this further because racism has had a direct impact on outcomes pertaining to Indigenous education. This section provides a definition of racism, and then examines scientific and institutional racism.

Racism can be defined as 'an ideology that has been reproduced in and through social relations to generate and sustain racial inequality in material outcomes' (Pettmann 1987:67 as cited in Brennan 1998:151). Racial discrimination is defined in the International Council of Human Rights Policy (2000:5) as:

> Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of life.

As noted by Coopes (2007) in section 2.1.1.1, colonialism has left an ongoing legacy of marginalisation of Indigenous Australians and one of the ways in which it is manifested is through racism. There is no single racism in Australia, but 'a range of racisms, which affect different groups in different contexts' (Castles & Vasta 1996:5). Scientific racism

is an extension of the underpinning ideologies attributed to racism. It is defined by Eckermann et al. (2006:9) as:

> The research carried out by scientists [in the 18th and 19th centuries] into the physical, social, intellectual and moral qualities of culturally different people. Invariably such differences are equated with inherent, biological inferiority, when compared to qualities associated with the scientists' own in-group. Most frequently this in-group has been Western European.

Reynolds (1989) explains that during the 18th century it was common for non-Indigenous people to argue matters through a racial hierarchy system (an attitude that emerged from colonialism). Northern Europeans would allocate the number one position on their hierarchy scales to themselves, with Indigenous Australians at the bottom (Anti-Discrimination Board 2003; Reynolds 1989). The Europeans believed they deserved such an esteemed position due to their 'perceived sophistication in terms of technology, ways of living, intellectual thought and Christianity' (Anti-Discrimination Board 2003:17). The science of race was achieved through anatomy (Reynolds 1989). Indigenous people became targets for scientific racism. As a result of scientific racism and interest in the study of evolution during the early stages of colonisation, there were many encounters between Indigenous Australians and the practitioners of Western Science. Colonialism wrongly purported Western Science as the informant of the truth (Rigney 2001). It has been the driving force of discrimination towards Indigenous Australians across all levels of society.

It is also interesting to consider other countries where Social Darwinism falsely lent its hand to claim scientific basis. For instance: European imperialism and segregation in the United States of America, genocide in Nazi Germany and apartheid in South Africa (Anti-Discrimination Board 2003). The underpinning mindset for these atrocities is based on the scientific racism that accompanies theories pertaining to Social Darwinism.

Stereotypes are often cemented in scientific racism. This has been the case since colonisation and has been perpetuated by the ideology of colonialism. Eckermann et al. (2006:9), citing Chase and von Sturmer (1973), list some of the more typical stereotypes attributed to Indigenous Australians:

> The notion that Aboriginal people were locked into a static Stone Age culture and environment; that they reached/survived by instinct rather than by use of intellect; that they were ancient, archaic survivors of the 'missing link'; that they had only a rudimentary religion, history and government; and that, overall, they were childlike and consequently unpredictable.

These false notions, based on a claim of scientific thinking, remain prevalent in Australian society today. They are relied upon to 'justify the position of Aboriginal people in our society' (Eckermann et al. 2006:9). Economic exploitation and, in particular, land and labour exploitation were a key motive underpinning scientific racism. Eckermann (1999:5) points out that 'scientific racism justified dispossession and land alienation' (as cited in Coopes 2007:40). Stevens (1981) argues that the relationship between scientific rationale and economics was responsible for Indigenous living conditions that mirrored slavery (Eckermann et al. 2006).

Scientific racism was 'used to justify dispossession' and led to institutional racism (Eckermann 1998:302; Eckermann et al. 2006:64). Institutional racism is defined as follows:

> Institutional racism is manifest in the laws, norms and regulations that maintain dominance of one group over another. It is covert and relatively subtle; it originates in the operation of essential and respected forces in society and is consequently accepted. Because it originates within the society's legal, political and economic system, is sanctioned by the power group in that society and at least tacitly accepted by the powerless, it receives very little public condemnation (Carmichael & Hamilton (1967) as cited in Eckermann et al. (2006:17)).

Thus it is evident that institutional racism is the 'reproduction of systematic patterns of inequality and is correlated largely or in part with race or cultural origin (real or presumed)' (Pettmann 1987:67 as cited in Brennan 1998:151). Brennan (1998:151) states 'everyday practices, routines, rules and representations within an institution regularly reward members of one group to the detriment of others.' Institutional racism has existed in Australia since colonisation (Coopes 2007).

Figure 2.2 illustrates the cycle of dispossession, discrimination and disadvantage facing many Indigenous people in Australia. Most importantly, it demonstrates how the key concepts discussed in this section are intertwined and the relationship they share.

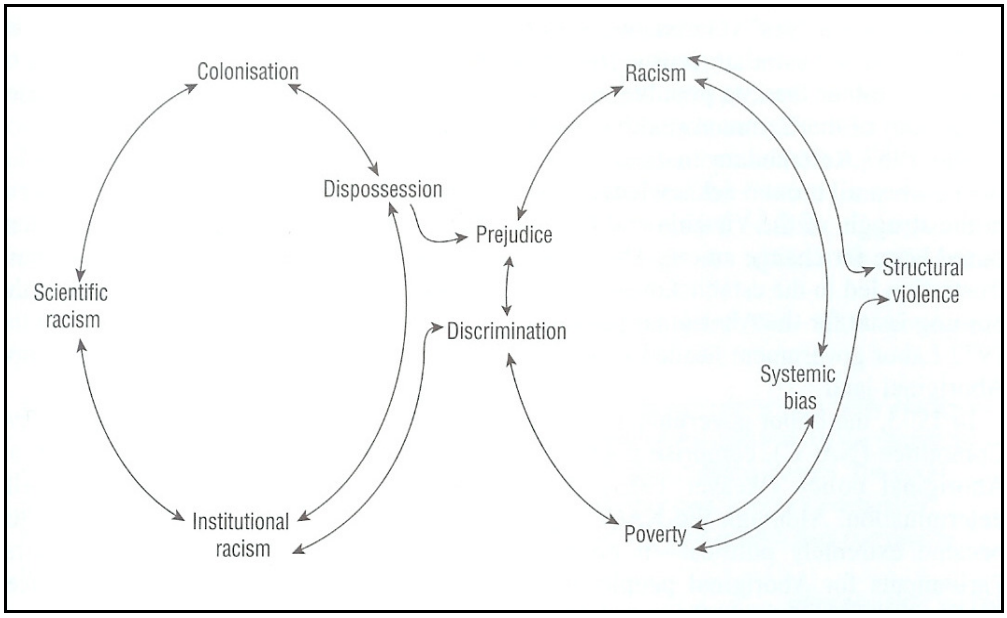

Figure 2.2 The cycle of dispossession, discrimination and disadvantage (Eckermann et al. 2006:65)

Discrimination evolving directly from scientific racism became part of early colonial Australian law. Acts regulated where Indigenous Australians could live; their education; and employment. Most notably, laws attempted to determine whether Indigenous people were 'fit parents, capable adults and thinking decision-makers' (Eckermann et al. 2006:19). These laws meant that government control and regulation resulted in institutionalising racism. Eckermann et al. (2006:19) comment that this meant 'it was no longer an individually accepted phenomenon, but had become established within the system.' It is therefore reasonable to argue that institutional racism was a method of controlling Indigenous people, by influencing every facet of their lives. Failure to conform to these European based paradigms was punishable by law.

It is important to consider the impact of institutional racism in the academic environment. There is often a degree of distrust between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous academics. Historically, non-Indigenous academics have inferred that the intelligence of Indigenous Australians is lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians One key

method of substantiating this view involved encouraging Indigenous Australians to undergo culturally biased IQ examinations (Bin-Sallik 1989; 1993). Bin-Sallik (1989:4) explains that these IQ examinations were often used as a means to 'legitimate exclusion' of Indigenous Australians from the educational opportunities available to non-Indigenous Australians.

First Nations People, and in particular Indigenous Australians, are the most studied people in the world (Rigney 1997). Rigney (1997:109) argues that 'the research enterprise as a vehicle for investigation has poked, prodded, measured, tested and compared data toward understanding Indigenous cultures and human nature.' Similarly, Fredericks (2006b:5) explains Indigenous Australians have been subjected to research techniques that have required people to be 'weighed, give blood, urine, faeces and hair samples, given their stories, explained their existence, been interviewed, questioned, observed, followed, interpreted, analysed and written about for years.'

Eckermann (1998:304) writes 'today, despite the fact that most forms of institutional racism have been abolished, Aboriginal life chances continue to be constrained by structural violence.' There is no doubt that structural violence remains a strong influence on Indigenous people's life chances. However, Eckermann's (1998) statement suggesting that most forms of institutional racism have been abolished is not necessarily true in contemporary Australia. Whilst it is reasonable to suggest that most, if not all, explicit regulations that govern the barriers to education have been abolished, institutional racism remains in more subtle forms. Social institutions such as politics, media, health, the legal system, and certainly education are prime examples of sectors of society that are plagued by institutional racism (Brennan 1998). Brennan (1998) points out that, with a few exceptions, the senior hierarchy of such institutions have a tendency to be Anglo-Celtic, male and middle class.

The self-appointed dominance of non-Indigenous Australia, with its European origins, is rife in education. While institutional racism in tertiary education impacts Indigenous

Australians significantly it is often accompanied by another attitudinal trend often disguised as compensatory measures – in other words the *deficit* discourse in education.

2.1.1.6 Deficit model of education

The discourse of compensatory education movement emerged during the late 1960s and found legitimacy in a report by Valentina in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 1971. Its basis was that those who were different were also deficient, particularly in terms of their academic capabilities. To combat this, the deficit model of education emerged from an assumption that those people who were disadvantaged were also deemed to be deficient and that they therefore needed to be provided with additional help to compensate for such disadvantage (Valentine 1971).

Education departments throughout Australia were quick to pick up on this discourse of the deficit model in education and adopt it as a method of examining the education needs of Indigenous children. Eckermann (1998:305) explains:

> The deficit model fitted neatly into prevailing beliefs and attitudes about Aboriginal people because it squarely placed the 'blame" for minority group children's poor educational attainments on their socialisation, family patterns, cultural traditions and socio-economic situation.

Coopes (2007:141) describes deficit discourse in education as a 'blame the victim' approach in its attempt to justify why a person or group of people do not perform as well as the dominant group. Connelly (2001) recognised the discourse in her study of school education and explained its emergence as having a psychological basis that presumes the lack of success is attributed to Indigenous learners in the form of deficits. These deficits were said to include 'mental, physical, and emotional and extends to encompass social and material backgrounds, that is the circumstances lived in, and the parents' and the community's influences' (Connelly 2001:38).

The compensatory education programs implemented in Australia to fix 'the problem', were a response to such deficit thinking (Connelly 2001). Not surprisingly, these

compensatory education programs failed as they assumed an Anglo superiority and way of life that would not be readily accepted by Indigenous Australians. Eckermann (1994:15) explains this further:

> Compensatory programs have shown little return for the time and money invested. Why are there so few positive results? Perhaps because the education system, by and large has seen its role as changing children to fit its middle-class white, English-speaking standards in an effort to create educational equity for all children. This approach has seriously endangered children's identity, self-esteem and humanity, processes which minority groups resent and condemn.

A condescending attitude accompanies deficit discourse. This is often evident in theories that believe the home is inadequate, or lacking aspects that middle class non-Indigenous people have. Connelly (2001) points out that the apparent deficit was believed to be in the child as a result of the family or home environment. Yet, 'the schools and systems contribution to learning failure remained unexamined' (Connelly 2001:39).

Eckermann (1998:305) justifiably claims that the influences of the deficit model of education 'continue to plague Aboriginal education, teachers' philosophies and teaching strategies.' It is reasonable to argue that theories reliant on deficit discourse in education have negatively impacted on Indigenous education in Australia for a considerable time.

2.1.2 Education Disengagement of Indigenous Australians

2.1.2.1 Educational disadvantage

Indigenous Australians remain the most socially and economically disadvantaged group in Australia (Craven 1999; DEET 1990; DEST 2002; Gale 1998; Jordan 1985; NAEC 1986). Of particular interest to this research is the further claim that Indigenous Australians remain the most 'educationally disadvantaged group' (DEET 1990:21; CAPA 1997:21; Gale 1998:vii, 3).

Education has played a defining role in terms of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Australia. There are two key schools of thought that become apparent when

investigating the relationship between Indigenous Australians and education. One school believes that education has not been readily accessible in the past. Eckermann (1998:304) explains 'any analysis of Aboriginal education clearly shows that it was marred by neglect until the 1970s.' Alternately some suggest that education is responsible for isolating Indigenous people and making them the 'other' (Mudrooroo 1995). The construction of the 'other' is responsible for the 'ways that racial and ethnic minority communities have been dehumanised and criminalised' throughout Australian history (Anti-Discrimination Board 2003:17).

Bin-Sallik (2003:21) explains that Indigenous Australians had minimal formal education because 'the early colonial authorities were divided on whether Aborigines could be educated.' Famous French philosopher Rousseau's concept of the 'noble savage' influenced many colonial authorities as there was a tendency to believe that Indigenous Australians lived in peace with nature. This philosophy encompassed an ideology that was not inclusive of an urban lifestyle. Conversely, others viewed Indigenous Australians as '"savages" who were "primitive" and incapable of accepting "civilising influences"' (Bin-Sallik 2003:21).

In 1814, a program designed to 'civilise' Indigenous people was launched by Governor Lachlan Macquarie. The program's objectives were to train Indigenous people as labourers, creating an exploitable labour force. In 1815 a 'Native Institution' was established at Parramatta, 'for the purpose of educating, Christianising and giving vocational training to Aboriginal people' (Bin-Sallik 2003:22). In 1819, the Anniversary Schools Examination was unexpectedly won by a 14 year old Indigenous girl, beating 20 other Indigenous children and 100 European children (Bin-Sallik 2003). Bin-Sallik (2003) states that Governor Macquarie's Institution was, in many ways, the beginning of both missionary and educational endeavours for Indigenous people in Australia.

Scrimgeour (2001) claims that formal education for Indigenous Australians commenced around the same time as the Europeans landed on our shores. It is further maintained that various combinations of Commonwealth, State and Territory involvement in education

have developed since the Federation of Australia in 1901. However, if we are to view the concept of formal to mean institutionalised Western education, then these statements are somewhat fallacious, as it was only in the last 30 to 40 years that Indigenous people had any real access to formal education. For decades various governments have commissioned research and issued reports that clearly indicate the dramatic disparity in education levels for Indigenous Australians. If, as Scrimgeour (2001) suggests, Indigenous Australians had indeed received formal education over the last two centuries, this inequality would not be so clearly evident. Perhaps Scrimgeour's (2001) reference to formal education would offer more validity if its underlying assumptions included the ongoing imposition of Western knowledges and ideologies on Indigenous Australians and the resultant disengagement of Indigenous Australians from these knowledges and ideologies.

Watts (1982:5) offers a view of formal education that encompasses the underlying cultural properties of the environment:

> Formal education for Aborigines, as for any group, must serve the cultural group and provide positive support for its attempts to accommodate to changing circumstances while maintaining its own integrity. There is thus a need to understand the values and lifestyles of the Aboriginal groups in their diverse socio-cultural settings before one can try to assess the specific roles and goals of schools and their associated programs.

Having examined the comments provided by Scrimgeour (2001) and Watts (1982) it is clear that the characteristics that accompany the concept of formal education are not easily defined. It is conceivable that formal education means different things to people because of their own life experiences. The cultural and social environment of people, regardless of ethnicity, arguably forms the foundations from which they perceive the ideology of a formal education.

Of particular concern to this research is the disparity in higher education participation in respect to Indigenous Australians. Bourke (1994:1) states 'Indigenous Australians rarely, if ever, participated in higher education courses in the first 175 years of European settlement in Australia'. At times, it was even considered morally wrong, if not illegal to include Indigenous Australian participation in higher education (Rigney 2001).

By the 1900s, the majority of Indigenous children in Australia were excluded from the mainstream education system. They were segregated and forced to attend 'poorly staffed and ill equipped "black" schools, a policy which continued well into the 1940s and 1950s' (Eckermann 1998:305). Eckermann (1998) identifies the philosophy of such practices as scientific racism. However, one could also suggest that these practices fall into the scope of institutional racism, as it is in the form of an overtly racist policy embedded into an education institution.

2.1.2.2 Educational access

The era of change in Indigenous education, and particularly in relation to higher education, is usually placed around the second half of the 20th Century. Rigney (2001:5) argues that the 'rise of the Indigenous resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s was influential in calling for Indigenous equity and justice.' Whatman (1995) claims that 1967, the year of the referendum, saw enormous progress made by Indigenous Australians in gaining access to, and participation in, tertiary education. Prior to this, Indigenous children were not even required to attend beyond primary school.

In 1969, the Australian Government introduced the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme (ASGS) encouraging students to undertake post-secondary studies (Bin-Sallik 2003; Watts 1976; Whatman 1995). However, due to the low participation rate of Indigenous Australians participating in tertiary studies, most of the ASGS grants were designated to supporting apprenticeships and job training programs (Whatman 1995; Bin-Sallik 2003).

In 1970, the Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme (ABSEG) was established to provide financial assistance for students who wanted to complete schooling beyond the compulsory age requirements (Whatman 1995; Bin-Sallik 2003). Despite this seemingly positive change, many obstacles confronted those students who completed year 12 under this scheme and sought to enrol in university. They were denied access into tertiary institutions because the secondary school system often failed to provide Indigenous

students with adequate tools to meet university entry requirements. Once admitted into higher education, Indigenous students often felt overwhelmed by the prospect of being the only Indigenous Australian on campus, and more often than not dropped out without completing their studies. There was also a lack of courses that appealed to the interests of Indigenous students. In some courses that did exist, there was sometimes a misrepresentation of Indigenous history and a lack of respect for Indigenous culture (Whatman 1995). In considering these factors, Whatman (1995:37) points out that the 'gross under-representation of Indigenous students in tertiary institutions would not be amended by government funding alone'.

The 1971 Census revealed that only 379 Indigenous students were enrolled in the fourth or later years of high school in Australia (Watts 1976). Of those students, not all would continue to participate in tertiary education (Watts 1976). Alternate literature offers similar statistical information claiming that in the 1970s almost 25% of all Indigenous Australian adults had never attended school; 40% had attended primary school and fewer than 2% had attended year 10 or junior high school (Eckermann 1998).

In the early 1970s only 18 Indigenous people were enrolled in tertiary studies in Australia (Bin-Sallik 2003). There are many reasonable explanations for this alarmingly low statistic. Of particular importance is the lack of perceived knowledge many non-Indigenous teachers had relating to Indigenous Australians. A National Conference on Aboriginal Education was also convened in 1971. It identified that only eight of the fifty teacher education institutions surveyed provided courses on Aboriginal Studies (Watts 1982). Hence, there was an obvious gap in the cultural knowledge available to non-Indigenous teachers.

This lack of knowledge was not restricted to primary and secondary education. It also impacted on higher education. During the 1970s, many misinformed people believed that equality in higher education would be achieved by simply 'adding Indigenous peoples to the academy of science and giving it a stir' (Rigney 2001:1).

Government policy sought to provide Indigenous Australians with more than just tertiary inclusion through the implementation of legislation that was supportive to Indigenous people. The Federal Race Discrimination Act was passed in 1975, designed to prohibit prejudice and discrimination (Rigney 2001). This was relevant to the higher education sector because, whilst racial discrimination was not permitted in universities, 'institutionalised and oppressive structures remained' (Rigney 2001:5). This was more than likely embedded in the form of institutional racism as discussed in section 2.1.1.5.

Participation of Indigenous Australians in tertiary education was initially a slow process. The first Indigenous person to reportedly receive an undergraduate degree from an Australian university was the late Charles Perkins, graduating from the University of Sydney in 1966 (Bin-Sallik 1989; Gostin 1996). By 1976 there were only 78 Indigenous Australians who had gained university degrees (Rigney 2001).

An alternative opinion held by many was that the 1977 formation of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) instigated change by providing a voice for Indigenous Australians (Reid & Holland 1996). This is explained further:

> Its [NAEC] rationale, aims and objectives published in 1980 stressed Aboriginal involvement at all levels of policy-making, funding and administration of programs (Reid & Holland 1996:115).

Scrimgeour (2001) asserts that the Indigenous education reform process gained momentum in the 1980s as a result of the formalisation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. Despite these reforms in 1986 the NAEC still identified Indigenous Australians as 'the most starkly under-represented group in tertiary education in Australia' (NAEC 1986:1). A diversity of likely reasons for such inequality has since been offered. Notably, Bin-Sallik (1989:1) argues that the 'denial of education to Aborigines is a legacy of the colonial past and subsequent policies and practices that did not abate until the beginning of the 1970s'. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy of 1989 had also been instrumental in campaigning for Indigenous access and equity (Rigney 2003).

One of the best examples of access to institutional education for Indigenous students is Batchelor Institute, which was established on the outskirts of Darwin in the mid-1960s to provide short programs for Indigenous teachers' aides and assistants in community schools. What is now Batchelor Institute was originally just a small annexe of Kamlda College (a government boarding school for Aboriginal students). It became Batchelor College in 1982; and in 1988 was recognised as a higher education institution by the Commonwealth Government. In 1990 a second campus was established at Alice Springs, with annexes also opening in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek. An evaluation conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Western Sydney recommended that the College progress towards independent university status in 1994 (BIITE 2007, 2008b). On the 1st July 1999 Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) was established, 'with the institution's ownership and governance passing to the Institute Council' (BIITE 2007:3). Batchelor Institute has developed to be a specialist Indigenous tertiary education institution that provides:

> Culturally safe and sustainable education and training that fosters the aspirations of Indigenous Australians, thus contributing to the cultural, social and economic development of Australia (BIITE 2007:3).

Of particular relevance to this inquiry, BIITE has recently launched postgraduate study options. Postgraduate coursework options include a Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Management and Administration, a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and an on-line Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Education program. A Research Division was established in 2007, offering two postgraduate research options – a PhD program and a Masters in Indigenous Knowledges by research (2008a:online).

A total of 316 people graduated from BIITE in 2007 – 252 VET students and 64 higher education students (BIITE 2007:6). This is a significant development, not only to students who reside within close proximity to BIITE, but to all Indigenous students in Australia, as close to half (44%) of BIITE's students reside in areas outside the Northern Territory (BIITE 2007:5). This is also a groundbreaking initiative as it provides the blueprint for other Indigenous tertiary institutions that may evolve in the future. Most

importantly, the success of BIITE creates a precedence that signifies that Indigenous education institutions can be successful in terms of safe, culturally appropriate education for all Indigenous Australians.

2.1.2.3 Culturally appropriate support

The literature so far examined in this section has identified that access alone does not result in successful educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The importance of culturally appropriate education has been noted, however most important to this inquiry is the investigation into the various support mechanisms Indigenous students require access to.

The 'typical' Indigenous student is likely to be the first person in their family to attend university (White et al. 2002); slightly older than non-Indigenous students; and female (Encel 2000). In reference to their education experiences, Indigenous people are less likely to hold prior formal qualifications; less likely to have completed secondary education; and less likely to successfully complete their course (Encel 2000).

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) identifies family responsibilities as a key reason that prevents some Indigenous Australians from undertaking postgraduate studies. They are often in senior employment positions and an extended family may rely on that income. Consequently, leaving such employment for further studies is not financially feasible. The AVCC argues that the problem is not a lack of scholarships, but a lack of adequately funded scholarships. One suggestion the AVCC offers to overcome this problem is to adopt the model of medical scholarships of up to $60,000 for Indigenous education (AVCC 2006a). This proposal by the AVCC would provide postgraduate students with an income that could assist in meeting family responsibilities. However, it is also important to consider that even when financial compensation is provided, the 'physical' absence of the person from their family and community could be traumatic. This may be particularly true when the person is female and is considered a matriarchal figure who forms the core of the family structure.

The AVCC (2006a) lists the following as factors that affect Indigenous students. Whilst they are not isolated to Indigenous Australian students, they are more prevalent in this group.

- financial pressures: the primary income earner is often the person who is undertaking studies;
- social and cultural isolation: Indigenous students have a tendency to feel isolated from mainstream students and staff members;
- basis of admission: many Indigenous students gain entry to higher education through special admission schemes. This has the potential to create a feeling of worthlessness as the student may feel they do not deserve such admission;
- experiences of racism (AVCC 2006a:8).

An additional point that the AVCC highlights is 'insufficient preparation for study and/or insufficient academic support' (AVCC 2006a:8). It states:

> … because many Indigenous students come from disadvantaged backgrounds they are frequently ill-prepared for tertiary study and do not receive the right support once they commence tertiary education (AVCC 2006a:8).

The support issue is the crux of the research and this topic will be explored in further detail during this chapter.

2.1.3 Indigenous postgraduate students

2.1.3.1 Postgraduate programs

Australian universities began offering postgraduate programs in the 1930s. The first Australian doctoral degrees were awarded to three non-Indigenous people in 1948; however the first doctoral qualification to be awarded to an Indigenous person did not occur until 1973 (Weir 2000). Subsequent doctoral degrees earned by Indigenous Australians were not conferred until 1989: one in the United States and the other in Australia (Weir 2000). In 2001, Indigenous Australians accounted for 1.1% of Doctoral students (NIPAAC 2002).

2.1.3.2 Indigenous postgraduate enrolments by institution

Table 2.1 lists the higher education Indigenous Australian enrolments by course level and institution in 2005 (the most current data available). The table indicates that in 2005 a total of 8,121 Indigenous students were enrolled in higher education within Australian universities. Of this number, 1,145 were Indigenous postgraduate students; 6,150 were Indigenous undergraduate students; and 826 were Indigenous non-award students (DEST 2005).

Table 2.1 indicates that some institutions have a high proportion of Indigenous undergraduate students, but low representation of Indigenous postgraduate students. It is important to exclude the non-award enrolment figures from the statistics provided in Table 2.1 to further analyse the relationship between Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate students. In doing so, the universities that are, and are not, attracting Indigenous postgraduate students can be identified. This information is highly important for the data analysed in this inquiry.

Table 2.1 Indigenous higher education enrolments by institutions in Australia for 2005 (DEST 2005)

Institution	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Non award	Total
The Australian National University	29	61	0	90
University of Canberra	18	56	19	93
Charles Sturt University	33	251	10	294
Macquarie University	29	121	0	150
Southern Cross University	47	180	9	236
The University of New England	41	189	37	267
The University of New South Wales	23	110	0	133
The University of Newcastle	51	251	24	326
The University of Sydney	40	199	19	258
University of Technology Sydney	77	260	1	338
University of Western Sydney	19	215	0	234
University of Wollongong	18	104	0	122
Charles Darwin University	29	64	64	157
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	17	358	211	586
Bond University	1	3	0	4
Central Queensland University	12	192	52	256
Griffith University	30	323	0	353
James Cook University	52	276	25	353
Queensland University of Technology	51	332	0	383
The University of Queensland	37	194	0	231
University of Southern Queensland	21	125	53	199
University of the Sunshine Coast	1	50	0	51
Flinders University	19	89	0	108
The University of Adelaide	9	75	30	114
University of South Australia	30	283	3	316
University of Tasmania	18	195	25	238
Deakin University	54	312	0	366
La Trobe University	9	65	0	74
Monash University	28	64	0	92
RMIT University	23	30	0	53
Swinburne University of Technology	13	7	0	20
The University of Melbourne	104	119	0	223
University of Ballarat	2	15	1	18
Victoria University	5	24	0	29
Curtin University of Technology	60	320	63	443
Edith Cowan University	56	187	85	328
Murdoch University	11	98	59	168
The University of Western Australia	11	98	36	145
The Australian Catholic University	17	255	0	272
Column Total	**1,145**	**6,150**	**826**	**8,121**

It is clear that the University of the Sunshine Coast has the highest level of disparity with only 2% of enrolled students undertaking postgraduate studies and 98% of students enrolled as undergraduate students. This is closely followed by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education with 5% of students enrolled in postgraduate studies and 95% in undergraduate studies. Central Queensland University demonstrates similar statistics, with 6% Indigenous postgraduate students and 94% undergraduate students. It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education only recently commenced offering postgraduate courses. An initially low representation of Indigenous postgraduate students is therefore expected.

Conversely, information provided in Table 2.1 demonstrates that some institutions comprise high proportions of Indigenous postgraduate students in comparison to Indigenous undergraduate students. Again excluding the non award enrolments from the analysis, it is clear that Swinburne University of Technology has a substantial proportion of its students enrolled in postgraduate studies, accounting for 65% of the total number of Indigenous students. However, it is important to note that the total of 13 Indigenous postgraduate students enrolled at Swinburne University of Technology in 2005 is somewhat small in comparison to Indigenous postgraduate enrolments at other institutions in Australia. The lower representation of only seven Indigenous undergraduate students enrolled at Swinburne University of Technology in 2005 is the underlying factor influencing the 65% postgraduate and 35% undergraduate statistics.

The disparity between Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate students is also evident in the University of Melbourne figures for 2005 where there was a representation of 47% Indigenous postgraduate and 53% Indigenous undergraduate students. It is important to acknowledge that the University of Melbourne accounted for almost 10% of all Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia with a representation of 104 of the 1,145 students. Further, RMIT consisted of 43% Indigenous postgraduate and 57% undergraduate students in 2005. There are a variety of possible explanations for the comparatively higher proportion of Indigenous postgraduate students at these three universities. From one perspective, these universities may encourage their

undergraduates to move into postgraduate studies at the same university. Similarly they may offer attractive postgraduate environments through solid course structures and support mechanisms. The same higher proportional representation could also be a result of geographic proximity, convenience of transportation or a level of familiarity due to friends or family members having attended that university. Conversely, the results may reflect more stringent selection processes for postgraduate program entry at other universities - or simply that other postgraduate programs are more expensive.

2.1.3.3 State and territory enrolments

It is interesting to note that Swinburne University of Technology, the University of Melbourne and RMIT are all institutions based in Victoria. It is now appropriate to examine Indigenous higher education enrolments for 2005 on a state/territory basis as provided in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Indigenous higher education enrolments by state/territory for 2005 (DEST 2005)

State/Territory	Postgraduate	Undergraduate	Non award	Total
Australian Capital Territory	47	117	19	183
New South Wales	378	1,880	100	2,358
Northern Territory	46	422	275	743
Queensland	205	1,495	130	1,830
South Australia	58	447	33	538
Tasmania	18	195	25	238
Victoria	238	636	1	875
Western Australia	138	703	243	1,084
Multi State - The Australian Catholic University	17	255	0	272
Column Total	**1,145**	**6,150**	**826**	**8,121**

The Australian Catholic University has campuses in many states and does not claim one particular state as its foundation. Therefore, it is given its own category of multi-state. It can be seen from Table 2.2 that New South Wales has the highest number of Indigenous

postgraduate students, with a total of 378 of the 1,145 students. New South Wales also has the highest number of undergraduate students, accounting for 1,880 of the 6,150 Indigenous students. It is interesting to note that the Northern Territory possesses the highest number of Indigenous non-award students comprising 275 of the 826 students. Referring back to Table 2.1 it can be seen that Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is primarily responsible for this figure, accounting for 211 non-award students.

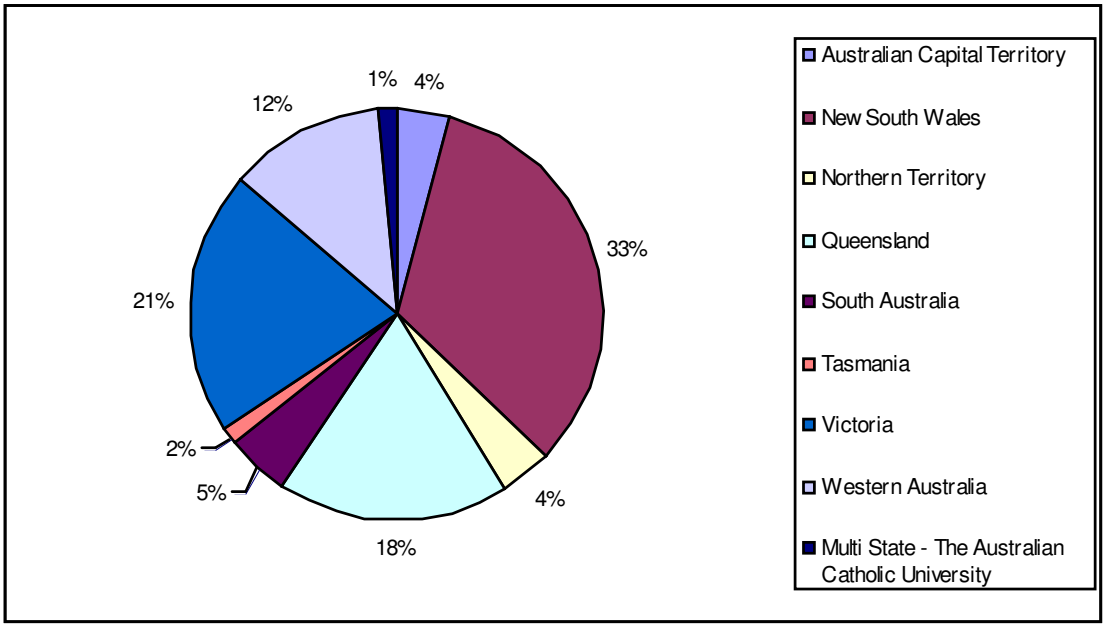

Figure 2.3 Indigenous postgraduate enrolments in 2005 according to state/territory (DEST 2005)

Figure 2.3 represents the specific breakdown of Indigenous postgraduate students by state/territory for 2005 and clearly shows the dominance of New South Wales in postgraduate education for Indigenous Australians, followed by Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia. Importantly, it should be remembered that there were 1,145 Indigenous postgraduate students enrolled during 2005. The support provided to these students is the crux of this inquiry. The next section of the literature review will examine support systems available to Indigenous students, and in particular to Indigenous postgraduate students.

2.2 Support Systems in Higher Education

The primary objective of this research is to examine the nature, and evaluate the effectiveness, of the support available to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australian institutions. In what follows, views drawn from literature inform the discussion on support mechanisms for Indigenous postgraduate students.

2.2.1 Indigenous Support Units

2.2.1.1 Emergence of Indigenous Support Units

In 1959, a proposal was made by William (Bill) Wentworth for a national Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Wentworth 1959 as cited in Nakata 2004:1). The first Indigenous Support Unit (ISU) was established in 1973 within the structure of the Aboriginal Task Force (ATF) program residing in the School of Social Studies at the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) (Bin-Sallik 1989, 1993, 2003; Gostin 1996; Rigney 2001). The ATF has been described by Bin-Sallik (1989:52) as 'the beginning of the creation of Aboriginal tertiary education in Australia'. Whilst it was not then described as an ISU, per se, essentially its structure and role established the foundation upon which Support Units would develop in the future.

The Department of Community Welfare (DCW) initially proposed the idea of the program to SAIT modelled on educational support programs for Native Americans. After negotiations between DCW and SAIT, the program was implemented (Bin-Sallik 1989).

The ATF allowed Indigenous students from across Australia to enrol in courses at the South Australian Institute of Technology, despite not necessarily possessing the academic prerequisites (Bin-Sallik 1989). The initial intention of establishing the ATF was to train a task force of Indigenous people in the field of social welfare. The program was

originally designed to operate for a period of two years and then be terminated. It is reasonable to argue that the ATF's initial plan was based on an assumption that there were a relatively small number of students who required this type of support. However, due to the enormous success of the program, and on the recommendation of an evaluation at the end of the first year, it was permitted to continue (Bin-Sallik 1989, 1993; Gostin 1996).

The ATF would later be described as 'setting a precedent for other States to follow' (Bin-Sallik 1989:34). Bin-Sallik (1989, 1993, 2003) argues that the ATF created the blueprint for Indigenous tertiary education. Bin-Sallik (1989:38) lists the features adopted from the ATF by other programs:

a) special entry conditions;
b) academic support;
c) counselling services;
d) the provision of separate space;
e) the encouragement and support of an Aboriginal identity.

Within the first decade, the ATF program progressed from initially offering Indigenous people a non-accredited award, to developing and implementing the first Bachelor Degree level of attainment specifically designed by Indigenous Australians for Indigenous Australians, and finally to laying the foundations for the first Aboriginal and Islander School within a tertiary institution (Bin-Sallik 1989). Deservedly, the ATF has been described as 'a main contributor to the development of a national Aboriginal intellectual community' (Bin-Sallik 1990:33 as cited in Gostin 1996:online).

By 1984, a steady increase in Indigenous tertiary education was apparent. The establishment of other Aboriginal programs was the primary indicator of such an increase (Bin-Sallik 1989, 1993). There is, however, some discrepancy in the available literature regarding the actual number of programs that existed at given points of time. For instance, Whatman (1995) maintains that there were 11 university special entry programs aimed at Indigenous Australians operating by the end of 1984. Bin-Sallik (1989, 1993) identified 14 programs in 1984, which increased to 62 in 1989. Conversely, Gale (1998) claims that there were 19 programs in 1984, which increased to 58 in 1989. Not

surprisingly, the bulk of these programs modelled either a segment, or all, of that which the original ATF program offered.

2.2.1.2 The Jordan Report

The Jordan Report came about as an outcome of the study of Indigenous enclave programs commissioned by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) and the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) in 1984. The Jordan Report (1985) was instrumental in establishing the foundations of Indigenous Support Units. Bin-Sallik (1989:38) claims that the Jordan Report and the Miller Report 'established the structure of Aboriginal tertiary education for the 1980s.' The CTEC had proposed the allocation of funds in 1985 to increase tertiary participation rates of disadvantaged groups (Bin-Sallik 1989; Jordan 1985). In response to this proposal, a research team was formed, headed by a Roman Catholic Nun from Adelaide University by the name of Dr. Diedre Jordan. The team visited all Indigenous units throughout Australia. Information for the report was primarily gained by conducting discussions with staff and students in all programs and through administering questionnaires to staff and students (Bin-Sallik 1989).

Adelaide University published the findings of the study as a two volume report in December 1985. Volume One was written by Dr Jordan and concentrated on the analysis of programs and included recommendations. Volume Two was written by Susan Howard, and focused on case studies of the fourteen institutions. Despite having two different authors, the reports were collectively referred to as the Jordan Report (Bin-Sallik 1989).

The Jordan Report concentrated on the functions of support systems to assist Indigenous Australian participation in higher education (Gale 1998). With the focus of the Jordan Report on enclaves, it is appropriate to define this term. The NAEC (1984) defined enclaves as follows:

> An enclave support program is where Aboriginal students enrolled in standard courses within institutions are given additional support appropriate to their culture, lifestyles and educational background (as cited in Gostin 1996:1).

The Jordan Report's primary purpose was to distinguish the main elements of the programs the units offered in order to assess their effectiveness in increasing Indigenous Australian enrolments at the tertiary institution to which they were affiliated; establish if the programs played a role in contributing to the academic success of students; evaluate the institutional status of the programs; and observe funding and staff arrangements (Bin-Sallik 1989; Jordan 1985). The original role of such units was identified to be:

(i) a provider of academic support, on the one hand acting to fill in gaps in past educational experiences, and on the other hand, working towards consolidating the fruits of study currently being undertaken.

(ii) a provider of personal support, introducing the student to social welfare networks, and making available to the student the knowledge and insights needed to exercise a degree of control over those adverse circumstances in life which inhibit motivation and perseverance in study.

(iii) a provider of a entity comprised of people and processes that promotes a positive sense of Aboriginal identity (Jordan 1985:7).

The report revealed that there had been a 500% surge in the number of Indigenous students enrolled in universities, institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education since such programs began in 1973 (Bin-Sallik 1989). This increase was believed to be a result of the special/mature age entry programs and the support provided to Indigenous students through enclave programs. It is argued that, without the support of these programs, the majority of students would have been excluded from enrolling in higher education (Bin-Sallik 1989). Consistent with this view, Gale (1998) argues that Indigenous tertiary education had developed and expanded primarily as a result of enclave programs.

In relation to assessing the use of support services by Indigenous students in tertiary institutions, Jordan (1985) notes that the main problems reported by students were:

- Finance;
- Lack of motivation;
- Illness;
- Family problems;
- Accommodation;
- Lack of family support;
- Loneliness; and
- Change of goals (Jordan 1985 as cited in Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996:6).

The Jordan Report (1985) claimed that existing Indigenous co-ordinators, who lacked tertiary qualifications, had a role similar to that of a community worker. Their limited academic experience often left them feeling frustrated when communicating with academics. To complicate matters, the majority of the remaining staff members tended to be non-Indigenous people possessing either a masters or doctoral degree. In order to alleviate these problems, Jordan (1985) recommended than an 'Aboriginalization of staff policy' be implemented and, more importantly, that priority should be placed on creating a structure to assist Indigenous people in obtaining higher degrees (Bin-Sallik 1989:45). Jordan (1985) suggested that those Indigenous people already committed to an academic career should be 'released completely from employment and committee work' so that they could give full attention to studying a higher degree. Additionally, Jordan stated that appropriate funding should be allocated to these students (Bin-Sallik 1989; Jordan 1985).

In summary, the Jordan Report highlighted the role of ISUs in relation to the ATF model and stressed the necessity of their role in order to increase the tertiary participation rate of Indigenous students in higher education programs. Bin-Sallik (1989) argues that the report failed to discuss the relevance of all courses in terms of their relationship to the economic development of Indigenous Australians nationally. It is further claimed that the Jordan Report failed to identify whether the courses successfully met the objectives of students, both current and potential (Bin-Sallik 1989). Similarly, one could argue that the common theme of the Jordan Report reflected an ideology that assumed Indigenous students were both personally and academically deficient in one way or another (Gale 1998).

What the Jordan Report (1985) clearly offered was evidence of the importance of Indigenous Support Units in terms of the vital role they play in the educational experience of Indigenous students. Tripcony (2002b:48) comments on her experiences in higher education at the University of Melbourne in the early 1970s prior to the existence of Indigenous Support Units:

> Because there was no such thing as an Aboriginal support unit, we two Aboriginal students were required to report each term to the Commonwealth Department of Education where an education officer was assigned to monitor our progress and assist with any academic issues. Somehow, both of us managed to pass all subjects without needing to sit supplementary exams, and subsequently graduated.

ISUs have come into existence since the early 1970s and the support they offer to Indigenous student is a great improvement on the situation as recalled by Tripcony (2002b).

2.2.1.3 Transformation of Indigenous Support Units

Traditional university structures did not consider the needs of Indigenous students and staff however, over time, there was an obvious shift towards ISUs having a greater role in the broader university structure. Traditional university structures did not consider the needs of Indigenous students and staff. In addition, the introduction of research and teaching of Indigenous related units required ISUs to take on a greater academic role in universities. By 1995 there was a move to elevate ISUs to the status of Academic Schools for teaching and research. Whatman (1995) developed a model to demonstrate that these former Indigenous support 'enclaves' could evolve into faculties (refer to Table 2.3) however its application is not necessarily intuitive because ISUs differ from one to the next, each having its own identity and diversity of functions and responsibilities (Anderson et al. 1998). This is explained further by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) (2008b:2):

> Indigenous centres vary widely in size, budgets, programs, reporting lines within universities, the number of Indigenous academic and professional staff and the extent to which they are engaged in teaching, research, and governance… Whatever the model, Indigenous centres are central to Indigenous leadership and Indigenous education strategies in universities and responsible for core, ongoing services and programs.

Table 2.3 A continuum showing how an Indigenous support enclave can evolve into a faculty (Whatman 1995:41)

Enclave Model	Teaching/Research Centre	Faculty Status
Student support only No control over budget Full responsibility for Indigenous students' success or failure	Student support is main function Delegation of budget funds Large lecturing role in other faculties Research capacity Limited involvement in course planning Sharing of responsibility for Indigenous students' success or failure	Lecturing role is dominant Student support is maintained Full control over budget Active research and consultancy Full responsibility for Indigenous subjects Sharing of responsibility for Indigenous students' success

Table 2.3 highlights the differences between the roles and responsibilities of a unit that only plays a supporting role to one that operates as a teaching/research centre and then one that operates as a faculty. However, crucial factors such as financial obligations and the political structure of any given unit are not considered and present as barriers to such an evolution.

As the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous units develop, the terminology that accompanies such divisions needs also to change over time. Thus terminology will continue to change as ISUs morph into academic units offering disciplines of study in their own right. Only then will they be equivalent to non-Indigenous academic units within the institutions in which they are situated. As evident in the Whatman (1995) model, the term 'faculty' is likely to be the most current aspiration of these units.

2.2.1.4 Nature of Indigenous Support Units

According to the characteristics identified in Whatman's (1995) continuum (refer to Table 2.3), most current ISUs in Australia would be considered teaching/research centres, and some would possess the faculty status of sole support towards teaching and learning. It is a positive sign that Indigenous education is making strong progress in higher education. It is important, however, to ensure that those ISUs still at the enclave stage quickly progress along the continuum towards faculty status.

An examination of the literature pertaining to ISUs shows an emergence of a common negative and/or critical attitude held by many Indigenous past students in response to the experiences they have had with ISUs. Whilst the necessity of ISUs is widely acknowledged, the support they provide has not always been deemed adequate. There are many critics. Bourke, Burden and Moore (1996) conducted research that revealed one third of Indigenous students surveyed believed that poor or negative attitudes of university staff were often a problem. Further, the same sample of students also believed that attitudes, both positive and negative, had a direct impact on students and were therefore of importance, particularly to those students who were enrolled through an on-campus mode. It was further indicated that over half of the enrolled students had not felt welcome at the university, however, it is worth noting that ISUs do not control how Indigenous students are treated by the wider university community (Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996).

One third of the students surveyed by Bourke, Burden and Moore (1996) indicated that there was insufficient Indigenous Australian input to, and participation in, subjects that involved Indigenous history and culture. Consistent with this, there was a general consensus amongst Indigenous students that various courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in universities across Australia lacked cultural content and knowledge (Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996).

White et al. (2002) surveyed a group of university students and found that personal support from others was a critical aspect towards the realization of their vocational goals. Such support is primarily provided by family, fellow students, university staff and Indigenous Support Units (White et al. 2002).

In 1989 Bin-Sallik investigated the satisfaction of recipients of the services provided by 36 enclave programs. The types of services offered to students included special entry conditions, counselling services, extra individual and group tutorials, study space, student common room, special tutorials, library resource centre, student accommodation and child care facilities. The study also revealed that students in more than 20 of the 36 programs were not happy with the support services they received (Bin-Sallik 1989). The likelihood that these programs were becoming outmoded and needed to evolve into a unit that served more complex roles and needs, is therefore highly probable.

The concept of offering bridging courses was widely adopted by ISUs and they were seen as a means to assist Indigenous people into higher education. Tertiary institutions have developed several programs to attract Indigenous students. The most common interventions are the various alternative entry programs, which DEST (2005) claims over 75% of universities currently offer. These programs act as a bridging course to introduce students to higher education; provide a means to assess students' academic abilities; and are usually managed by the ISUs. The figure of 75% as provided by DEST (2005) is likely to be currently understated because all universities in Australia provide some form of ISU that offers support across all disciplines and contributes to the academic programs of the university (Coopes 2007). Offering alternative entry programs is therefore a basic function of ISUs.

Despite the fact that many bridging courses exist today, there is much criticism of them. For instance, Keeffe (1990:91) argues that bridging courses are 'permeated by myths and illusions'. It is further stated that the 'illusions of academic success, tertiary autonomy and self-management conceal the reality of program failure' (Keeffe 1990:91).

There is also debate centred on the best way to measure success or failure of Indigenous students in the higher education sphere. Keeffe (1990:92) believes that it is 'culturally inappropriate' to measure success using the same criteria as non-Indigenous students. However, in order to achieve parity in higher education with non-Indigenous people it is important that instruments used to measure the success or failure of students are consistently applied. Without such criteria data would be incomparable.

Keeffe (1990:93) maintains that the higher education sector reflects a 'closed shop' mentality:

> Many institutions are reluctant to leave themselves open to comparisons in an area in which policy initiatives are relatively recent, untried and unevaluated (Keeffe 1990:93, 94).

Given the disparity of views regarding ISUs it is unlikely that any single measure of effectiveness is appropriate. More likely, it is a combination of ISUs and numerous other factors that will determine the probability of Indigenous students achieving parity with non-Indigenous students.

2.2.1.5 Indigenous Academics

Another aspect of Indigenous participation in higher education is the number of Indigenous people who remain after postgraduate studies to teach in the institution. Literature shows a low percentage of Indigenous academics employed in universities. Both undergraduate and postgraduate Indigenous students could benefit if there were a greater number of Indigenous people in the academy (AVCC 2006a). The AVCC explains that this could be achieved through a 'mentoring and role-model perspective and assist in reducing the isolation experienced by many students' (AVCC 2006a:9).

One particular aspect that needs to be considered when analysing the dearth of Indigenous academics is the issue of job security. Limited term employment is more prevalent for Indigenous university staff than for non-Indigenous staff members (McConville 2002). One key reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that a significant

portion of Indigenous staff members are employed within Indigenous Support Units where there is less job security than in other sectors within universities. McConville (2002) estimates that 45.4% of ISU staff are employed on a limited term basis, compared to 32.7% for other areas of staff. Reasons behind this could include limitations to ISU budgets and an under-representation of Indigenous people with postgraduate qualifications, a normal requirement for academic positions. This means that Indigenous staff members do not enjoy the same security of tenure as their non-Indigenous counterparts and therefore have less job security. This is one example of the systematic discrimination evident in higher education (McConville 2002). The implications of this discrimination are significant:

> Contract employment places all staff in a position where they could be subjected to arbitrary action, but for Indigenous Australian staff it may limit their capacity to be free to disagree with senior colleagues, or to challenge university teaching and research from their own Indigenous perspective. The fact that non-Indigenous staff are more secure in positions within centres established for Indigenous Education questions whether opportunities are being created for genuine Indigenous control of Indigenous Education (McConville 2002:19).

Such discrimination provides further support to the contention that the higher education system continues to view Indigenous participation as a tokenistic gesture of goodwill. This has been referred to as the 'guest paradigm' – which occurs when Indigenous Australians have a presence in higher education, as students, teachers, researchers and advisors, that is 'dependent on the goodwill of those institutions, and of the governments which fund them' (McConville 2002:17). It is yet another example of how colonialism manifests in the lives of Indigenous Australians, in this case on those Indigenous people who are employed in the higher education sector.

NIPAAC (2002) further argues that the positions held by Indigenous Australians in tertiary institutions tend to be Indigenous identified positions located within Aboriginal teaching Centres, Research Centres and ISUs. It is claimed that these staff members do not 'compete with non-Indigenous people for lectureships in mainstream faculties' (NIPAAC 2002: 15). Consequently, it is reasonable to question whether such positions are tokenistic gestures by the various institutions that incorporate policies reflecting aspects of both assimilation and segregation. Alternately, it could be asked if it is a case

of Indigenous people feeling more culturally safe in an environment surrounded by other Indigenous Australians. The effects of institutional racism, as discussed earlier, may be reflected in such circumstances.

NIPAAC (2002:15) offers one solution in the form of an academic cadetship program to combat the low participation rates of Indigenous Australians in academia. Indigenous graduates would be paid to complete postgraduate studies in return for academic duties such as 'tutoring, guest lecturing, course coordination and lecturing.' Consequently, this would provide Indigenous graduates with various skills for academic employment, along with the necessary funding to complete their studies. Whilst this suggestion by NIPAAC (2002) is commendable, it could also be viewed as over-simplistic. Cadetships may not be attractive as they often offer an income similar to that provided by ABSTUDY but encompass a workload that would likely impinge upon academic study time.

The AVCC (2006a) notes that between 2001 and 2004 there was an increase of 16% in the number of Indigenous Australians employed in teaching and/or research roles in Australia (refer to Table 2.4). As reported by the AVCC, to achieve parity would require employment of almost 700 additional Indigenous Australians in similar roles. The number of 'other' staff was also increased by 34% between 2001 and 2004. The term 'other' is used to represent non-academic roles such as administrative positions. Therefore an additional 750 positions would need to be filled by Indigenous staff to achieve parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff (AVCC 2006a).

Table 2.4 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Higher Education Staff 2001-2004 and 2010 estimates at 2001-04 growth rates (AVCC 2006a:9)

	2001	2004	% change 2001-2004	2010 estimate	Parity number
Teaching and/or Research					
Indigenous	229	266	16%	350	960
Non-Indigenous	35,447	39,625	12%	47,000	
% Indigenous	0.64%	0.67%		0.74%	
Other					
Indigenous	323	434	34%	640	1180
Non-Indigenous	42,229	47,333	12%	57,000	
% Indigenous	0.76%	0.91%		1.11%	
All staff					
Indigenous	552	700	27%	990	
Non-Indigenous	77,676	86,958	12%	104,000	
% Indigenous	0.71%	0.80%		0.95%	

It could be the case that Indigenous people avoid positions in the tertiary education sector for two reasons. Firstly, Indigenous Australians are still in the process of gaining a solid knowledge base - Indigenous people in Australia are behind their non-Indigenous counterparts with respect to acquiring tertiary qualifications. This is evident when considering the fact that only 15% of Indigenous academic staff hold a Doctorate qualification, compared to 57% of non-Indigenous academic staff (IHEAC 2008a). Secondly, the cultural environment in higher education is often intimidating and unfamiliar. This therefore leads to a discussion on cultural safety in the higher education sector in Australia.

In summarising the literature on ISUs it is clearly evident that there is a strong need for their existence. Unlike most faculties that have existed in the fabric of various universities for many decades, or even centuries in some nations, ISUs are a relatively new phenomenon. They remain in their teething stage, as does the entire ideology of Indigenous participation in higher education. Determining how ISUs could better facilitate the needs of Indigenous students, and notably Indigenous postgraduate students, is of primary consideration in this inquiry.

2.2.1.6 Cultural safety

Cultural safety is a notion that extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. Cultural safety is apparent in:

> an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning together (Williams 1999:213 as cited in Bin-Sallik 2003:21 and Coopes 2007:53).

Coopes (2007:54) offers a further definition of cultural safety:

> Cultural safety is a process that involves service providers in critical reflection of the historical and socio-political factors which impact on the life chances of both themselves and their clients. Positions of power and powerlessness result from these factors. Recognition of this promotes respect for clients and avoids perceptions of them through the looking glass of deficit theories. This facilitates clients' input into defining what is safe for them.

There are three principles underpinning cultural safety – reflection, recognition and respect (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005). Cultural safety differs from cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness because it assumes no prior knowledge about cultural or ethnic diversity (Papps & Ramsden 1996). The concept of something being culturally unsafe derived from the premise that a service provided is deemed to be unsafe and/or dangerous to a minority group, often resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes (Coopes 2007).

The term cultural safety is one that all cultural groups can relate to. Importantly, it does not denote any form of special treatment (Bin-Sallik 2003). Bin-Sallik (2003:27) argues that Indigenous groups in higher education would benefit from campaigning under the aegis of cultural safety in decisions relating to:

a) designated Indigenous spaces;
b) culturally appropriate curricula;
c) culturally appropriate courses and behaviours; and
d) the need for Indigenous academics to teach Indigenous studies.

Cultural safety is 'an outcome that enables safe service to be defined by those who receive the service' (Bin-Sallik 2003:27).

2.2.2 Support specific to postgraduate students

2.2.2.1 Challenges Indigenous postgraduate students face

Weir (2000:7) argues that postgraduate education is 'a national necessity given that universities are the main providers of professional preparation and research training in Australia.'

The Australian Research Council argues that postgraduate education benefits the general community in the following ways:

- contributions to the quality of culture;
- direct applications of research results;
- graduates of high quality;
- increased institutional capacity for consulting, contract research and other service activities; and
- international links (Weir 2000:22).

Australia as a whole would benefit from an increase in Indigenous participation in postgraduate education. Indigenous and non-Indigenous key bodies such as the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) and the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) recognise such benefits and identify Indigenous postgraduate participation as a priority. IHEAC highlights the need to 'improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers' as a key priority (AVCC 2006a:3).

> The AVCC supports the targets set as a step in the direction of achieving the AVCC's Vision for 2020. The AVCC intends to implement strategies to bring about the achievement of these targets such as:
>
> - Earnings replacement scholarships for Indigenous people in current employment who are considering taking up postgraduate scholarships;

- Adequate supervision arrangements for Indigenous students, including appropriate cultural support; and
- Allowing for recognised prior learning (AVCC 2006a:3).

Commentary from Weir (2000) and AVCC (2006a) demonstrate that there is substantial support for improving the level of Indigenous postgraduate participation in the higher education sector. The support is not segregated to one culture or group of people as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous factions are supportive and identify it as a priority. This research relates to the issue of how best to implement strategies and facilitate positive change.

In an endeavour to attract and sustain Indigenous postgraduate students NIPAAC (2002) suggests establishing a national mentoring framework that would include a database of Indigenous graduates who could provide guidance and advice for Indigenous postgraduate students.

> The database would serve as a central point from which university staff dealing with Indigenous education could find people external to their institutions to act as supervisors or mentors or assist in any of the following ways: curriculum review, orientation of new students, dispute resolution, as 'welcome to country' speakers, guest lecturers, and as guest speakers at symposiums and conferences (NIPAAC 2002:16).

The noted recommendations are important considerations in investigating the low numbers of Indigenous postgraduate students.

2.2.2.2 Social Relationships

The social relationship shared by Indigenous students is an important point for discussion. In 1990 Bin-Sallik argued that Indigenous participation in higher education was a recent event (Rigney 2001:5). Weir (2000:x) made an identical statement one decade later but only mentioned postgraduate students; 'Indigenous entry into the Australian postgraduate sector of education is a recent event'. Regardless of whether one is commenting on the overall Indigenous participation in higher education, or Indigenous postgraduate students, the relative newness of Indigenous participation at these levels is evident. IHEAC (2007:3) suggests:

> The under-representation of Indigenous people in many facets of university life is unacceptable in a society in which education is essential for successful community participation and national development.

Weir (2000:24) adds that 'students entering this sector constitute a new social group in the tertiary education sector, the Australian Indigenous community, and the broader Australian community'. In view of this perspective offered by Weir (2000), the relationship shared between Indigenous postgraduate students and the importance of social groups in higher education needs further consideration. Weir (2000:26-27) explores this perspective through the idea that 'Indigenous postgraduates are establishing a "sense of place" in postgraduate education'. Further:

> 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 (Weir 2000:27).

A 'sense of place' is arguably important for Indigenous postgraduate students and feelings of isolation can surface when a 'sense of place' is not achieved.

2.2.2.3 Isolation

People experience isolation in different ways. This inquiry is specifically concerned with physical and psychological isolation of Indigenous postgraduate students. Physical isolation is:

> Concrete, tangible and actual and pertains to location, demographics, access to services, economics and difficulties in travel (Squires 2003:38).

Psychological isolation 'can manifest as a state of mind' (Squires 2003:32) and is just as powerful as physical isolation in terms of its impact on an individual. Psychological isolation is 'subjective, perceptual and constructed' and includes many aspects such as leadership and community self-image (Squires 2003:38).

The relationship between physical and psychological isolation is further explained by Squires (2003:33):

> There are often inter-relationships between physical and psychological isolation. Perceptions of psychological isolation can be strengthened if they coincide with manifest psychical isolation. Similarly, a sense of physical isolation can generate and nurture psychological isolation. Typically, 'isolation' as a phenomenon, is composed of a fluid mixture of both physical and psychological factors.

Due to the limited representation of Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia, in comparison to the total higher education population, a common feeling of isolation is often evident.

> This [isolation] makes it hard for many to keep in regular contact with peers, to share feelings of frustration as they reach an impasse in their understanding of complex theory and to discuss problems such as how to successfully apply for research grants or publish papers (DEST 2002:29).

Isolation is further described in the following passage:

> When Aboriginal students find themselves in the minority on university campuses and in some cases the sole Aboriginal students, the pursuit of a university education is a lonely and difficult experience (Coopes 2007:231).

Conferences such as The Indigenous Researchers' Forum have blossomed over the last decade. In 2002 DEST (2002) claimed that the annual Indigenous Researchers' Forum addressed some of the issues of isolation. However, it also argued that such events are low-budget and the financial restrictions often result in 'barriers to attendance' (DEST 2002:29). It could be claimed that these conferences are an absolute necessity and contribute to Indigenous research and, in particular, support Indigenous postgraduate students, however, they do not eliminate the recurring feeling of isolation that many students experience.

2.2.2.4 Voice

Many Indigenous people feel they are silenced by powers within the higher education sector. Nakata explains this is because:

> White academics still name the game, define the problems and propose the solutions to anything and everything Indigenous (as cited in Coopes 2007:199).

Fredericks (2006b:8-9) discusses her own experiences in higher education:

> When I used an Aboriginal experience, I was told that I was 'not objective' or criticised for my failure to be objective. What the system of higher education failed and still fails to recognise, is that it itself reflects a specific culture, even if the system does not name the culture it reflects. The criticism I received is really a reflection of the failure of those within the academy to examine their own biases and the bias of the system within which they work.

Fredericks (2006b:10) continues to provide a detailed account of her experiences and feelings on attempts to silence her:

> I have felt what it is like to be silenced. I have seen Aboriginal peoples left as the shadows of the speakers, as the speechless, the voiceless and the voice of absence. In this process we become re-written. We remain in the periphery and once again in the margin. We are again portrayed as 'object', and those who do the talking, the speaking about us, are again given the 'legitimacy' and further 'authority' to keep doing it, to keep making us 'voiceless objects'. These people are the 'cultural overseers' and the 'privileged interpreters' of Aboriginal peoples, issues and objects. In this, the places and spaces within higher education that used to speak about us become further sites of appropriation and objectification and not sites of emancipation, liberation, subjectivity, resistance and sites where we can individually and jointly speak. In making us speechless, voiceless, and marginal and maintaining cultural overseer positions, possible sites of radical openness and challenge are lost.

Interestingly, Fredericks (2006b) continues this argument by claiming that some educated Indigenous people replicate such behaviour. This poses an important question - if Indigenous people are being silenced by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in higher education, how is it that Indigenous Australians are making great progress in this field? If Fredericks' (2006b) claim is correct, then those Indigenous people who are not responsible for silencing fellow Indigenous Australians are indeed very vocal people with their thought processes so intact and valid that they are making amazing progress. It is these leaders of the Indigenous academic community who are paving the way for future generations of Indigenous academics and researchers.

Nakata (2007:2) provides a rather negative recollection of his time as a tertiary student:

> My initial success brought with it only subdued elation because of the sense of alienation I felt, in particular from much of the cross-cultural and Australian Indigenous components of my course. To me, they seemed to be less about 'me', 'us' or 'our situation' and more about what people with academic knowledge – the 'experts' – thought about these things. It was as if Indigenous people were an object of study viewed from the confines of a fixed vantage point.

Fortunately both Fredericks and Nakata managed to overcome these barriers in education. They are both renowned Indigenous scholars who are highly respected, however considerable thought should be given to the many Indigenous Australians who do not achieve the same outcomes.

2.2.2.5 Supervision of Indigenous Postgraduate Students

The issues pertaining to supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students attract considerable debate. On the one hand, institutional politics and regulations require supervisors to fit a particular mould. On the other, it is reasonable to argue that Indigenous knowledges are an important factor to research projects that involve Indigenous people. The task of finding the balance between acknowledging the conventions governing universities and incorporating Indigenous knowledge is a difficult one, and one that poses many problems.

Literature suggests that Indigenous postgraduate students feel perturbed when directed towards non-Indigenous "Indigenous research experts" (Hart & Whatman 1998). Fredericks (1996) explains:

> There are issues still of some non-Indigenous people being regarded as Indigenous experts and Indigenous students being directly referred to them as supervisors. There have been instances where this has resulted in conflicts and where the students have felt uneasy about disclosing information for fear that the supervisor would misuse information for their own purposes (as cited in Hart & Whatman 1998:online).

Alternately, Indigenous scholar Coopes (2007:201) advocates that many non-Indigenous people provide 'appropriate and effective supervision for Indigenous postgraduate students'.

In considering the findings of Hart and Whatman (1998) and Coopes (2007) further, there is a level of overlap evident. It is common for Indigenous postgraduate students to request a suitable and highly qualified person from the community to supervise their research, particularly, as Hart and Whatman (1998) note, when the research relates to Indigenous topics – rather than Indigenous researchers. University regulations, however,

often prevent any formal recognition of such arrangements (Hart & Whatman 1998). Coopes' (2007) finding is focused on Indigenous researchers – rather than Indigenous topics. So, unless the research topic is specifically Indigenous, there is a need for supervision that transcends the ethnic background of the supervisor.

The accessibility and availability of Indigenous supervisors able to assist Indigenous researchers is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent problems Indigenous people face when attempting to undertake postgraduate studies. The following statement acknowledges this, and infers the need for culturally aware non-Indigenous supervisors:

> One factor that may impede an increase in number of Indigenous researchers is a dearth of Indigenous supervisors and of non-Indigenous supervisors with an understanding of ways of knowing and doing (DEST 2002:29).

A series of recommendations have been made by various government departments in relation to this matter. One such recommendation involves credentialing Indigenous people to act as co-supervisors, despite them not possessing appropriate tertiary qualifications (DEST 2002). This concept is explained further:

> Institutional structures can be altered to recognise the expertise that exists in communities and to incorporate this expertise. An initial step could be the recognition of a co-supervisory role for community people who could contribute to the discussion related to culturally sensitive issues, appropriate methodologies and consultation processes (Coopes 2007:202).

Undeniably such action could be viewed as tokenistic and of little benefit to students because the world of academia has a language of its own where only the initiated can communicate fluently.

2.2.2.6 Support provided by Indigenous communities and families to Indigenous higher education students

Family is an important aspect of Indigenous culture. Eckermann et al. (2006:87) explains that:

> Family ties and extended kin networks based in mutual respect and reciprocity are cornerstones of Aboriginal cultural vitality.

Noting the socio-economic indicators commonly associated with Indigenous Australians it becomes clear that higher education is a new phenomenon to Indigenous Australians as a group. In fact, most Indigenous Australians participating in higher education are the first in their families to do so (Brabham et al. 2002; Kippen, Ward & Warren 2006). This means that 'the ability of the family to provide some of the social support required is diminished' (Kippen, Ward & Warren 2006:4).

Brabham et al. (2002) explain that, in the past, Indigenous higher education students have had huge family responsibilities to contend with while studying, stating that they have not only had to worry about their own welfare, but also that of their immediate family and other dependent relatives.

> As mature-aged Indigenous people, these potential students were also most likely to have family and cultural responsibilities within a domestic situation framed by all the lower socio-economic factors so familiar to Indigenous Australians (Brabham et al. 2002:13).

This is an added burden on Indigenous students that could potentially impact the academic progress of Indigenous people participating in higher education.

Brabham et al. (2002:13) claim the message that Indigenous students bring home to their families and communities has changed - from 'Look, I can do it, so can you!' - to one less positive. Behind this change in perspective is a reality that suggests a more pragmatic view based on the limited financial assistance available to mature-age Indigenous students with broad family responsibilities.

Indigenous higher education students often find themselves without academic role models. Kippen, Ward and Warren (2006) argue that consideration should be given to the establishment of a program specifically designed to provide mentorship to Indigenous students. An additional suggestion they make is that 'it is desirable, if not essential, for Indigenous students attending the university to be put in touch with the local Indigenous community' (Kippen, Ward & Warren 2006:6). However this suggestion is flawed as the authors have not taken into consideration the fact that Indigenous students present with their own set of unique cultural beliefs, customs and knowledges. Whilst the local Indigenous community may be able to provide a sense of belonging to some Indigenous

students, in reality many students would not feel a sense of kinship with them and thus would not associate with them.

It is important to also look at the onus of responsibility pertaining to learning outcomes for Indigenous students. NIPAAC (2002) suggests that, in order to improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students, universities need to develop relationships with ISUs and Indigenous communities. However, this research will seek to place greater onus on ISUs, and the universities that house these units, than on Indigenous communities, as suggested by NIPAAC (2002). The supporting argument lies in the fact that Indigenous community members may have limited knowledge of tertiary institutions. It is expected that ISU staff members have both cultural/community knowledge and are familiar with tertiary procedures, rules and regulations. Additionally, as Indigenous students come from diverse places in Australia, the local Indigenous community is not necessarily going to be their 'mob'. With different cultural identities, languages, customs and beliefs, it is unreasonable to expect that one community can effectively speak for all Indigenous students within any given institution.

Overall, the support that families and communities provide Indigenous students participating in higher education varies from one situation to the next. Whilst many Indigenous families and communities may want to offer students considerable support, there is a very real possibility that they may simply not know how to. Greater numbers of Indigenous Australians completing higher education studies, and in particular postgraduate qualifications, would hopefully create more role models in the community.

2.2.3 Financial Support

2.2.3.1 Financial Conditions

Financial assistance is vital in 'promoting equal opportunity in higher education (Coopes 2007:174). In 2006 the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee conducted research titled the *Australian University Student Finances Survey*. Of particular interest was the

finding that Indigenous university students experience greater financial difficulty than non-Indigenous students (AVCC 2007).

Indigenous students in employment were found to work more hours than non-Indigenous students; with Indigenous undergraduates working 3 hours per week more than non-Indigenous undergraduates; and Indigenous postgraduate students working 3.6 hours per week more than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Despite working longer hours, Indigenous students were found to rely more on income support from scholarships, Centrelink payments and services offered by student organisations; and they were less likely to rely on assistance from other people, except for childcare. The study also established that Indigenous students were more likely to have acquired a loan to assist with their studies. On average, these loans were significantly higher than the loans of non-Indigenous students (AVCC 2007).

Of key importance was the finding that 72.5% of Indigenous students who participated in the research indicated that their financial situation was a worry to them, compared to 52.5% of non-Indigenous students. Further, 25.4% of Indigenous students indicated that they were regularly deprived of food or other necessities because they could not afford them, compared to 12.8% of non-Indigenous students (AVCC 2007).

The *Australian University Student Finances Survey* (AVCC 2007) also found that Indigenous students had more outside commitments than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Of the research participants, 47.8% of Indigenous students were aged over 30 years. This is comparable to 30.2% of non-Indigenous students being aged over 30 years (AVCC 2007).

Indigenous students were more likely (18.8%) than non-Indigenous students (6.4%) to be the sole carer of another person and were almost twice as likely (30.2%) to have dependent children as non-Indigenous students (16.6%). Further, 40.3% of Indigenous postgraduates indicated that they had regularly missed class because of work commitments (AVCC 2007).

The study also found other parity concerns. For example, Indigenous students were more likely (3.8%) to be enrolled in bridging courses than non-Indigenous students (0.5%); more likely to be enrolled in diploma courses (4.7%) compared to non-Indigenous students (1.7%); and significantly less likely (18.8%) to be undertaking postgraduate courses than non-Indigenous students (38.9%) (AVCC 2007).

Whilst this study stated no findings in terms of the amount of money Indigenous postgraduate students spent on computer and related equipment, it did stipulate that Indigenous undergraduate students spent more money ($190 per year on average) than non-Indigenous undergraduate students ($160 per year on average) on computer related equipment (AVCC 2007).

Further equity concerns emerged in the finding that 15% of Indigenous students identified as having a disability or condition that affected their studies. This is comparable to only 6.1% of non-Indigenous students (AVCC 2007).

These findings from the 2006 *Australian University Student Finances Survey* (AVCC 2007) indicate that the financial environment of Indigenous students was significantly different to, and arguably more challenging than, that of non-Indigenous students. Literature provided by Coopes (2007:174) supports this claim:

> Difficulty in financing the costs associated with higher education has been and continues to be, a barrier to Aboriginal Australians entering the higher education arena.

2.2.3.2 ABSTUDY

The Commonwealth Government's ABSTUDY Scheme is the main source of income support available to Indigenous university students. In 1969 the Commonwealth Government of Australia introduced the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme, which was the precursor to ABSTUDY. Its implementation was designed to financially assist

Indigenous Australians 'to achieve their educational, social and economic objectives through financial assistance to study' (DEST 2007a:foreword).

Further, DEST (2007a:foreword) lists the main objectives of the ABSTUDY scheme are to:

- encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available;
- promote equity of educational opportunity; and
- improve educational outcomes.

The ABSTUDY Living Allowance is designed 'for assistance in meeting the day-to-day living costs of the student' (DEST 2007a:71.1). Unlike other components of the ABSTUDY Scheme, Masters and Doctoral students receive a different rate of pay to Bachelor, Honours and other students. In this case, a higher rate of Living Allowance, which is based on the Australian Postgraduate Award Scheme (DEST 2007a), is paid to students. In 2007 the Living Allowance rate for Masters and Doctorate students was $19,616 per annum, or $752.40 per fortnight. The standard rate of pay for all other university students over the age of 21 was a mere $429.80 per fortnight (Centrelink 2007a). Hence there is substantial difference in the financial support available to Indigenous postgraduate students, dependent on the level of study undertaken.

The Living Allowance is means tested, making it ideal only for students who participate in limited or no paid work. ABSTUDY may also include an Incidentals Allowance, the purpose of which, as noted by DEST (2007a:82.1), is 'to assist students and Australian Apprentices to meet expenses associated with commencement of study in the approved course'. Notably, the Incidentals Allowance is not restricted to Indigenous Australian postgraduate students, and the basic rate is fixed for all courses. Unlike other components of the ABSTUDY scheme, the Incidentals Allowance is not means tested (DEST 2007a).

Indigenous Masters and Doctorate students are entitled to a one-off payment to assist with the printing and preparation of students' theses. Again, Honours students are not

included in this section of the ABSTUDY Scheme. This is surprising considering that Honours students also have to bear the costs associated with producing a thesis.

ABSTUDY also provides a fares allowance to assist students when undertaking necessary travel for education. The Fares Allowance is not means tested. It is available to all Indigenous students and does not differ for postgraduate students (DEST 2007a). The Fares Allowance is designed to assist students who reside a considerable distance from the institution in which they are enrolled, notably external and block-release students.

2.2.3.3 HECS

The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) commenced in 1989 (Fed 2007). The higher education system is set up in a way that enables Australian universities to offer Commonwealth supported places to Australian citizens, New Zealand citizens and Australian permanent visa holders. The Federal Government designates a specified number of Commonwealth supported places to the higher education providers every year (DEEWR 2008). Students who hold Commonwealth supported positions are required to contribute to some of the costs of their education, whilst the Australian Government also covers some of the cost (DEEWR 2008). They may choose to defer the payment of these expenses, opting to repay them at a later date through the Australian taxation system.

Literature indicates that HECS may deter Indigenous students from enrolling in higher education due to the future burden it places on students and their families when it must be paid back. For instance, the West Australian Aboriginal Council on Higher Education (WAACHE) noted that the decline in some course areas was linked to changes in HECS. Literature suggests that Indigenous Australians have not welcomed increases to HECS:

> Increased debt through HECS or other loans, creates additional burdens on Indigenous families already struggling financially. Continuing rises in HECS fees, combined with restrictions to ABSTUDY, has compounded the financial obstacles restricting Indigenous participation in higher education (WAACHE 2004:7.3).

Interestingly, Indigenous Australians tend to have a considerably lower proportion of HECS unpaid than non-Indigenous people (Birch & Miller 2006).

2.2.4 Contemporary Contexts of Indigenous Education

The literature that considers the current state of Indigenous involvement in Higher Education in Australia reflects the notion that it remains stagnant. In recent years Eckermann et al. (2006:51) have stated:

> Even today, when racist legislation is no longer in force to keep Aboriginal children out of school, serious problems continue to exist in terms of schools' hidden curricula evident in teacher training and teacher attitude, testing and evaluation criteria, classroom organisation and curriculum content, parental involvement and decision-making in school policies and approaches.

Other literature suggests there is a strong relationship between politics and Indigenous education. Doyle (2005:7) argues that:

> To be involved in Indigenous education and research at any level is a political act that demands the constant commitment to critically reflective practice and process. It is a political act based on personal integrity, humility, respect and an open minded and open hearted willingness to learn.

Rights and access to education are of critical importance to contemporary Indigenous Australia. The issue of Indigenous rights plays a key role in education for Indigenous Australians and an interesting correlation can be formed between rights and control. Some literature (Herbert 2002; Rigney 2003) suggests that Indigenous Australians are often said to be allocated such rights in higher education, however the right to control their own academic futures is yet to be achieved. Rigney (2003:76) draws attention to the fact that 'full transition of Indigenous jurisdiction, control and authority over resources, structures and administration in Indigenous education is yet to be realised'.

These views are further supported by the data pertaining to Indigenous access and parity rates (refer to Figure 1.1) discussed under section 1.2. It was noted that whilst the parity rate is increasing, the access rate is falling; so not only are there issues with unrealised transition, as noted by Rigney (2003), but the rate of populating a pool of emergent

graduates to assist in the transition process is decreasing. Again a link can be drawn from this outcome back to the Howard government's funding cuts - and their impacts become more obvious.

Consistent with these views, Herbert (2002) claims that there is often considerable rhetoric regarding the amount of commitment the university communities have in terms of improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Herbert (2002:25) argues that 'there are few universities where such commitment amounts to more than "talk"'. Additional resources to provide extra support for Indigenous students are rarely allocated by faculties or universities, and funding for ISUs is more typically provided by the Commonwealth Government (Herbert 2002). Herbert (2002:26) explains that ISUs are often not strongly funded:

> While there is a general assumption, within the Indigenous and wider community, that such funding is allocated, in total, to the Indigenous Support Unit, this is not always the reality. There are, in fact, some universities where there remains a degree of resistance to such units.

Similarly, Rigney (2003:78) contends 'the lack of success in education for Indigenous students is at crisis point.' For considerable time, jurisdiction over Indigenous education has been assumed by all forms of Australian Governments (Federal, State and Territory), yet the crisis in Indigenous education remains prominent today (Rigney 2003).

The support provided by qualified Indigenous academics is crucial to Indigenous postgraduate students. However, there is not enough of it currently available.

> It is important that Aboriginal students progress through undergraduate to postgraduate study and into the staff of universities. It is only when this happens that Aboriginal voices will come to have an influence in academia (Coopes 2007:199).

The necessity for Indigenous people to gain tertiary qualifications is vital and a key component in the quest for self-determination amongst Indigenous Australians. CAPA (1997:33) explain:

> Self determination will never be a reality until Indigenous people have the right to determine their own priorities and allocate their resources accordingly.

This position is echoed by Nakata (2007) who advocates the need for Indigenous students to receive greater support than they are currently receiving:

> The challenges they face need much more attention in curriculum and assessment design. Many Indigenous students in higher education are intellectually lonely. They must layer in the meanings from another unrepresented world and process these alongside disciplinary concepts and meanings. In some cases, they do not even articulate this aspect of their learning to anyone, for they can find no spaces in which to do so, not in the content of their courses, not in tutorials and not in assessment (Nakata 2007:224).

Several questions arise from Nakata's statement. In order to provide adequate support for all Indigenous higher education students, how would an institution manage to combat such intellectual loneliness? If students are not articulating such thoughts, what environment would best suit the needs of the students to enable adequate expression?

The current situation is one that differs tremendously in comparison to the 1970s and 1980s. Indigenous people in Australia now have representatives from the community who possess higher education degrees at all levels. Further, in 2003 it was noted that there were 15 Indigenous Professors, consisting of 4 males and 11 females (Bin-Sallik 2003). Contemporary Indigenous Australia is one which is increasingly empowering itself with knowledge.

Bin-Sallik (2003) calls for universities to appoint an Indigenous Pro-Vice Chancellor in every university in Australia.

> Until we have our own Indigenous Pro-Vice Chancellors to oversee Indigenous issues, universities will continue to make decisions on our behalf and to date these decisions have not all been positive. This is not a new concept (Bin-Sallik 2003:27).

This suggestion proposed by Bin-Sallik (2003) is one that arguably has potential to become globally popular. For instance, in New Zealand one university has a position titled Pro-Vice Chancellor Maori (Bin-Sallik 2003). Whilst this approach has merit, it is important that the positions should only be filled when appropriate people with suitable qualifications are found. With only 15 Indigenous Professors in 2003, and over 30 institutions in Australia, a series of problems could potentially arise. Tokenistic gestures that are designed to set Indigenous people up for failure should be avoided. It is important to promote Indigenous people with suitable qualifications to key positions.

In summary it is evident that the relative newness of this phenomenon calls for further investigation. Key themes of importance emerging from the literature are cultural awareness, supervision and the function and impacts of ISUs.

2.3 Current Government Policy - A Crossroad for Change?

In order to better understand the political environment that Indigenous Australians currently experience, comment on three government initiatives will be provided. These initiatives are: the Northern Territory Intervention; the Apology to the Stolen Generations; and the 2020 Summit.

2.3.1 Northern Territory Intervention

The issue of intervention policies is one area that requires careful consideration. The initiative became a policy that the Howard Government first introduced on the 21st June, 2007 when it was announced that it was a 'national emergency response to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory' from abuse and violence (Connelly 2008:1). The timing of such an initiative was primarily political – the Howard government was facing re-election or the loss of power to their political opponents – the Labor government. Even today debate continues as to whether it is a positive or negative policy. However, when it was first implemented, the Northern Territory Intervention caused significant anger and hostility from much of the Australian community.

> The previous government's intervention was criticised as paternalistic because it was not based on adequate consultation and the quarantining of welfare payments was seen as discriminatory (Smith, T. 2008:4).

The bulk of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians understood and accepted the basis for the intervention, believing that the protection and safety of children was

imperative (Connelly 2008). However, it was the methods employed that deeply angered people.

> Many held reservations about intervention measures involving changes to land tenure, the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act and the quarantining of the welfare payments of all people living in the targeted communities, regardless of their circumstances (Connelly 2008:2).

Though it is still in existence, the emphasis placed on the Northern Territory Intervention appears to be have been significantly lessened since the Rudd Government won the 2007 election. The Rudd Government has successfully shifted attention, through use of the media, from the Northern Territory Intervention to other Indigenous matters that encouraged the population to believe that the Federal Government was offering a new way of thinking about Indigenous issues. This new philosophy centres on change and, specifically, the active inclusion of Indigenous people in Australian society.

2.3.2 Apology to the Stolen Generations

It has taken 220 years for the Australian Government to acknowledge past wrongs and offer an apology to the Stolen Generations (refer to the Federal Parliament's full apology to the Stolen Generations at Appendix 7). In February 2008 the newly elected Rudd Government made the Apology a top priority by offering it as the first act of business of the 42nd Parliament (Gillard 2008). The Apology was moved as a parliamentary resolution on the 13th February 2008 (Smith, T. 2008). The formal Apology took only four minutes to execute but was followed by a 20 minute speech by Prime Minister Rudd (Corntassel & Holder 2008; Johnston 2008).

Prime Minister Rudd called for the turning of a 'new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future' (Corntassel & Holder 2008:14). Deputy Prime Minister Gillard stated:

> The historic act of saying sorry after decades of division and despair heralds the opportunity for a new beginning for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to reconcile and move forward as one nation (Gillard 2008:online).

> Education is the foundation upon which every individual builds his or her participation in society, builds their capacity to work and their ability to lead a healthy and active life. There is much work to be done to close the gap in education (Gillard 2008:online).

The Prime Minister's Apology policy appears to have been well received, attracting considerable praise (Corntassel & Holder 2008). It was greeted with 'relief, pride, gratitude and pleasure' (Smith, T. 2008:3). Notably, the speech resulted in a standing ovation (Smith, T. 2008). The Apology is 'a statement of historic national significance' (Smith, T. 2008:3). Prominent Indigenous leader Mick Dodson was quoted as saying 'It's the right thing to do, it's the proper thing to do, it's the decent thing to do, and it ought to ennoble all of us' (Stern 2008:13).

Despite the general consensus reflecting many positive views, it is important to note that the apology does have its critics. For example, Corntassel & Holder (2008:14) provide the following statement:

> Prime Minister Rudd's 2008 apology, while offering a new opening for indigenous self-determination, has thus far de-linked the act of apologizing from any possibility of restitution or reparation … the premium that state officials placed on maintaining absolute political and legal authority over indigenous peoples made it impossible for them to offer genuine apologies and so made it impossible for them to initiate a process of genuine reconciliation.

Similarly, *The New York Times* newspaper reported that 'Mr Rudd's apology will not have gone far enough because he has ruled out setting up a government fund to compensate the victims of the policies that led to the Stolen Generations' (Johnston 2008:14). This concept of compensation presents many difficulties. There is no doubt that the Australian legal system is designed in a way that encourages 'victims' of injustice to seek adequate compensation. In this case, Stolen Generation members may face considerable impediments if they attempt to seek financial compensation. Some may be content with the apology, the recognition that they have suffered at the hands of past Australian Governments. However, it is also reasonable to provide others the opportunity to present their case before the Australian courts. At the moment, the Rudd Government has not provided adequately for this to occur.

2.3.3 Australia 2020 Summit

The 2020 Summit was held in Canberra on the 19th - 20th April, 2008 (Hagan 2008). Prime Minister Rudd invited 1000 delegates for what could be described as a massive brain storming opportunity. Ten groups of one hundred people were formed according to their areas of expertise. The Future of Indigenous Australians delegates discussed numerous issues relating to Indigenous Australians and the future.

Renowned Indigenous academic, film maker and 2006 NAIDOC Person of the Year Stephen Hagan was one of the delegates. In his fortnightly column in *The Koori Mail* newspaper, Hagan wrote of the 'opportunities lost' (Hagan 2008:14). He explained that the first day of the Summit resulted in progress, however the following morning saw the mood of delegates change to 'dismay and outrage' as Indigenous Cape York leader Noel Pearson was reported by a local newspaper as saying that the group of delegates were struggling to come up with any big ideas that he hadn't already heard. Pearson was also noted as not attending the Summit on the second, and final, day (Hagan 2008:14). Further, Hagan (2008:14) explained that Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin:

> took advantage of strained relations between members by misrepresenting our expressed views on the big-ticket items of a Treaty and Futures Fund to the full assembly of 1000 delegates and a large national audience viewing proceedings live on ABC TV.

Education was one aspect discussed at the Summit, however the focus was more on educating children rather than adults. For example, a priority theme of the 2020 Summit called for 'a major focus on early childhood development and the continued well-being of children to develop to their full potential' (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2008:26). Similarly, one of the 'top ideas' that the 2020 Summit delivered was to:

> Develop a new education framework to give real choice for Indigenous children to get high quality education, including to attend boarding schools or hostels, enabled by a combination of ABSTUDY, private school scholarships and government funding' (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2008:27).

Further, an additional recommendation reads:

> A national Indigenous Knowledge centre network should be established to provide support to regional knowledge centres. Regional centres reflect that each Indigenous group is

> different and has different knowledge to preserve and to develop (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2008:27).

This concept of an 'Indigenous Knowledge centre' may have some affiliation with the higher education sector; however the recommendation is not specifically applicable to Indigenous postgraduate students.

As the 2020 Summit only occurred quite recently, Prime Minister Rudd is yet to announce which initiatives he will address. It is therefore currently difficult to provide any in-depth analysis relating to the success of Summit outcomes, although it can be stated that the 2020 Summit appears to have concentrated on areas such as early childhood, and literacy and numeracy proposals for primary and secondary children. It seems that Indigenous participation in the higher education sector has been largely ignored. This is also somewhat surprising considering many of the delegates were Indigenous people studying and/or working in higher education. It is critical that the Government addresses Indigenous education at a grassroots level, focusing on improving the education outcomes and experiences of Indigenous children, however it must not overlook the fact that Indigenous Australian adults also have a basic fundamental right to an education.

2.3.4 A New Phase

Having briefly examined the main outcomes of the Apology to the Stolen Generations, the Northern Territory Intervention and the 2020 Summit, it is appropriate to ask 'Are we in a new phase?' and 'Is Australia at a cross-road for change?'

There is no doubt that the Rudd Government has been more inclusive than the previous government and Indigenous people are now more involved in decision making processes. The Rudd Government is dedicated to improving the lives of Indigenous people in Australia, showing substantially more initiative than the previous Coalition Government. These are positive indicators that signify Australia is at a cross-road where change is a possibility.

However, there are issues that require time to assess - the implementation of ideas evolving out of the 2020 Summit, and whether the Government continues to deny the Stolen Generations compensation for past injustices suffered as a result of previous Governments are just two such issues. Time is also needed to determine whether the Government establishes an Indigenous representative body to better represent the voices and opinions of Indigenous Australians following the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) by the former Howard Government. Hagan (2008:14) suggests that a national representative body is necessary:

> One thing that is patently clear to me after witnessing events unfold at the 2020 Forum [Summit] and the debate that raged between media-savvy Indigenous leaders who continue to spitefully attack one another post-2020 Forum, is the urgent need to reinstate a national representative body.
>
> Until we have a representative body with a mandate from Indigenous voters to speak on our behalf, the Government will continue to laugh at our fractured, unelected leadership as viewed farcically in the national media – and play wedge politics to their convenience.

It is imperative that, as a group of knowledgeable, respectable and determined people, Indigenous Australians stop the in-fighting, the political dramas and the 'power tripping', if there is to be truly significant progress. Many Indigenous people believe that they cannot expect the Federal Government to listen to their ideas when they are often not willing to listen to each other.

2.4 Indigenous Research and Knowledges

In this final section of the literature review Indigenous research and knowledges will be considered for their relationship to the issue of postgraduate students and their cultural safety inside higher education institutions.

The Australian Government has invested heavily in terms of developing Western knowledge capital throughout its universities. The IHEAC (2008a) calls for a similar investment in Indigenous knowledges so that both of Australia's knowledge systems operate successfully in higher education:

> Bringing Indigenous and western knowledge systems into the space is an essential infrastructure task to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage (IHEAC 2008a:4).

Indigenous Australian society has possessed it own deep and intrinsic system of knowledge from the beginning of time. For this reason, the concepts of Indigenous research and knowledges are ancient. However, in the context to a Western Education system, it becomes apparent that the application and reference to Indigenous research and knowledges are relatively new phenomena. Schools of thought that relate to these matters have begun to develop over the past decade. It is therefore reasonable to state that these fundamental concepts are somewhat scarce in the literature currently available.

Up until the 1960s, Indigenous content in higher education was typically taught through disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and linguistics (Nakata 2007). During the early 1970s there was a movement towards research areas that concentrated on improving social conditions for Indigenous Australians, with education and health high on the research agenda. There were also increased levels of interest in the impacts of colonialism and its practice on Indigenous people in Australia, along with new ways to understand Indigenous histories, cultures and philosophies (Nakata 2007).

Nakata (2004) further explains the relationship between Indigenous Studies, education and communities:

> For us, the field of Indigenous Studies is part of a broader landscape that includes not just Indigenous Studies, but higher education for Indigenous students, and the rebuilding of Indigenous communities and futures. For us, these are not entirely separable (Nakata 2004:1-2).

The importance of this relationship cannot be understated and is the underpinning foundation of this section.

2.4.1 Indigenous Knowledges

There is no single clear definition of Indigenous knowledges, particularly as the term's use is quickly growing (Sillitoe, Dixon & Barr 2005). Depending on the field of concern

or investigation, there are a range of alternatives specifically appropriate that are used globally. These include rural people's knowledge, Indigenous technical knowledge, traditional environmental knowledge and local agricultural knowledge. They 'all share a certain common semantic load and address the same broad issues' (Sillitoe, Dixon & Barr 2005:3). Importantly, Sillitoe, Dixon and Barr (2005:3) explain that 'they relate to any knowledge held collectively by a population, informing interpretation of the world.'

Indigenous knowledges is a concept that is inclusive of traditional, contemporary, recorded, artistic, oral, creative and written knowledge. It can present itself in various forms including photographs, stories, oral histories, films, geographic and genealogical information, and information about plants and animals (Janke 2005).

The concept of Indigenous knowledges is relatively new in Australia. Nakata (2004:4) states that early knowledge production was all about Indigenous Australians, yet had nothing to do with Indigenous Australians – 'it was quite external to our society and concerns.' In other words, non-Indigenous people sought to produce knowledge about Indigenous Australians. In doing so, they failed to consult with Indigenous society and failed to understand Indigenous concerns. It was external to Indigenous Australian society as it employed Western-based philosophies that were centred on Western schools of thought and knowledge. Indigenous knowledges were not truly represented.

It is also stated by Nakata (2004:7) that 'Western education demands an ongoing denial or exclusion of our own knowledges, epistemologies, and traditions and a further co-option into a system' that is different to the Indigenous system; that occupies our historical treatment and continuing position; that cannot understand or represent Indigenous histories, knowledges, experience and expression of our reality; and restricts Indigenous representations and understanding in its re-presentations. The exclusion of Indigenous knowledges, particularly because they fail to conform to Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies, is a form of cultural violence (Coopes 2007).

The removal of Indigenous knowledges can be extremely detrimental to Indigenous communities. Janke (2005:101) explains:

> When Indigenous knowledge is removed from an Indigenous community, the community loses control over the way it is represented and used. These systems of knowledge may have evolved over many years and are uniquely bound up with Indigenous peoples' customs, beliefs, traditions, land and resources.

L.T. Smith (2001:100) believes that Indigenous Knowledges are more at risk now than ever before.

> The struggle for the validity of Indigenous Knowledges may no longer be over the recognition that Indigenous peoples have ways of viewing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge (Smith, L.T. 2001:104).

On the other hand, Nakata (2004:12) proposes that the arbitrator between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding is the 'ontological world of Western knowledge systems', not Indigenous people or academics. The differing perspectives between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges are further explained:

> To speak broadly about scholarly and intellectual practice in the field of Indigenous Studies from the Indigenous perspective is to speak about it quite differently from non-Indigenous academics who speak from within the disciplinary intersections where their knowledge production and practice takes up issues about us, our historical experience, and our contemporary position (Nakata 2004:1).

Literature suggests that many non-Indigenous people benefited through Western systems of education labelling them the experts in subject areas that directly relate to Indigenous Australian studies. Nakata (2007:220) comments on the relationship between Indigenous scholars and Western disciplines:

> Indigenous students and academics are all also grounded in Western disciplines, through historical experience, through Christianisation, through the English language, through interventions of and interactions with colonial and contemporary institutions, through formal education, through subscription to the law, through subscription to the world of work, to democratic values, through everyday living, through use of technology, through popular culture, and so on.

There is no escaping the endless ways in which Indigenous people are grounded in Western disciplines. Nakata (2007:220) comments that we may choose to 'accept it, refuse it, assimilate it, domesticate it, use it or subvert it'. Regardless of which of Nakata's (2007) options we choose to apply, we cannot escape it. He claims we shift our

reasoning between these frames or reference points and in turn use them to guide us in 'viewing, understanding and knowing the world' (Nakata 2007:220).

Knowledge that is produced about Indigenous people, along with all knowledge that Indigenous people produce is 'added to the Western corpus' (Nakata 2004:12). It is therefore 'reorganised and studied via the disciplines of Western knowledge' (Nakata 2004:12). Nakata goes on to add that 'it is important to think about the space that the academy provides for bringing in Indigenous knowledges, histories, experiences and perspectives' and for Indigenous people to utilise this space for their own objectives. Nakata (1998:4) also highlights the complexity of how to 'speak back to the knowledges that have been formed around what is perceived as Indigenous positioning within Western worldviews' (as cited in Fredericks 2006b:9).

Having briefly examined the concepts underpinning Indigenous knowledges, it is now appropriate to apply this to Indigenous research.

2.4.2 Indigenous Research

Western research may be viewed as 'primarily secular,' whilst Indigenous ways of knowing tend to be 'inherently spiritual' (Walker 2000:33) – the contrast between the two often causing confusion, and is the centre of debate amongst scholars. L.T. Smith (2001:1) discusses the lack of willingness to accept and embrace the concept of research by many Indigenous groups, describing the word 'research' as 'one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary'. Research has, at times, been extremely detrimental to Indigenous Australian communities (Tozer 2006).

The concept of research is described as the 'core activity of universities' (AVCC 2006a:15). Further, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) deems quality Indigenous research 'to be a cornerstone of Indigenous higher education' (AVCC 2006a:15). IHEAC noted the importance of Indigenous participation in research, as illustrated in its priorities:

> IHEAC Priority 3: Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers (AVCC 2006a:15).

Researchers including Abdullah and Stringer (1997) and Fredericks (2006b) believe that Indigenous Australians are the most researched group of people in the world. But the outcomes of research on the lives of Indigenous people are often questionable (Abdullah & Stringer 1997). Coopes (2007) points out that research should be *for* Indigenous people and communities, as opposed to being *about* them. Herbert (n.d:5) quotes Rigney (1996:4) in her argument that it is imperative for Indigenous Australians to engage in Indigenous-based research activities because 'Indigenous Australians … do tend to be more aware and respectful of each other's cultural traditions'. Abdullah and Stringer (1997:iv) maintain that when research is conducted on Indigenous people or issues by non-Indigenous academics 'the knowledge obtained during the research has not been available once the researcher has moved out of the context'. Research that is *for Indigenous people* can potentially eliminate the possibility of non-Indigenous researchers taking the knowledge with them as they 'move out of the context' (Abdullah and Stringer 1997:iv).

One key proposal put to the Government by IHEAC (2008a) is to invest in the establishment of an Indigenous Centre for Research Excellence (ICRE). The aim of ICRE is to develop Indigenous research in higher education. It requires a number of Indigenous people with high levels of education qualifications and research experience, along with a body of people available to provide leadership and support to develop research activity. IHEAC (2008a:6) cites the aim of the Centre to be:

> The vision of an Indigenous research workforce that can lead an Indigenous research agenda towards projects that improve the life options and outcomes of Australian Indigenous peoples. Indigenous research within this context is research on issues of importance defined from an Indigenous perspective.

The main purposes of the Centre is to build Indigenous research capacity and leadership within the higher education sector (IHEAC 2008a). The literature reviewed in this inquiry reveals that there is a significant problem in terms of Indigenous research and knowledges, therefore supporting the recommendation that the government invests in ICRE, or a similar body.

Indigenous academics tend to argue that they are the experts on Indigenous research (Doyle 2005). The development of contemporary Indigenous research approaches, though a relatively new phenomenon, has contributed significantly to what Rigney (2001:7) labels a 'methodological revolution'. Indigenous scholars such as Nakata, Moreton-Robinson, Fredericks and Rigney offer new frames of reference and theoretical approaches for Indigenous researchers to adopt. Rigney (2001:8) proposes a theory referred to as 'Indigenist', which centres on alternative research approaches for Indigenous scholars. Indigenist research maintains three core, inter-related principles: resistance (as the emancipatory imperative); political integrity; and privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices (Rigney 2001:8). These approaches provide 'alternative conceptual and analytical strategies' for Indigenous scholars (Rigney 2001:8).

2.4.3 Inter-related principles

It is useful to compare the theory provided by Rigney (2001) to one of the most influential education thinkers of the twentieth century, Paulo Freire. In his most famous work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in reference to a South America context Freire refers to the oppressed and the oppressors. These are equivalent terms of reference to the 'colonised' and the 'colonisers' in Australia.

The first of Rigney's (2001) suggested principles is 'resistance (as the emancipatory imperative)'. Rigney (2001) is referring to resistance in terms of achieving freedom. Freire (1970:3) comments on this area:

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.

Rigney (2001) is calling for freedom through resistance as a fundamental principle in Indigenous research. Freire's (1970) statement, however, suggests that Indigenous people would be fearful of such freedom. It can be claimed that Indigenous people in Australia have experienced freedom prior to the last 220 years, although it may only have been recognised since colonisation. One may not acknowledge the fundamental principles of freedom if their right to freedom has not been threatened, tainted or disregarded. Linking this back to Freire (1970), it is reasonable to argue that different groups of Indigenous people in Australia would possess various views on freedom. As suggested, some may be fearful of freedom however this is likely to be those Indigenous people who now know no alternative to a Western-influenced Indigenous lifestyle.

In further considering Rigney's (2001) call for resistance as an emancipatory imperative, an interpretation that would be most beneficial to Indigenous Australians is resistance as a process of gaining rights. The right of freedom to choose and access the same privileges as fellow Australians, rather than a utopian traditional concept of freedom, would be most beneficial. Of key importance to this inquiry is the right to participate in education in a culturally safe environment.

The second of Rigney's (2001) principles is political integrity. Freire's (1970) work demonstrates the relationship shared between political spheres and the oppressed:

> Political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action *with* the oppressed. Those who work for liberation must not take advantage of the emotional dependence of the oppressed — dependence that is the fruit of the concrete situation of domination which surrounds them and which engendered their unauthentic view of the world. Using their dependence to create still greater dependence is an oppressor tactic (Freire 1970:14).

The underpinning politics between the oppressed, or the colonised, is an ongoing issue for people of all countries. Both Freire (1970) and Rigney (2001) discuss the political impacts from an affective angle calling for integrity and respect. Of importance to this inquiry is the political integrity of tertiary institutions. Such integrity and respect are of key importance to Indigenous Australians gaining tertiary education qualifications.

The third principle maintained by Rigney (2001) is privileging Indigenous voices in Australia. Freire (1970:88) also discusses the importance of dialogue through the use of words:

> Human existence cannot be silent nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist humanly is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

Friere's (1970) assertion is similar to Rigney's (2001) third core principal. Both Rigney (2001) and Freire (1970) highlight the importance of dialogue. In education, such a voice is crucial.

Having compared and contrasted the three core inter-related principles of Indigenist research as offered by Rigney (2001) with the work of Freire (1970), strong similarities were found. The common themes that emerged are resistance for the right to make choices, political integrity and respect; and the necessity for Indigenous people to have the right to dialogue. All three principles are highly relevant and important to Indigenous Australians participating in higher education. They will be further addressed in the methodology chapter and form an underlying foundation upon which Indigenous research and participation can be centred and measured.

2.4.4 Control of Indigenous research

Given that the majority of research concerning Indigenous Australians is undertaken by non-Indigenous people (Fredericks 2006b; NIPAAC 2002; Tozer 2006), it can be argued that it is an 'extension of colonialist attitudes and practices' (Tozer 2006:10). It can be confidently claimed that Indigenous perspectives are lacking in the majority of this research (NIPAAC 2002).

Fredericks (2006b) explains that Indigenous people have suffered at the hands of non-Indigenous researchers as some of the research carried out has been invasive. It is also pointed out that Indigenous people have not given permission in some instances, and the

research has disregarded the rights of Indigenous Australians. In particular, the right to choose whether to participate in the research or not was often overlooked (Fredericks 2006b; Tozer 2006). In some instances, communities were not aware that research had been conducted by non-Indigenous researchers while visiting their communities (Fredericks 2006b). NIPAAC also argues that research into Indigenous Australia has provided career and financial benefits to non-Indigenous Australians, at the same time having the tendency of failing to provide any tangible benefits to Indigenous Australian communities (Tozer 2006).

Rigney (1997) points out that the research academy in Australia, and its epistemologies, have been constructed by non-Indigenous people. It has excluded Indigenous Australians from all facets of research (Rigney 1997). Rigney (1997) argues that the process of racialisation in the field of research denounces Indigenous minds, intellect, knowledges, histories and experiences as being irrelevant.

Linking this back to the need for more postgraduate research students and the need for Indigenous people to gain postgraduate research qualifications to participate at a similar level as non-Indigenous researchers, Gower and Mack (2002:145) state:

> Research in Indigenous communities has historically been controlled and dominated by non-Indigenous researchers. The research methodologies used have been inappropriate and have centred on non-Indigenous frames of reference which in turn has not prompted Indigenous involvement and ownership over the research activity.

Literature also highlights the fact that Indigenous scholars such as Nakata (1998), Doyle (2005) and Fredericks (2006b) are demanding research and its accompanying practices to be put in the control and governance of Indigenous Australians. Nakata further states:

> We need to have our own people at the level of research knowledge production because we understand our situation in ways that differ from the way non-indigenous people view our difficulties. We often see the solution to those difficulties in ways that are quite different to the solutions that they may propose (Nakata 1998:23).

Coopes (2007:207) agrees, 'Indigenist research must give prominence to Aboriginal voices'. Similarly, Doyle (2005:10) maintains:

> It is vital to create a canopy of protection for the development of restoration and regeneration of Australian indigenous research. This can be created in part where there has

> been critical reflection to establish research ethics based on integrity and protocols that affirm and promote protection of indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

Fredericks (2006b:6) notes that, since colonisation, research has been 'part of the landscape' of Indigenous Australian lives in a variety of capacities. It is further suggested that Indigenous people have recently partaken in the process by moving into the roles of researchers and been instrumental in determining 'what and how the research should look and be like' (Fredericks 2006b:6).

Doyle (2005) argues that it is essential for Indigenous Australians to educate themselves, and each other, and critically reflect in order to participate in Indigenous research that is responsive to the concerns and ways of Indigenous people. Cultural safety and the 'unique emergent education philosophies' need to be nurtured (Doyle 2005:15). It is claimed by Doyle (2005:15) that this is only possible when 'research purpose is returned to Indigenous hands'. Unfortunately, but realistically, it is unlikely that control of research will ever be returned to Indigenous hands. Non-Indigenous academics will present their own theories pertaining to Indigenous research. These 'experts' will continue to compete against Indigenous Australians for research funding. This trend will only be counteracted when Indigenous researchers present culturally appropriate proposals, backed by academic experience and Indigenous knowledges, wrapped in a package that 'screams out for' cultural safety and awareness, thereby 'winning' scarce research funding.

Some academics may argue that there are inexperienced Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in academia. Their argument would likely continue by stipulating that one's culture should not ensure them research positions or funding. However, as Doyle (2005) asserts, the *control* of Indigenous research should be placed in Indigenous hands. At no time does that call for non-Indigenous researchers to cease all levels of inquiry into Indigenous-related matters. It is therefore important and crucial to this inquiry to note that there is a key difference between *control* and *participation*.

Indigenous students undertaking research have the potential to improve outcomes for Indigenous communities in Australia. The vast majority of these researchers possess a strong commitment to 'addressing the socio-economic inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities' (NIPAAC 2002:3). Such researchers are, unfortunately, drastically under-represented in the research community.

L.T. Smith (2001:199) discusses the relationship between Indigenous people and research:

> Research seems such a small and technical aspect of the wider politics of Indigenous peoples. It is often thought of as an activity which only anthropologists do! As Indigenous peoples we have our own research needs and priorities. Our questions are important. Research helps us to answer them.

Fredericks (2006b:7) comments on her own experiences as an Indigenous researcher:

> My survival with the higher education system and the research academy depends on my knowing how the western academy is structured and operates. That is, I need to know who the relevant scholars are, who controls the processes within the research academy, committee procedure and ways of 'doing business.'

Similarly, Fredericks (2006a) cites Wheaton (2000) in stating that there is a very real need for Indigenous people to develop research processes about Indigenous people in order to represent Indigenous people best. Further, these Indigenous research processes need to 'reflect who we are, what we do, how we think, our protocols and processes, in order to represent us best' (Fredericks 2006a:5). It is also important to understand that whilst Fredericks (2006a) makes some extremely valid and important points, she also reflects a rather essentialist position. As indicated, the need for Indigenous research processes to consider and reflect Indigenous people is imperative; however it must be remembered that all Indigenous Australians are not the same and offer great diversity as individuals.

In 1997 Rigney argued for Indigenous people to search for 'new anti-colonial epistemologies and methodologies to construct, re-discover and/or affirm their knowledges and cultures' (Rigney 1997:115). In order for these epistemologies to be successful, they must provide a true representation of aspirations of Indigenous

Australians, and have the ability to 'strengthen the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression' (Rigney 1997:115). Four years later, Rigney (2001:1) wrote about the terminologies previously mentioned above that he referred to as *Indigenism* and *Indigenist*:

> By Indigenism I mean a body of knowledge by Indigenous scholars in the interest of Indigenous peoples for the purpose of self-determination. Indigenism is multi-disciplinary with the essential criteria being the identity and colonising experience of the writer. Similarly, by the term Indigenist I mean the body of knowledge by Indigenous scholars in relation to research methodological approaches.

The evolving nature of Indigenous research methodologies and epistemologies is evident in Rigney (1997, 2001). Indigenous communities around the globe remain cautious and apprehensive towards research ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies (Rigney 1997). Whilst these elements of wariness exist, there are also instances where Indigenous communities have welcomed research and its various methodological practices. Indigenous communities have benefited from research and its accompanying methodologies (Rigney 1997).

Indigenous people now require research and its design to contribute to the self-determination and liberation struggles that are both controlled and defined by Indigenous communities. In order for this to occur, Rigney (1997:109) claims that 'Indigenous people themselves must analyse and critique epistemologies that are common place in higher education'.

Walker (2000:34) adds to the discussion:

> Although a growing number of Indigenous scholars around the world are working to re-institute Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, further work needs to be done to redress the imbalances that were established during the European colonisation of Indigenous peoples around the globe.

Warrior (1999), an Osage First Nation American, argues that Native American intellectual traditions require the freedom to abscond the structures of Western academic conventions, to allow Native Americans the space to determine their own area of intellectual engagement (Rigney 2001). Rigney (2001:9) identifies Warrior's main concern as 'critical reflection on the meaning of freedom through the practice of

intellectual sovereignty for Indigenous scholars'. Warrior (1995) lists the following four points that outline the need for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty:

- The need to capitalise on the gains made in the previous decade and solidify the process of the Indigenous communities taking control of their own destinies;
- The responsibility which sovereignty creates is orientated primarily toward the existence and continuance of the group;
- Intellectual sovereignty provides a framework for developing an Indigenous intellectual praxis that can help make sense of the spiritual, political and social lives of First peoples; and
- The diversity of First Nation intellectualism is now to proceed toward intellectual sovereignty and not simply interrogating non-Indigenous work but the work of ourselves as Indigenous scholars (Warrior 1995 as cited in Rigney 2001:9-10).

In the Australian context Rigney (2001:10) suggests that striving for sovereignty is also to 'strive for the possibility of a non-neo-colonial future'. Contemporary Indigenous intellectual scholarship requires the initial process of building an intellectual community, a process that will assist in defining the future for Indigenous people (Rigney 2001). It is suggested by Rigney (2001:11) that the 'return of traditional forms of Indigenous knowledge and cultural realisation can complement the research approaches that are being developed in the contemporary context'. This new birth of knowledge is described by Rigney (2001) as Contemporary Indigenous Australian Critical Studies.

As the teaching of Indigenous Knowledges becomes common practice in academia it will bring with it many points of contention. Particularly in terms of 'what should be taught, who should teach it, how should it be taught, and who should be able to access what knowledges' (Anderson et al. 1998:142). The inquiry undertaken by Anderson et al. (1998:142) includes the view of one senior Indigenous academic:

> What are the rules and what are the bottom lines of the sorts of things that are appropriate knowledge…? And because we haven't written those sorts of rules yet, even if the institution, and in our case, all people in the institution, come to us all the time for advice about what they could and should do, it puts us in a difficult position because we still haven't written the rule book yet about how everybody should work.

This statement reinforces very clearly the fact that Indigenous participation in academia is still developing in many ways.

Abdullah and Stringer (1997) provide a concluding argument, stating that there is a tendency for many non-Indigenous researchers to assign Indigenous people as the subjects of the research, rather than equal participants in it. Conversely, when Indigenous people are situated at the heart of the research activity, and Indigenous systems of knowledge and understanding are employed as the basis for inquiry and investigation, the possibility of broadening the knowledge base of Indigenous Australians is created (Abdullah & Stringer 1997).

2.5 Summary

This literature review commenced with an overview of Indigenous education in Australia. Literature examined encompassed colonisation, culture shock, cultural violence, structural violence, scientific racism, institutional racism and the deficit model of education. This led to a discussion of how these factors were influential in, or responsible for, the under-education of Indigenous people in Australia. Of key importance to this research was the under-representation of Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia. DEST (2005) student records files indicated that there were only 1,145 Indigenous students undertaking postgraduate studies in 2005. This statistic was identified as important to the data analysis phase of this research as it provides a crucial reference point. Whilst not definitive, it was identified as the most reliable and recent measurement.

Support systems in higher education were discussed. The research of Bin-Sallik (1989) (1993) and Jordan (1985) was shown to be highly beneficial in understanding the support mechanisms that were available to Indigenous students during the 1970s and 1980s. NAEC proved to be the key foundation of Indigenous support in higher education. The fact that Indigenous Support Units were a new phenomenon with massive teething problems was highlighted. ISUs have their respective critics who comment particularly on the lack of support offered by ISU staff members. At the same time it was shown that Indigenous tertiary staff members are a rare asset. The need for cultural awareness in the higher education sector was highlighted as important in order to initiate change and assist

progress. The support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students was then discussed, with particular emphasis on the lack of supervision available from fellow Indigenous Australians.

Next, literature on governmental initiatives was commented on in respect to their impact on Indigenous issues on the whole, but also on their specific implications for education. The Northern Territory Intervention was discussed - a former Howard Coalition Government policy - in relation to the contestation it has engendered around Indigenous ownership and partnership in initiatives to assist in Indigenous concerns. The recently elected Rudd Government was responsible for implementing the 2020 Summit and the Apology to the Stolen Generations. It can be seen that this Government has made a deliberate effort to ensure that Indigenous Australians are involved in decision making processes. There is also a commitment - at the rhetorical level so far - to improve the lives of Indigenous people in Australia. These factors were highlighted as an important step towards change; however time was identified as the most reliable indicator that will determine whether the conditions in Australian Indigenous people's lives will alter as a result of these initiatives.

Finally, the focus moved to relatively new schools of thought – Indigenous knowledges and research. Literature provided by Nakata (1995, 1998, 2004, 2007) was crucial to the review of this topic area. There is an ongoing request by Indigenous academics for Indigenous research practices to be put in the control of Indigenous scholars and communities. Literature suggests that there is currently an Indigenous academic revolution that demands non-Indigenous researchers either focus on joint research projects where Indigenous people have a sense of ownership, or else step aside and allow the new generation of Indigenous scholars the space to involve fellow Indigenous people in the research process.

An outcome of colonisation and colonialism's pervasive practices is that Indigenous people have been subjected to various forms of racism, violence and injustice. The higher education sector, as a key institution in Australia, has been responsible for

perpetuating some of these injustices. Consequently Indigenous people have suffered, particularly in the field of education. It is therefore important for appropriate support systems to be identified and incorporated into institutions to strive towards the ideology of equality in education for Indigenous students. Most importantly, it is crucial that Indigenous students compete at the highest level – that is at the postgraduate level of study.

This literature review ranging across a number of topic areas related to the successful engagement of Indigenous people in higher education demonstrates that there is a void - a need to explore new ways to best cater for the needs of Indigenous postgraduate students. It is imperative that research be conducted into the support systems that Indigenous postgraduate students currently have available to them. Of these systems, we must establish those that students believe are appropriate and those that are not. It is also important to highlight the support mechanisms students would like to have made available to them, but are currently unavailable. Additional issues such as cultural awareness need further analysis. There is a critical need for 'an investigation into the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia' and this is what this inquiry sets out to achieve.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the details of the methodology of the inquiry. It begins with a discussion on the personal background of the researcher. Whilst this inclusion may be rare in traditional theses, it is an important component when research is conducted by an Indigenous person on an Indigenous related topic as it acknowledges the researcher's ontology and its impact on the research topic.

This is followed by a discussion on research paradigms. Definitions and an overview of paradigms are provided, followed by a discussion of why the interpretivist paradigm is most appropriate to this research.

The process of recruitment of participants is then discussed. Participants are introduced along with their demographics. The role Indigenous Support Units (ISUs) played in the participant recruitment process will also be explained.

The survey design employed in the inquiry is explained along with an outline of the sampling process. The employment of in-depth exploration and triangulation methods are also noted.

3.1 Personal Background of Researcher

I position myself as an Indigenous scholar, thus it is important that I introduce myself and my kinship as it frames the perspective I take in this inquiry. This will assist the reader to better understand who I am and where I come from.

The paternal side of my family are descendents of the Wiradjuri Nation. We are referred to by the European surname of Trudgett. My mob comes from central-western New South Wales, Australia. We have association to country areas encompassing Bathurst, Dubbo and Warren. I am extremely proud of my Indigenous heritage. Existing as a Wiradjuri woman means having a spirituality that never escapes my soul. It also provides me with a drive to assist other Indigenous people with tools to empower themselves. In my opinion, education is the best method to achieve such goals and aspirations.

The maternal side of my family are descendents of English marines and Irish convicts. I do not have a deep knowledge of my maternal heritage, mostly because my mother's family identify themselves as 6th and 7th Generation Australians.

Pertinent to my background, Indigenous scholar Rhonda Coopes (2007) described in her thesis a conversation she had with a friend of hers:

> We were discussing the situation of urban people, especially students. She made the comment that one of the least considered groups are those who are not physically recognisable as Aboriginal, and are in schools with very few Aboriginal students. These students do not receive recognition of specific needs related to their Indigineity, and indeed are often derided by fellow students and staff when they identify (Coopes 2007:8).

This description of the urbanised fair complexion student is one I can personally relate to. The high school I attended between 1987 and 1992 consisted of 800 - 900 students. It was a public school located in an affluent area of Sydney. I was the only Aboriginal Australian student in the school. There were also two Torres Strait Islander siblings – a brother and sister in the school (who I was good friends with) – the brother was a year above me and the sister a year below. We were visited once every two years or so by the Aboriginal Student Liaison Officer whose job was to visit all Indigenous students attending schools between the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Gosford. It was a massive area to cover, however it was thought that there weren't many Indigenous students in this proximity because it was a high socio-economic area and the students in it would not require as much support as Indigenous students from other areas. By comparison, there were other areas in Sydney with high Indigenous populations (such as Redfern) who had,

in some instances, one or more full-time Aboriginal Student Liaison Officers in individual schools. As an outcome of this policy I believe that the NSW Government failed to provide me with adequate or appropriate support as an Indigenous student. There were definitely times during my education when I experienced significant racism from teachers, however I did not have any support mechanism readily available that could assist me as an Indigenous student. These experiences have influenced my interest in researching the support provided to Indigenous students.

I have studied at the University of New England located in Armidale, New South Wales since 1997. During that time I completed Bachelor of Arts (Aboriginal Studies) and Masters of Professional Studies (Aboriginal Studies) Degrees. I was enrolled as an internal student for the first two years of study and have been an external student since then. Whilst studying I became increasingly concerned at the lack of support provided to Indigenous students. There was also an emerging pattern that the further I progressed in my studies, the less support I had available. Notably, there was no academic support available to me from fellow Indigenous Australians once I entered the postgraduate sector of higher education. This, in turn, meant that any queries I had relating to my tertiary studies were answered by non-Indigenous academics or Indigenous people not employed by the university. Having access to an Indigenous mentor who held a postgraduate academic qualification was not an option available to me at any stage of my postgraduate studies.

A further area of concern emerged whilst undertaking casual employment at Macquarie University, New South Wales. Working in a variety of roles including marker, tutor, project officer and research assistant, I observed that Indigenous students appeared to be very angry towards those governing the institution. There appeared to be a particular level of distrust and apprehension towards the ideology of research. At times students did not wish to be either researcher or participant in any research projects. On some occasions Indigenous staff members vocally supported students' active resistance. The literature presented in the previous chapter has provided numerous reasons for this type of distrust towards the research academy. However, it is also important to appreciate the

literature asserting that Indigenous research and knowledges should be in Indigenous hands. I began to formulate the idea that a key solution to these issues would be to support Indigenous students to obtain postgraduate qualifications.

Reflections on the past decade of my personal experiences in academia have led me to the quest of examining how Indigenous Australians could best be supported when undertaking postgraduate studies. This research project therefore is centred on the support Indigenous postgraduate students believe they currently have; and the support they desire but do not have available.

3.2 Research Paradigms

The word 'paradigm' originates from the Greek verb meaning 'exhibiting side by side' (Husen 1999:31). This term is commonplace in research methodology literature due to the fact that all research is situated within a research paradigm, whether directly stated or not (Grix 2004). Paradigms have been defined by Punch (1999:28) as 'a set of assumptions about the social world, and what constitute proper techniques and topics for inquiry'. Or, more simplistically, it means 'a view of how science should be done' (Punch 1999:28). Sarantakos (2001) agrees with the emphasis on science as offered by Punch (1999) and describes a paradigm as:

> A set of beliefs, values and techniques which is shared by members of a scientific community, and which act as a guide or map, dictating the kinds of problems scientist should address and the type of explanations that are acceptable to them (Sarantakos 2001:32).

The paradigm best suited to this research is interpretivism, commonly referred to as the 'naturalistic' research paradigm (Ernest 1994:24). It is also referred to as a constructivist or alternative research paradigm (Ernest 1994). The interpretivist paradigm is a 'distinct paradigm linked to understanding in research' (Grix 2004:78). It is an umbrella term that incorporates many perspectives in the human sciences. They include relativism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, idealism, symbolic interactionism, and constructivism, along with many others (Grix 2004). When human inquiry is warranted, the

interpretative paradigm is often the most appropriate because it 'allows for the inclusion of multiple knowledges that are mediated by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors' (Cheema 1999:30).

Thus the interpretivist paradigm was deemed to be most suited to this inquiry into a human reality – the support of Indigenous postgraduate students in postgraduate study. Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007:8) add that there are 'many points of entry into any given reality'. Lynch (2005:1) explains this further:

> Rather than seeking a 'true' match between our research observations and reality, the interpretivist paradigm understands reality as being constructed in and through our observations and pursuit of knowledge.

The goal of interpretivism is stated as 'understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt 1994:118 as cited in Cheema 1999:30). This is a crucial element because the lived experience of Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia is at the heart of this investigation. Importantly, the interpretivist paradigm creates a space for participants to express their points of view within a structured methodological framework.

3.3 Research Participants

3.3.1 Considerations relating to participants

The research participants in this inquiry were made up of Indigenous students either currently enrolled in a postgraduate course, or who had completed a postgraduate qualification in the previous 12 months. In establishing an appropriate time frame for the inclusion of participants who had completed postgraduate studies, it was decided that a 12 month period be used as a guide. It was assumed that little would have changed in the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students during that time.

Students who had deferred or withdrawn from studies were excluded from the research. The main reason for not seeking active participation from this cohort was because they

were not easily identifiable. An additional factor considered was that this cohort may have had very limited knowledge of the support available to them as their academic experiences may have been minimal.

Initially the research proposed to investigate the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students only in New South Wales. Most ISUs in New South Wales, however, were slow to respond to the initial requests for assistance in identifying postgraduate students and it soon became clear that the scope of the study needed to be widened to include all states and territories of Australia. The implication of this decision required further liaising with every ISU in Australia.

The change also facilitated some additional benefits. Most significantly, it provided an opportunity for a greater number of Indigenous postgraduate students across a broader geographic area to be included in the research. The research was endorsed by the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (refer to Appendix 6).

Having determined the enrolment and completion characteristics of Indigenous postgraduate students that would qualify them for inclusion in the research, the subsequent task was to determine the most appropriate sampling technique.

3.3.2 Sampling and the recruitment of participants

Snowball sampling occurs where the researcher identifies a number of people who have characteristics that may be appropriate to the research. These people become informants and are engaged to 'connect' the researcher with other people who may also have characteristics applicable to the research. These 'other' people may too become informants, thus creating a snowball effect (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). Snowball sampling tends to be useful for sampling a population when it is difficult to access potential participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000; Sue & Ritter 2007).

Snowball sampling was employed in this inquiry because it was the only way to access students. There were no master lists that provided a collation of postgraduate Indigenous students' details, thus snowballing proved to be the most effective way to contact potential participants.

Streeton, Cook and Campbell (2004:37) comment that in order for snowball sampling to be effective, researchers require 'knowledge of the social situation they wish to investigate, initially gathering information from a small set of contacts who trust the researcher.' Similarly, Sue & Ritter (2007:33) assert that 'snowball sampling works best with small populations where the members know each other.' The Indigenous academic community is relatively small and members are generally well known to one another, making it an ideal environment for snowball sampling.

The snowball technique requires the researcher to identify who the critical or key informants are, and then make contact with these people (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000). Relating these comments to the research, key people within each ISU were identified as the crucial contacts. They were approached and asked to assist with the research. The snowball sampling began when these people contacted possible participants on behalf of the researcher.

Because the snowball technique was utilised, it is impossible to know exactly how many Indigenous postgraduate students received information about the research, however DEST's (2005) Student Record Files state that in 2005 there were 1,145 Indigenous students enrolled in postgraduate courses in Australia. Assuming this did not alter dramatically during the following two to three years, it provided a reasonable estimate of the number of students enrolled in 2007 when this inquiry was conducted.

Indigenous Support Units were identified as the most appropriate way to contact Indigenous postgraduate students. A detailed list was formatted identifying all ISUs in Australia. In some instances ISUs did not exist within particular universities. In these

cases the Indigenous representative or support officer was identified as the most appropriate contact point.

Initial contact with each ISU was made via a letter to the Director of the Unit or Head of School (refer to Appendix 4). The letter contained a brief overview of the research and requested the assistance of the ISU in emailing an information package to all Indigenous postgraduate students affiliated with their university. The package contained the questionnaire (refer to Appendix 1), an information sheet for participants (refer to Appendix 2) and a consent form (refer to Appendix 3).

The letter clearly stipulated that the researcher would not have direct access to students' personal details. Employing the ISUs as intermediaries created the opportunity for Indigenous students to determine whether to participate in the research without the pressure of having a researcher present while they made their decision. However, it also led to the possibility of 'gate-keeping.' Although ISUs were asked to contact all Indigenous Postgraduate students, they were able to decide who the questionnaire was forwarded to. Considering all ethical protocols, it was impossible to prevent this.

39 ISUs or similarly governed bodies were identified and approached within universities throughout Australia. Of these, 31 agreed to assist with the research; 2 did not agree; and 6 failed to respond. A total of 55 questionnaires were received from participants from 23 different universities.

It is also possible that the ISUs that rejected the request for assistance were concerned that their associated Indigenous postgraduate students would respond negatively when asked about the support provided. This may also have been why some ISUs did not respond to the many requests for assistance. It is for these reasons that this research maintains that it is likely senior staff members of ISUs acted as 'gate-keepers.' The gatekeeper decides which information will be provided, and which will not (Lewin 1947).

There was, however, an exception with one university. After numerous attempts to contact the Director of the ISU went unanswered, the Students Services Department, which is an administrative arm of a university - not directly associated with the ISUs - provided a list of people who had identified themselves as Indigenous Postgraduate students. In this instance, I was in a position to contact these students directly via e-mail. The snowball sampling technique remained applicable to all other universities. In all circumstances I received contact only by email which left the student free to respond, if they so wished.

Of key importance to the research was ensuring confidentiality of participants. Some issues arose when representatives of ISUs offered to collect the questionnaires on my behalf, or requested copies of the information supplied by the Indigenous postgraduate students at their university. In such cases, I reiterated the ethical protocols by which the research was bound. At no time was information available to any person or institution other than the researcher and research supervisors. The majority of senior Indigenous academics were extremely helpful, supportive and interested in this research topic. Without the support of these people, access to participants would not have been possible.

Brady (1992:105) has been quoted by Rigney (1997:109) as saying 'it is the acquisition of Indigenous knowledges and the ensuing ownership of that knowledge which are the foundations upon which many academic qualifications and careers have been achieved.' On this point, I would like to acknowledge many senior academics for their assistance. A number of Indigenous people in positions of academic power went out of their way to speak with me, offering encouraging and wise words of support. Through sharing such knowledge, they provide other Indigenous scholars, including myself, with powerful insights. This in turn enables more and more Indigenous scholars to gain academic qualifications.

3.3.3 Participant demographics

This inquiry set out to investigate the support available to Indigenous postgraduate students throughout Australia, thus it was significant that each state and territory in Australia was represented. Table 3.1 illustrates the number of participants from each state or territory.

Table 3.1 Participant numbers according to state or territory

State/Territory	Number of participants
Australian Capital Territory	3
New South Wales	19
Northern Territory	7
Queensland	7
South Australia	4
Tasmania	2
Victoria	5
Western Australia	8
Total	**55**

New South Wales had the largest cohort of participants, which is not surprising considering New South Wales has the largest proportion of Indigenous Australians, accounting for 28.7% of the total number of Indigenous Australians (ABS 2006a). In addition, New South Wales also has the greatest number of universities, totalling 11.

Participants were recruited from both urban and rural environments throughout the country. The majority of universities in Australia are located in urban regions. This accounts for the fact that 78% of participants were urban based and 22% resided in rural areas.

The term 'postgraduate' is inclusive of graduate diploma/certificates, honours, masters and doctorates courses of study. Both coursework and research students were included in the study. Importantly, all participants were given a pseudonym to assist in protecting their identity.

Table 3.2 shows the course levels in which participants were enrolled, or recently completed.

Table 3.2 Participant numbers by course level

Course enrolled in	Number of participants
Doctorate	15
Masters	27
Honours	7
Graduate Diploma/Certificate	6
Total	**55**

Table 3.2 illustrates that of the 55 participants who took part in the research: 15 were enrolled in Doctoral degrees; 27 were undertaking Masters degrees; 7 participants were completing Honours degrees; and there were 6 Graduate Diploma/Certificate candidates.

3.4 Survey Design

3.4.1 Justification of the questionnaire

At the beginning of the study there were various options available for data collection. The most prominent choices were face-to-face individual or group interviews, telephone interviews and questionnaires. After serious deliberation, a questionnaire was identified as the most appropriate data collection tool for this study. The main reasons for this decision was based on factors such as time constraints, cost efficiency and accessibility.

In the early stages of investigation it became apparent that Indigenous postgraduate students were extremely busy, often attempting to juggle a career and academic studies. Arranging specific times for each meeting or interview would have been a very difficult task. A questionnaire was viewed as an effective tool to collect data, providing participants with the opportunity to respond at a time that best suited them.

The issue of cost efficiency was another factor that required serious consideration. There was no external funding source for this research project. Consequently, the option of visiting participants for face-to-face interviews was ruled out due to the high expense.

For the purposes of this research, email was used as a means to distribute the questionnaire to potential participants. The questionnaire was in the form of an email attachment – some participants provided responses via email – others printed the attachment and replied via post in hardcopy format.

3.4.2 Online surveys

Technological advancements now allow researchers the option to conduct interviews electronically. Fontana and Frey (2005:721) explain:

> The reliance on the interview as a means of information gathering most recently has expanded to electronic outlets, with questionnaires being administered by fax, electronic mail, and websites.

There are numerous advantages of utilising online surveys to collect data for research. The internet is a modern, highly effective data collection tool. Benefits of the internet include the opportunity for the researcher to contact people throughout the world at very little expense (Markham 2005). Fontana and Frey (2005:721) also note that benefits of using the internet include 'low cost (no telephone or interview charges) and speed of return'.

Sarantakos (2001:250) also maintains that collecting data online has the potential to:

> Provide a neutral interview environment particularly with regard to sensitive questions, anonymity and confidentiality, and to aid significantly the grouping and analysis of the data.

Schaefer and Dillman (1998) note that similar response rates can be achieved by e-mail and mail surveys, however, they suggest greater completion and more detailed responses to open-ended questions via the e-mail approach. The virtual interview is a tool that is expected to become increasingly popular with time (Fontana & Frey 2005) with the use

of e-mail enabling people to respond when they feel comfortable (Selwyn & Robson 1998).

Collecting data electronically also has its disadvantages. Firstly, it is near impossible to establish a strong interviewer-interviewee relationship as there is considerable distance between the researcher and the participant. Secondly, online surveys make it easy for participants to 'manufacture fictional realities without anyone knowing the difference' (Fontana & Frey 2005:721). Thirdly, it is not possible to ensure anonymity when data is collected through online surveys (Fontana & Frey 2005), although technology is advancing to make this a possibility.

In 2007-2008, 67% of households in Australia had internet access at home. This figure has quadrupled from 16% in 1998. Broadband was the most common form of internet connection, existing in 52% of all Australian households (ABS 2008b). While it is a fact that by global comparison, Australia is in the high end of the internet access spectrum, analysis of individuals cases – such as whether Indigenous people have ready access to this technology cannot be assured. In respect to the research carried out in this study this point is relevant and needs to be kept in perspective.

Research conducted by other scholars have explored internet usage characteristics and patterns both in Australia and throughout the world. Lloyd and Bill's (2004) study found that socio-economic factors were strongly linked to internet usage in Australia. Those earning higher incomes and who were deemed to be more educated were found to be more likely to have access to the internet than those with lesser incomes or education. Daly's (2005) research discussed the low levels of internet usage by Indigenous Australians, and found that this was also attributed to the lower levels of income and education of Indigenous people. International studies reveal similar patterns to Australia. For instance, Xavier (2001) claims that major determinants of internet access and usage patterns in other countries throughout the world are also linked to socio-economic factors such as income, level of education attainment, gender, age, and disabilities.

It is important to analyse whether Indigenous postgraduate students, as a group of people, are likely to have access to the internet in order to understand the chances of them being in a position to access the online survey. Indigenous Australians are half as likely to have Broadband access than non-Indigenous people. However, people with postgraduate degrees were 83% more likely to have Broadband access than people with no post school qualifications (ABS 2006b). Drawing on these statistics, it is impossible to establish an exact percentage of Indigenous postgraduate students with internet access at home. However, data does indicate that Indigenous postgraduate students are less likely to have internet access than non-Indigenous postgraduate students; but more likely to have internet access than other Indigenous Australians who do not study. A reliable internet connection would logically be important to their studies. There is also an assumption made by universities that postgraduate students would have a reasonable level of familiarity and comfort with technology.

Therefore, the use of email to distribute the questionnaire to participants was deemed to be an effective solution to the requirements of the research. In practice this approach worked well and generated responses from a range of Indigenous postgraduate students across a geographically dispersed area.

3.4.2.1 Distribution problems of the e-survey

A challenge encountered during the data gathering phase of this research was to ensure that the e-mail and attached documents that comprised the survey were accessible to potential participants or those who were assisting in identifying and recruiting participants. In the case of two universities, security options such as firewalls on university web-mail accounts prevented the questionnaire from being opened. One university had provided me with personal and university e-mail addresses for most Indigenous postgraduate students on their records. Where two e-mail addresses were provided, the issue was addressed by contacting participants through their personal e-mail address. In the few instances where only the university e-mail address was available, participants were sent the research information and encouraged to respond by providing

an alternate e-mail address if they required further information. This process worked well as it created an initial dialogue between the researcher and participant.

Documents sent to another university were flagged by the university's e-mail filter as 'spam'. This became apparent after several failed attempts to communicate with the Director of the university's ISU. Once recognised, ISU staff members listed my e-mail address as 'safe', enabling all further communication to successfully pass through the e-mail filter. This particular ISU agreed to pass on the research information to their Indigenous postgraduate students. Unfortunately, despite the fact that they had a large number of Indigenous postgraduate enrolments, no students from this university made contact with the researcher which raises the questions of whether postgraduate students actually received the questionnaire.

3.4.3 Questionnaire Design

This section focuses on the questionnaire design. It will provide a discussion on the process of the pilot study. The structure of the questionnaire will be explained in detail.

3.4.3.1 Pilot study

The primary survey instrument consisted of a five page questionnaire (refer to Appendix 1). In addition, an information sheet for participants (refer to Appendix 2), and consent form (refer to Appendix 3) were provided. The questionnaire was divided into six sections – personal information; course information; support issues; Indigenous support units; supervision; and further comments.

A pilot study was conducted as a key part of the development of the questionnaire to test the clarity and relevance of questions. Two aspects of importance to the survey design emerged from the pilot questionnaire. Firstly, it was evident that it was important to distinguish between administrative and academic support. The pilot revealed that it was possible for participants to feel that they were adequately supported in one of these areas,

but not the other. Hence, instead of questions reading 'Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff suitably qualified to assist you with matters that relate to your studies?' The question was altered and split into two separate questions that read:

18) Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you with administration matters?
□ Yes □ No

19) Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you academically?
□ Yes □ No

This modification allowed participants the freedom to comment on administrative and academic support separately, which proved to be a very valuable modification.

The second point that emerged from the pilot study was the issue of belonging to a local Indigenous community. The pilot questionnaire had wrongly assumed that all Indigenous people were part of a local Indigenous community and asked participants to answer 'in what ways does the community support your studies?' Feedback highlighted the fact that not all Indigenous Australians associate themselves with a local community. The question was altered to read:

18) a. Are you part of a local Indigenous community?
□ Yes □ No (Go to question 19)
b. In what ways does your community support your studies?

After the questionnaire had been piloted and adjusted according to feedback, it was distributed to potential participants through the snowballing technique as outlined in Section 3.3.2.

3.4.3.2 Structure of the questionnaire

As noted in the previous section, the questionnaire was divided into six sections (refer to Appendix 1). Questions 1-7, in Section One, sought demographic information regarding participants. It asked people to identify their gender; Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander

status; age; whether they had children and the ages of children; and whether they resided in an urban or rural area.

Section Two of the questionnaire concerned course information. Participants were asked to provide information pertaining to their respective courses, including their university of enrolment (question 8); the level of course they were undertaking (question 9); and the highest qualification they had completed (question 10). This section also required participants to identify whether they were enrolled in full-time or part-time study (question 11); and whether they were enrolled as internal, external or mixed mode/block release students (question 12). These questions were important in gaining a better understanding of the academic environments experienced by participants.

Section Three related to support issues. As it constituted the core of the investigation, this was the largest of the six sections in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to identify the support they believed was available to them (question 13); and the support they desired but believed was unavailable (question 14). Question 15 centred on any differences between this support and the support that was available when participants were completing undergraduate studies.

The roles that children, family and community played in terms of participants' studies were also investigated. Question 16 asked how children impacted on studies and question 17 required information on the type of support provided by families for the participants' studies. Question 18 asked participants whether they were part of a local Indigenous community, and in what ways the community supported their studies. Participants were asked to explain the most difficult problems they faced while undertaking postgraduate studies in question 19. Question 20 sought to establish who had been the most supportive person to the participant while they were a postgraduate student.

Financial support was also explored in Section Three. Question 21 asked participants to nominate whether financial support while studying was extremely important; somewhat

important or irrelevant. Participants were also asked to identify, in question 22, whether the financial support they received was adequate. In summary, Section Three of the questionnaire encouraged participants to explore the various factors that affected their postgraduate studies, both positive and negative.

The focal point of Section Four was the ISUs. Literature reviewed in Chapter Two demonstrated that ISUs play an integral role in Indigenous education outcomes. Question 23 was concerned with identifying the frequency with which Indigenous students accessed ISUs. Questions 24 and 25 sought to establish whether participants believed that ISU staff members were suitably qualified to assist them with administrative and academic matters. It was important to investigate whether participants were satisfied with the overall support they received from ISUs (question 26) and to encourage suggestions on how ISUs might be improved (question 27).

Section Five of the questionnaire focused on issues relating to supervision. A key objective of this section was to discover who supervises Indigenous Australian postgraduate students. This section was comprised of questions relating to whether any of the participants' supervisors were Indigenous (question 28); and the importance of having Indigenous supervisors (question 29). Question 30 focused on the relationship between cultural appropriateness and supervision. Suggestions for improvement of the overall quality of supervision for Indigenous students were sought in question 31.

Section Six of the questionnaire enabled participants to provide any additional comments regarding their experiences as postgraduate students (question 32). A concluding question asked the participants to note whether they consented to the researcher contacting them at a later date to discuss the information they provided (question 33).

3.4.4 In-depth exploration

Some participants identified issues and concerns in much more detail than others in their questionnaire responses. There was a clear need to follow-up certain aspects that were

raised by several of the participants. Additionally, the data that some participants provided was considered to be extremely important although they had only provided brief information in their questionnaire responses. It was increasingly evident that further investigation was necessary in order to obtain the richest data for the research. This process is referred to as in-depth exploration.

Several options pertaining to the conduct of the in-depth exploration were considered, including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and e-mail. Face-to-face interviews were considered to be impractical due to the costs involved. Telephone interviews were considered, however discounted due to difficulties in contacting participants at mutually convenient times. Ultimately, it was decided that participants would be contacted via e-mail, a process that may be referred to as 'virtual interviewing' (Fontana & Frey 2005:721). This enabled participants to respond to questions at a time most convenient to them. The intention of this approach was to encourage a high rate of response.

3.4.4.1 Identifying responses for in-depth exploration

After the 55 participants returned their questionnaires, each response was examined individually. Given that the initial analysis identified a high level of commonality across questionnaire responses, it was not deemed necessary to undertake in-depth exploration with each participant. Of the 55 Indigenous postgraduate students who had completed the questionnaire, nine were identified for in-depth exploration, specifically in relation to suggested improvements, clarification of terminology and personal experiences. Unfortunately only five of these participants provided in-depth responses. This response rate was rather disappointing, as all participants contacted had consented to the researcher contacting them at a later date. Circumstances such as these make it extremely difficult to verify the research data. In order to overcome these difficulties further considerations were made, as outlined in the next section.

3.4.5 Triangulation

In order to support the rigour of the research, the concept of triangulation was introduced to the research methodology. Triangulation involves the use of two or more methods of data collection in research that involves an element of human behaviour (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:112). It is ideal for assisting this research to 'secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:5). Triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but rather it acts as an alternative to validation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005).

Triangulation does have its critics who argue that:

> the problem with using triangulation to test validity is that, by counterposing different contexts, it ignores the context-bound and skilful character of social interaction and assumes that members are 'cultural dopes', who need a social scientist to dispel their illusions (Garfinkel 1967 and Bloor 1978 as cited in Silverman 2001:235).

> The assumption that a single unit can always be measured more than once violates the interactionist principles of emergence, fluidity, uniqueness and specificity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000:115).

Hence, critics of triangulation tend to believe that consistency or replication is not ensured because there are multiple data sources present (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000).

It is essential to consider such comments from critics of triangulation and question how they affect this inquiry. Importantly, this research did not seek to replicate any single unit. However, within the scope of qualitative research, triangulation allows the space to consistently compare and contrast various data forms.

From a converse perspective, many scholars view triangulation as an excellent tool for qualitative research. Fontana and Frey (2005:722) argue that multi-method approaches to research are becoming increasingly popular as they often achieve 'broader and better results'. Stake (2005:454) suggests that triangulation helps to clarify meaning for researchers by 'verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation'. It also

assists to illustrate the various differences in perception through highlighting the many different realities (Stake 2005).

Having considered the need to increase the rigour applied to the research data and the benefits attributable to a triangulation approach, its application to this research will now be discussed.

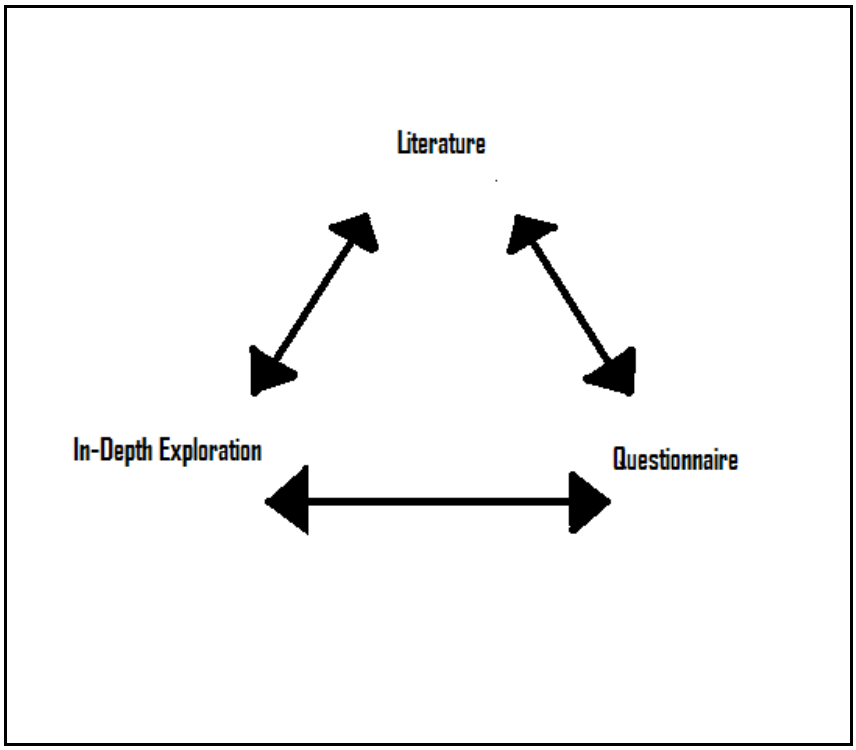

Figure 3.1 The multi-method approach applied to this research

Figure 3.1 illustrates the triangulation approach applied to this research. There are three angles of interest, or data sources, in the multi method approach employed in this research – literature, in-depth exploration and questionnaire. The literature examined in Chapter Two is the first source of data for this research. It provides a substantial overview of the current status of Indigenous education in Australia. Discussion began with examining the effects of colonisation on Indigenous Australians and, in particular, on Indigenous education in Australia. It highlighted the under-representation of Indigenous people participating in education. Inequalities were particularly evident when examining the level of Indigenous participation at the postgraduate level. Despite the fact

that Indigenous Support Units and various policies have been employed to assist Indigenous students at all levels of tertiary education, inequality remains prevalent.

The second source of data is the questionnaire that acts as an extremely valuable tool to collect information. It provides participants with an opportunity to comment freely on the positive and/or negative experiences they encounter whilst undertaking postgraduate studies.

The final data source used in this multi-method approach was in-depth exploration of issues and concerns identified by some respondents. Such follow-up was consistent with the original data collection approach, and provided participants with the opportunity to respond in more detail at their leisure.

Triangulation was proven to be effective as the literature review, questionnaire and in-depth exploration supported one another. In summary, triangulation proved to be an ideal way to collect and verify data relating to this research.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has addressed the methodology best suited to this inquiry. It is important for Indigenous scholars to discuss kinship when the research they are undertaking relates to a topic area that involves Indigenous factors or considerations. The role of my Wiradjuri ancestry in encouraging me to explore Indigenous education has proven to be a vital factor in this research. It provided the driving force - the rationale for sustained engagement – to deal with the issues and outcomes of the research. Essentially it is the basis of my epistemology.

The interpretivist or naturalistic paradigm was adopted as the most appropriate paradigm for the research. The approach was predicated on the nature of the human inquiry involved, specifically as it provides a space for Indigenous postgraduate students to express their opinions within a structured methodological framework.

The survey instrument employed in this research was a five page questionnaire. It was divided into six sections – personal information; course information; support issues; Indigenous support units; supervision; and further comments. The questionnaire was piloted and then amended accordingly to incorporate feedback from participants.

Snowball sampling techniques were utilised. A total of 55 Indigenous postgraduate students participated in the research project. Demographics of participants varied, which was important in gaining responses from a diverse group of Indigenous postgraduate students.

Indigenous Support Units played a key role in recruiting participants for the research. They acted as the liaison between the researcher and the potential participants. The vast majority of Indigenous Support Unit Directors and/or senior academics were overwhelmingly supportive, helpful and often insightful. Many shared their knowledges in order to enrich the research. Whilst this interaction was independent of the research methodology and its subsequent findings and recommendations, it demonstrates the positive aspects of meaningful support to Indigenous postgraduate students – although in this instance the support was provided to an Indigenous researcher.

In order to apply an appropriate level of rigour to the data, particularly in relation to gaining an in-depth understanding of the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students, a triangulation approach was considered and deemed appropriate to this research.

In conclusion, this methodology chapter has described, examined and explored the methods and tools employed in this inquiry. It is important that they are clearly understood from not only a Western academic viewpoint, but understood in a way that embraces, and is congruent with, the Indigenous origins of the researcher.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC BASED SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO INDIGENOUS POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed analysis of participant responses. The focus is on data related to academic support available to Indigenous postgraduate students.

Section 4.1 examines participant demographics and relationships between the various demographic identifiers.

Supervision by Indigenous and non-Indigenous supervisors and the cultural appropriateness of supervision are discussed in section 4.2. Participants' suggestions relating to supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students is also considered.

Section 4.3 presents an analysis of ISUs, including participants' views on ISU staff members' suitability to assist Indigenous postgraduate students with administrative and academic matters and their overall levels of satisfaction with the support provided by ISUs. The section concludes with participants' suggested improvements that would have a bearing on the future support provided by ISUs.

Indigenous Postgraduate Support Groups are the focus of section 4.4. Comments from participants who belong to Indigenous support groups are examined, followed by comments from participants who were not associated with Indigenous support groups or networks. The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC) – its objectives and the role it plays as a mechanism of support - will be briefly explained and its objectives analysed in response to a key gap in the data gleaned from respondents.

A summary of the key points identified throughout this chapter will then be provided in Section 4.5. Support that is not deemed academic, that is support provided from sources outside the tertiary institution, is reported and analysed in Chapter Five.

4.1 Participant Demographics

4.1.1 Descriptive information

Of the 55 Indigenous respondents who answered question 2 (refer to Appendix 1) 52 were Aboriginal people (94.5%); 2 Torres Strait Islanders (3.6%); and 1 person identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (1.8%). Of these 55 people, 69% were female and 31% male; and 61.8% indicated that they have children. 78.2% of respondents indicated that they resided in urban areas; the other 21.8% lived in rural regions in Australia.

The majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 59 years. The spread across specific age groups is shown at Figure 4.1.

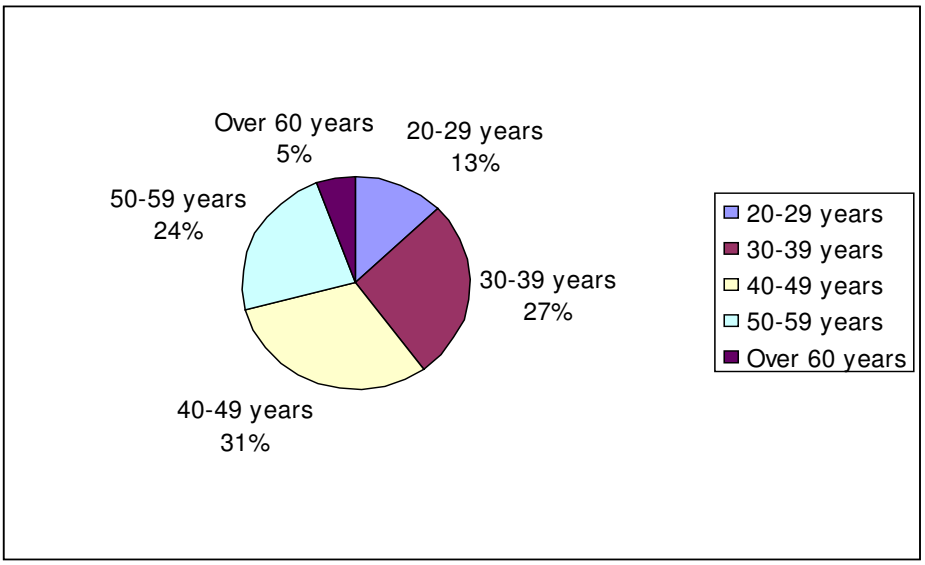

Figure 4.1 Age distribution of participants

These statistics are consistent with the national average age of 38.7 years for Indigenous postgraduate students in 2004. This age distribution suggests a slightly higher average age than the non-Indigenous postgraduate student average age of 34.6 years (DEST 2006a).

Masters degrees represent the most common postgraduate award undertaken by this group of Indigenous postgraduate students, with 49.1% of respondents enrolled in this award. This was followed by 27.3% undertaking doctoral studies, 12.7% enrolled in Honours degrees and 10.9% undertaking Graduate Diplomas/Certificates.

As shown in Figure 4.2 below, when comparing these enrolments to national figures it can be seen that the proportion of participants enrolled in Masters and Honours programs was similar to the national Indigenous postgraduate enrolment figures in 2003 (AVCC 2006a). Interestingly, a greater proportion of respondents were enrolled in doctorates (27.3% compared to the national figure of 15.5%). However, the proportion of respondents undertaking Graduate Diplomas/Certificates was well below the national figure at only 10.9% compared to 33.5% of Indigenous postgraduate students undertaking those awards nationally.

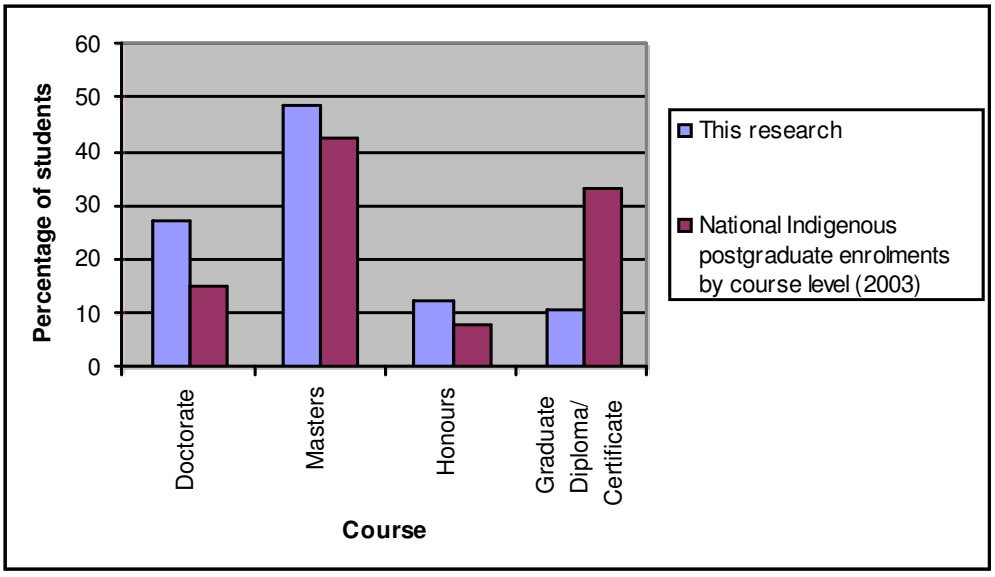

Figure 4.2 Degree type compared to national Indigenous postgraduate enrolments

Various modes of study were noted in the survey responses - 43.6% of respondents were enrolled on an external basis; 38.2% identified as internal students; 16.4% attended through a mixed mode/block release mode; 1.8% indicated enrolment in both external and mixed mode/block release.

Figure 4.3 below compares the percentage of participants enrolled in each study mode to all Indigenous Higher Education student enrolments in 2004.

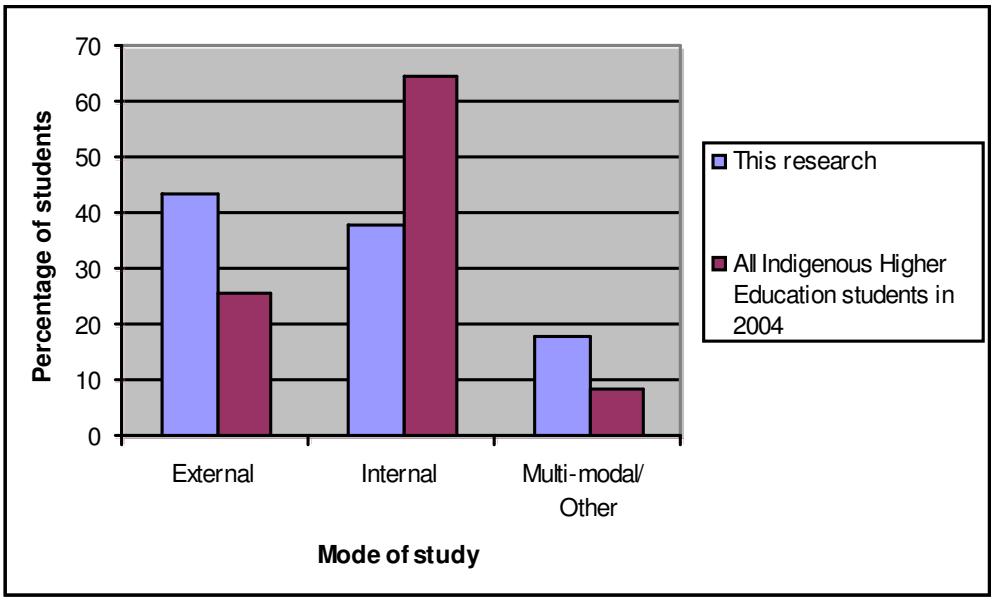

Figure 4.3 Mode of study compared to all Indigenous Higher Education students

It is important to note that figures available in 2004 include both undergraduate and postgraduate students. There is a larger representation of external and multi-modal students than internal in this study as a proportion of all the Indigenous students participating in higher education in 2004. These results indicate that Indigenous postgraduate students appear to prefer the external study mode (43.6%) over the internal (38.2%) alternative.

4.1.2 Emerging patterns in demographic data

When participants' gender, age, locality, course, mode of study and attendance type are considered in combination, several patterns arise.

4.1.2.1 Gender and Course

Of the 17 male participants, 47.1% were enrolled in Doctorates; 41.2% in Masters; and 11.8% in other postgraduate certificates/awards. Of the 38 female participants, 18.4% were enrolled in Doctorates; 52.6% in Masters; 18.4% in Honour Degrees; and 10.5% in other postgraduate certificates/awards. Proportionally, male participants were two and a half times more likely to be enrolled in Doctoral degrees than female participants. These figures differ significantly to the statistics relating to overall enrolments in Doctoral Degrees (inclusive of coursework and research) in Australia, which show little discrepancy between genders - 49.3% of which were male and 50.7% female in 2005 (DEST 2006b:3.3). In this inquiry over one third of all participants (36.4%) were females enrolled in a Masters degree. Additionally, all 7 Honours Degree participants were female, yet the National statistics show that 60.9% of all Honours students in Australia are female (DEST 2006b:3.3).

This trend indicates that Indigenous males are more likely to participate in higher levels of postgraduate studies than Indigenous females. This may be a reflection of the effects gender can have on identities, norms, interaction, and institutions, as emphasised by Bittman et al. (2003). It could be conjectured that Indigenous males are involved less in raising children or household duties than females and therefore have more time available to devote to higher education. This view would support Bittman's (1998) findings that, on average, men spend half the time of women on unpaid family responsibilities. Another possibility is that males may feel that they have a greater responsibility to provide financially for their families and view education as an important component of such provision. An alternative could simply be that Indigenous males have been given better educational opportunities in the past than Indigenous females. The veracity of any

of these possible explanations for the greater propensity for Indigenous males to participate in higher levels of postgraduate study, is outside the scope of this study, however, it suggests that further research on gender-based participation rates is warranted.

4.1.2.2 Gender, Age and Locality

Females (26.3%) were more likely to reside in rural areas than males (11.8%). Younger participants were more likely to reside in urban areas. Thus, 22 participants, aged between 20-39 years of age, reside in urban areas. Of the 17 participants aged 40-49 years, only 3 reside in rural areas. Close to half of the participants aged 50-59 reside in a rural area (46.2%), whilst all 3 participants aged over 60 years reside in rural regions. These data indicate that the clientele who most often access higher education through an urban university are generally younger than those enrolled in rural universities. The level of access of those living in regional areas may be slightly higher than suggested by the data due to the utilisation of block-release programs. Block-release describes an attendance mode through which students attend university on a full-time basis for specified periods of time, or 'blocks'. Typically these blocks are of one to two weeks in duration and students return home once each block is completed.

4.1.2.3 Age and Course

In analysing the age and course of participants, the largest representation was the 30-39 years group who were enrolled in Masters Degrees, as illustrated below in Figure 4.4.

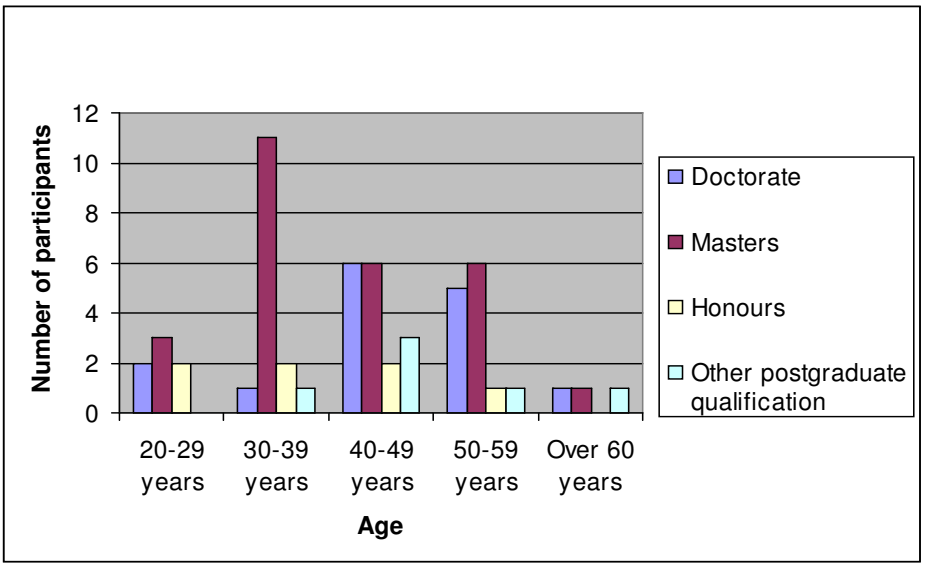

Figure 4.4 Age and course of participants

This statistic indicates that the Masters Degree courses available to this group appear to be well suited to 30-39 year old Indigenous students. This is likely to be a result of many ISUs offering Indigenous content specific Masters Degrees. It illustrates a visible trend amongst younger Indigenous Australians to compete at a post-graduate level of academia. There is also a real possibility that a considerable portion of this group would progress from Masters degrees onto Doctoral studies at a later date.

4.1.2.4 Other patterns in Age, Course, Locality, Attendance Type and Mode of Delivery

Of the 55 participants, 60% were enrolled in part-time studies; however, of those 40-49 years of age, 88.2% were enrolled in part-time studies. Participants indicated that this was due to family and/or work commitments. The implication of this very high percentage of students who study part time is that there is likely to be less opportunity for face-to-face contact with other students and university personnel. Of particular note is the likelihood of less opportunity for direct contact with support personnel within ISUs, which raises questions about ISUs strategies of multiple contact methods, such as outbound calling, to

ensure contact is established and maintained with Indigenous postgraduate students who are not enrolled on a full-time basis.

Urban participants were more likely (44.2%) to be enrolled in internal studies than their rural counterparts (16.7%). Participants who resided in urban areas were more likely to study full-time (41.9%) compared to their rural counterparts (25%).

Figure 4.5 shows the number of participants according to each course and attendance type.

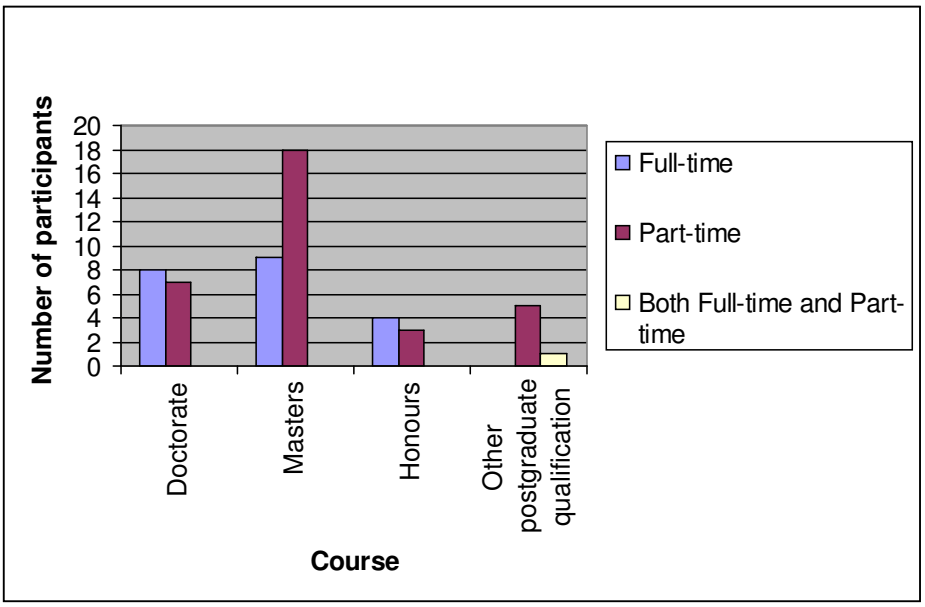

Figure 4.5 Study basis and courses

The most notable feature in Figure 4.5 is that participants enrolled in Masters degrees were twice as likely to be enrolled on a part-time basis than a full-time basis. This may be due to financial/employment reasons where, having completed undergraduate qualifications, students obtain graduate-level employment. The statistics do not indicate the period between completion of undergraduate and commencement of post-graduate qualifications and therefore it cannot be assumed that students move immediately into post-graduate programs of study. This supports the suggestion that employment may be a

key factor in the proportion of participants studying on a part-time basis. Similarly, the limited financial support available to students, including ABSTUDY, may place financial pressure on students during undergraduate courses. The need to redress financial issues via full-time employment may therefore account for the higher proportion of part-time enrolments.

4.2 Supervision

To ensure a better understanding of who is supervising Indigenous postgraduate students, it is important to quantify the number of participants supervised by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Question 28 asked participants whether their supervisors were Indigenous Australians (refer to Appendix 1). Of the 55 respondents, 21.8% indicated that they had an Indigenous supervisor, 70.9% stated that they did not have an Indigenous supervisor and 7.3% noted that they were enrolled in coursework masters and had no supervisor (it is not a requirement for coursework students to have a supervisor).

Of those students who were being supervised, similar percentages of male (23.5%) and female (21.1%) respondents had an Indigenous supervisor (refer to question 28 of Appendix 1). There was a relatively even distribution of participants with Indigenous supervisors throughout the various course levels. The overall small proportion of respondents with Indigenous supervisors contrasts with the importance placed on Indigenous supervision identified by respondents in terms of the support they could receive from them.

Participants who identified as being part of a local Indigenous community[1] were equally likely to have an Indigenous supervisor as those who did not. Participants who identified as part of a local Indigenous community viewed having an Indigenous supervisor, as more important than not having one, as demonstrated in Figure 4.6.

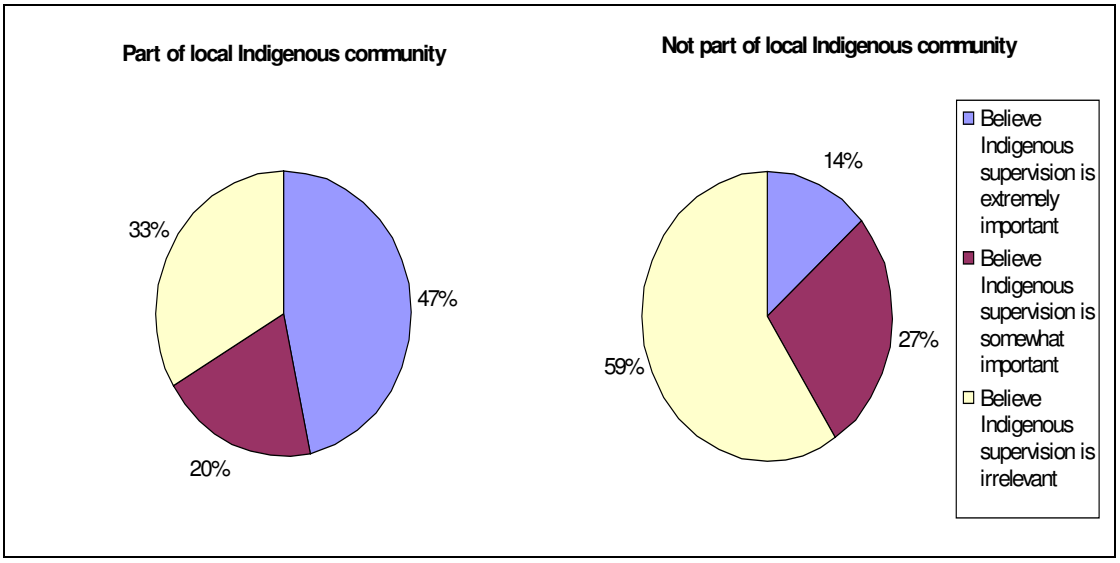

Figure 4.6 The relationship between participants identifying with a local Indigenous community and their opinions on the importance of Indigenous supervisors

Figure 4.6 illustrates that 47% of participants who identified as part of a local Indigenous community believed it was extremely important to have an Indigenous supervisor, however the rationale used by respondents' for making this assertion was not sought (refer to Appendix 1). Conversely, only 14% of participants who did not identify as part

[1] The concept of community is extremely complex. The term is a derivative of the word 'common' and thus 'implies a single social entity, thinking and acting along the same lines through some mysterious process of consensus' (Mudrooroo 1995:76). Eckermann et al. (2006:x) use the term to mean 'family groups that occupy specific territory or use particular services', and is thus based on kinship and 'does not imply 'unity' or common interest.' Mudrooroo (1995:77) argues that the term is too often used to describe the unity of individuals or a group of people and often fails to consider the differences of class, race, or sex. Whilst the definitions by Eckermann et al. (2006) and Mudrooroo (1995) are valid, the participants in this research are educated people who can interpret what the term 'local Indigenous community' means to them, and apply their own definition appropriately.

of a local Indigenous community viewed it as extremely important. It is worth noting that the term 'local Indigenous community' has been left up to the respondent to interpret. For instance, it may be viewed as the community in which they live, or the one to which they belong through kinship, or both if these intersect.

4.2.1 Support offered by supervisors

In relation to the supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students, academic knowledge alone was often not deemed sufficient. Additional skills such as cultural knowledge and a personal connection were identified by some participants as necessary and appropriate. This was evident in responses from Elizabeth and Robert when asked 'What would improve the overall quality of supervision Indigenous postgraduate students receive?' (refer to question 31 of the questionnaire in Appendix 1).

> Elizabeth – *I feel as though this is a personal thing between the student and the supervisors. For myself I could not improve them. However, I do feel that if a student is researching an Aboriginal based topic it is imperative to have an Aboriginal supervisor.*

> Robert – *Have someone with a bit of life experience from the other side of the tracks.*

Other responses indicated that the preferred supervision varied from one student to the next.

> Christopher - *Based on my experience it is more important that you have a supervisor that understands you and works in the same way you do… One bad supervisor could be the critical thing that loses "us" - Indigenous PhD students.*

When asked 'who has been the most supportive while you have been undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to question 20 of the questionnaire at Appendix 1), 23.6% of participants identified their supervisors as most supportive. There was no common source of support across participants – 27.3% identified family and 21.8% identified their partner/spouse as the most supportive. However, some may argue that these two categories share an identical meaning which would then change the findings to indicate

that close to half (49.1%) of the participants identified family/spouse as the most supportive mechanism for this group of Indigenous postgraduate students.

Elizabeth is a Masters Degree student. Her primary supervisor is a non-Indigenous male, and her secondary supervisor is an Indigenous Australian woman. She highlighted key qualities of her supervisors, noting that:

> *… without them I would not be here especially my primary supervisor. The best support I have received from my primary supervisor is belief, understanding and acceptance.*

Helen is completing an Honours Degree and also holds her supervisor in high regard.

> *A supervisor of whom I have kept in contact with since helping him in 3rd year with a research project. It has been good because he has provided constructive criticism in relation to my work and shown me what I need to improve upon. But still giving praise, where it is deserved.*

The key difference between Elizabeth's and Helen's responses is that Elizabeth acknowledges the notions of belief, understanding and acceptance suggesting that aspects of her Indigineity were embraced by her supervisor, which is consistent with the key themes of this research.

4.2.2 Indigenous supervisors

In relation to Indigenous supervisors, question 29 asked 'How important is it for you to be supervised by other Indigenous Australians?' (refer to Appendix 1). Three choices were provided – extremely important, somewhat important or irrelevant. In response 32.7% stated that it was extremely important, 23.6% indicated it was somewhat important, 41.8% asserted that Indigenous supervision was irrelevant, whilst one response was inconclusive.

Some participants indicated that it was only important to have an Indigenous supervisor in circumstances where the student was enrolled in an Indigenous related research project. Thus Darlene commented:

Irrelevant only for the current course I am doing. If it was a course offered by Aboriginal Programs, then it would be very important.

Irene, who had completed her Doctorate, explained that her supervisor was a non-Indigenous academic. However, she had three Indigenous examiners, one of whom was an international examiner. Irene proposed that Indigenous examiners were more important than Indigenous supervisors and further stated that she would like to have had Indigenous 'sounding-boards' as it *'would have helped avoid a lot of the angst and frustration when dealing with the non-Indigenous supervisor – but still and all, he deserves high commendation'*.

Some participants specified that they considered having an Indigenous supervisor was imperative to their studies and subsequent success.

Rose – *I have made sure that I had an Indigenous supervisor. I feel that I could not do it without her.*

Gary – *My thesis subject requires knowledge of race relations so an Indigenous supervisor who specializes in this area was highly desirable. On a more general level, there are sound epistemological arguments to be made as to the value of having [an] Indigenous supervisor for Indigenous post-graduate study/research.*

Overall the data revealed different views on Indigenous supervision. Some respondents considered it necessary to be supervised by Indigenous Australians, supporting Hart and Whatman's (1998) findings; others indicated that the quality of supervision was more important than ethnicity, which tends to support the views of Coopes (2007). Based on these findings it is evident that the quality of supervision is a key factor in effectively supporting Indigenous postgraduate students.

4.2.3 Non-Indigenous supervisors

Thirty-nine participants (70.9%) indicated that they did not have an Indigenous supervisor. The vast majority of participants with non-Indigenous supervisors were happy with their supervision and not concerned whether they were supervised by an Indigenous or non-Indigenous person, providing the quality of the supervision was high, again consistent with Coopes (2007). Many participants, such as Jacqueline, offered positive comments regarding their experiences with non-Indigenous supervision.

> *Both my supervisors are non-Indigenous (male and female) and have a vast experience in working with Indigenous people and are very sensitive and knowledgeable of our culture and issues.*

Jacqueline and other participants argued that their non-Indigenous supervisors were equally capable of supervising Indigenous students as Indigenous supervisors. They advocated that the ethnicity of supervisors was irrelevant to their studies and that the most important factor was high quality supervision.

Regardless of whether their supervision experiences were positive or negative, many participants identified that they would like to see mandatory cultural awareness training introduced throughout all universities in Australia. Some students identified that it was important for supervisors to be aware of their Indigenous ancestry and respect it accordingly. In the same way, Daniel indicated that it was important for non-Indigenous Australians to acknowledge the political and cultural background of Indigenous students.

> *They are aware of my strong political and cultural background and accept me for what I am and the passion I bring to the school as reflected in my writing.*

In Daniel's case, this acknowledgement has resulted in a culturally safe academic environment.

One full-time Masters student, Alan, explained his frustration at the general support offered to him by the department where he was enrolled:

Although I have been very happy with the supervision I have received lately, my main complaint would be that academics are a bunch of bastards generally. If I had have had an Indigenous supervisor I would not have been shafted so easily. In fact, even if there had been an Indigenous academic in my department things would have been rather different (I am talking about honours).

Alan argued that Indigenous supervisors would be more inclined to defend Indigenous students' rights and needs. He continued by stating that he has since changed departments.

Several participants expressed frustration at the academic attitudes that resulted from a lack of cultural knowledge. In these cases, Western academic practices were preferred over Indigenous epistemologies. One example was provided by James who demonstrated great discontent when discussing the supervision he received from his non-Indigenous supervisors:

My postgraduate studies [were] not enjoyable – I was constantly challenging 'white' views and attitudes and the maternalism to both myself, [and] others doing the course was terrible. I found that I was constantly briefing non Indigenous supervisors on protocols relating to working with Indigenous staff and students only to have them (non Indigenous) repeat their inappropriate behaviour.

Similarly, Julie provided the following statement:

Most difficult thing has been finding and maintaining adequate and appropriate level of supervision, especially from my main supervisor. Although he has expertise in doing research in the field of planning and development, and has worked with Indigenous peoples from Qld, he cannot fully understand or support where my project is coming from, as in its historic roots as a SA community in remote region. Also, his knowledge of Indigenous research ethics is limited, as is his knowledge of Indigenous research methodologies.

Julie's experiences highlight the need for culturally appropriate supervision - in this case the supervisor appears to have been culturally sensitive but lacking in background knowledge to maximise the effectiveness of the support provided. On a broader level, the

lack of understanding of Indigenous research methodologies is a significant factor for supervisors of Indigenous postgraduate students and one that warrants further research.

John was undertaking his Graduate Diploma on a part-time external basis. His responses provide great insight into his experience as an Indigenous postgraduate student, offering both positive and negative aspects of lecturers and supervision.

> *The formal part of the course was taught by lecturers that (1) were not terribly knowledgeable – they followed a certain approach that was not creative or intellectually stimulating – and (2) only demonstrated a superficial understanding of Indigenous culture through what I call a sanitized version – talking about the positives and the spiritual world without understanding the practical implications of Indigenous disadvantage in educational settings. However, the understanding shown by senior supervisory staff was excellent.*

In the statement provided by John, the senior and more experienced academics appear to have a better understanding and appreciation of issues specific to Indigenous students. However, this is not necessarily the case across the board as not all senior academics would have insight and knowledge about Indigenous culture. It is more likely to be a case of whether an academic – regardless of their professional status – has had opportunities to acquire an understanding of Indigenous culture through contact and contexts rather than academic tenure.

Overall, the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the academic guidance provided by non-Indigenous staff. Respondents who were not satisfied had either found new supervision or, as in Alan's case, changed departments. Participants frequently acknowledged frustration with the lack of cultural guidance available to them, an issue noted by DEST (2002) as likely to act as an impediment in increasing the number of Indigenous researchers. This lack of cultural guidance suggests a lack of cultural understanding in academia, notably outside of Indigenous Studies faculties, that can negatively impact Indigenous postgraduate students outcomes manifesting, for example, in the frustration noted above. The positive aspect of this finding is, that having identified these issues, there are opportunities to address them in broad terms.

The AVCC (2006a) acknowledged that the goal of ensuring adequate supervision arrangements for Indigenous students was a key strategy in its vision for 2020. The strategy specifically noted the requirement for appropriate cultural support as part of the supervisory requirement, however, this does not imply that such cultural support cannot be provided by non-Indigenous supervisors. Coopes (2007:201) stated that 'appropriate and effective supervision for Indigenous postgraduate students' is provided by many non-Indigenous people. The cultural appropriateness of supervision is a critical element in improving the effectiveness of supervision. This topic is considered in the next section.

4.2.4 Cultural appropriateness of supervision

It can be inferred from the data that supervision by non-Indigenous staff was satisfactory but the notion of cultural appropriateness, though crucial, was often absent. Because what constitutes Indigenous culture is not fixed, the ideology of what 'culturally appropriate' is, can vary from one community to the next. This made the task of analysing the data pertaining to what participants describe as 'cultural appropriateness' extremely difficult. As noted in Chapter 2, Langton (1993), Morgan (1992), Rigney (1997) and Whatman (1995) identified that significant investigation into the lack of cultural awareness in higher education was needed.

Whatman (1995) further argued that inapt practices in tertiary education would continue to exist until all staff members of an institution acknowledge, support and implement culturally appropriate strategies. It was further stated that new and existing tertiary staff members would benefit from compulsory cultural awareness workshops (Whatman 1995).

Whatman's (1995) proposal on the benefits of compulsory cultural awareness training creates somewhat of a dilemma due to the varying nature of cultural appropriateness across different communities and, as suggested, further investigation into the issue of cultural appropriateness is warranted. The implementation of culturally appropriate

strategies may not ultimately be characterised by a definitive approach but, rather, a set of guiding principles around cultural diversity to ensure that academics who supervise Indigenous students develop competencies in negotiating and learning with students who may present with a culturally different perspective. In other words the nature of the supervisory role needs to change when Indigenous students are being supervised.

Linking this element of the literature review to the information gleaned from the data, it could be concluded that participants were referring to increasing acknowledgement, support and the implementation of culturally appropriate strategies in universities. Further, participants indicated that it would be highly beneficial if supervisors had some understanding of Indigenous issues. This may include areas such as historical and contemporary matters that encompass social justice and equity concerns. Cultural 'ways of being' are also included under the umbrella term 'cultural appropriateness', for example, through acceptable body language. This is further evident in the following passage provided by Kristie who provided a detailed account of why the support provided to her is not culturally appropriate:

> *My supervisor is academically fantastic and well respected however she has no knowledge of meeting Indigenous learning needs and minimal understanding of our culture. I made the effort before the session to meet and explain that I am quite a visual learner and that I'm Indigenous … I now spend most of my meeting time answering questions about relatives; culture; what it means now that I look her in the eye when I talk to her … Then the meeting time is over and so is my supervision time so I leave with only a few minutes of help with my work. So you can't win… if you don't identify, you're doing the wrong thing in expecting them to meet your needs. If you do, you run the inherent risk of being the token Indigenous person and then a sounding board for all Indigenous issues.*

Kristie's comment illustrates an awkward situation. On one hand it is important that the supervisor be educated about Indigenous cultures; however it raises the question 'at what cost?' Kristie provided a further account of her experiences when asked in question 19 of the questionnaire 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to Appendix 1):

Being the token Indigenous person and singled out for being Indigenous. Being analysed as an I*ndigenous person and 'put in a box' by academics with no cultural training.*

Irene provided a different perspective when asked if the supervision she received was culturally appropriate (refer to question 30 of Appendix 1):

Not really but I kept reminding myself that the exercise I was involved in was clearly set in a foreign culture and tradition and I constantly reminded myself that the best thing about being a blackfella was our resilient nature and great adaptability to incorporate new ideas, new learnings, new teachings. If I learned anything I learnt that I must practice what I preach – that valid canons of knowledge exist and operate within different cultures, even though I was constantly reminded that it is the Indigenous participant that is more willing to adapt and accept than the non-Indigenous – but being a colonial historian who specialises in colonialism and the structures and forces of white superiority and privilege, I did not find the task insurmountable. I do believe that in History especially, whitefellas need to allow Indigenous scholars/historians to develop and promote new methodologies, a new (Indigenous) historiography, new techniques – that there is room within western academia to allow some flexibility.

Similarly, James answered the same question in the following manner:

I say no [I do not receive culturally appropriate supervision] because it limited me in being able to discuss certain Indig[enous] issues and theory relating to my research and culture. I found that 'white' theories dominated over the top of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing – Indig[enous] culture/theory seemed less important.

Other participants echoed similar views to James, stating that there were limitations on the depth of discussion pertaining to Indigenous culture and knowledge. Further, some participants argued that colonialist theories dominated tertiary institutions. Jennifer explained her experiences with non-Indigenous supervisors:

The supervisors have had little or no experience in this instance of Indigenous culture and therefore cannot always offer the appropriate methods of dealing with the socio-cultural issues that may have arisen.

Alternately, Cathy explained how Indigenous Australian supervisors often have a better understanding of cultural issues that accompany Indigenous students:

> *Both my supervisors are Indigenous, one Aboriginal and one Torres Strait Islander. I believe that there is a better understanding of me as an Indigenous person and my needs – e.g. time out for deaths/ tombstone openings/ interaction with other 'blackfellas', flexibility around timeframes.*

One participant identified cultural safety as an issue pertaining to the cultural appropriateness of supervision. Cheryl explained that '*cultural safety is vital and largely unacknowledged in Australia more recently it has become more important in health but should be vital in education*'.

Approximately half of the participants in this study suggested cultural awareness training as a mandatory requirement for people who supervise Indigenous postgraduate students:

> Kristie – *Cultural awareness training for all supervisors of indigenous students and administrators as well as for the students so that they can learn what they should be aware of for studying.*
>
> James – *All non Indigenous supervisors need 'specific' cultural awareness – deep understanding of Indig[enous] culture without the 'white' philosophy of 'what's good for us' attitudes.*
>
> Christopher – *I can see that perhaps mandatory cultural awareness training for supervisors of Indigenous candidates would be necessary.*
>
> Jennifer – *It would be interesting in this case to have non-Indigenous supervisors take a mandatory course in cultural awareness. This would therefore provide them with the necessary tools to supervise in an appropriate manner.*

The need for cultural awareness training was also evident throughout the data:

Jan - *That supervisors understand where we come from as Indigenous students and just because we have completed an undergraduate degree does not make us experts in the field of research. The supervisors should have some background in Indigenous issues/fields (the first supervisor I had didn't have a clue).*

Tracy – *Every member of staff should have to do cultural awareness training, because they just don't understand the cultural differences and history, significance and impacts of colonization!*

Some universities now offer cultural awareness training to academic staff – however this tends to be an option rather than a mandatory requirement. This inquiry does not propose any framework for a cultural awareness package. A respondent, Julie, noted the importance of *'adequate and appropriate cross-cultural training for supervisors'*. She extended this by suggesting that '*research ethics training for supervisors'* was also necessary for people supervising Indigenous students. Such comments presents evidence that there is a call for discussion on the issue. It needs to be acknowledged that culture is a fluid phenomenon and problems such as essentialising and stereotyping are ever-present consequences of any process of developing cultural training for non-Indigenous academics. Thus a one-size-fits-all approach would be highly inappropriate. However, it is important to acknowledge that should such training be envisaged by universities, local Indigenous communities should be involved in facilitating such cultural awareness processes. Propositions such as this require extensive collaborative negotiation, and whilst all efforts could be made to avoid inherent problems, they may nevertheless be unavoidable.

All issues of cultural awareness training aside, the cultural appropriateness of supervision is arguably the key to supervisory effectiveness and this is highlighted in the responses of participants who identified as being part of a local Indigenous community. Almost half of this group labelled the allocation of an Indigenous supervisor as being extremely important. The responses from this group indirectly support the findings of Fredericks (1996) who suggested that the assignment of non-Indigenous supervisors to Indigenous students may result in conflicts or the students feeling uneasy about disclosing

information. The high level of importance placed on Indigenous supervision by this group of respondents also supports the findings of Hart and Whatman (1998) that Indigenous postgraduate students commonly request a suitable and highly qualified person from the community to supervise their research.

The data indicated that supervisors allocated to Indigenous postgraduate students are four times more likely to be non-Indigenous than Indigenous. Whilst the reviewed literature did not provide specific data on the frequency of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous supervisor allocation, the appropriateness of Indigenous supervision was of considerable importance, as noted by Coopes (2007).

The findings of this inquiry relating to the background of supervisors echoes claims made in the literature. Overall it has been shown that the issue of supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students is a significant one as demonstrated through the data analysis in sections 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.2.4.

4.2.5 Suggested improvements to supervision

Many suggestions to improve supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students were provided by respondents. These included allocating suitable meeting times; involving Indigenous community members and Elders in the supervision process; increasing Indigenous academics in the tertiary sector; and increasing funding to Indigenous Centres and Colleges.

Participants identified that arranging a time to meet with their supervisor was often a problem. They indicated that meetings were often not structured and it could be difficult to organise regular scheduled meetings.

One part-time internal Masters student, Jennifer, explained:

> *More time with supervisor as that seems to be an issue due to lack of time on both sides, a more structured liaison between student/supervisor.*

External mixed mode/block release student Jacqueline proposed the idea of using 'tele/video conferencing to maintain contact'. This could assist some external and remote students to overcome the frequently identified challenge of ensuring contact with supervisors but the need to have the hardware at the student's location to conduct such communication might present as a barrier.

In respect to community member involvement, two participants identified that Indigenous postgraduate students would benefit from fellow Indigenous community members or Elders having a role in their supervision, possibly appointing these people as associates. In response to the question, 'What would improve the overall quality of supervision Indigenous postgraduates receive?' (refer to Question 31 of Appendix 1), Rachel and Alison provided the following:

> Rachel - *1. The request of an Indigenous associate.*
> *2. To engage key Elders (for Indigenous Knowledge input).*
> *3. To have one of their Elders as a Cultural Examiner.*
>
> Alison – *CAPA [Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations Incorporated] recommendation that community members with appropriate experience could be appointed as co-supervisors.*

Despite the fact that the majority of participants supervised by non-Indigenous people were satisfied with the supervision they received, nine participants suggested that Indigenous postgraduate students would benefit from more Indigenous supervision. Christopher noted that it will take some time for the number of Indigenous supervisors to increase:

> *Perhaps having more Indigenous supervisors available. But this will increase as more Indigenous academics come to light.*

When asked 'What would improve the overall quality of supervision Indigenous postgraduate students receive?' (refer to Question 31 of Appendix 1), Julie and Karen

suggested that a national database listing all Indigenous supervisors would be beneficial to Indigenous postgraduate students:

> Julie - *A database that houses names of people willing and able to supervise.*

> Karen - *Information on website for indigenous students. i.e. giving a list of supervisors available.*

Another way in which supervision could be improved is through funding increases to establish or assist more Indigenous Colleges, Centres and Support Units, as suggested by James and Cheryl:

> James - *I believe that additional funding should be made available to 'backfill' positions where Indigenous staff need to take 'time off' to study.*

> Cheryl - *More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Academics and self determination for Aboriginal Colleges and Centres and Indigenous Studies units and more funding directed at the grassroots and in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching and research.*

The subsequent increase in the number of Indigenous academics would eventually result in a greater pool of Indigenous supervisors. An additional factor to consider is that Indigenous staff members could assist the non-Indigenous supervisors. Full-time Masters degree student Rose noted that:

> *An Indigenous person needs to be on hand at all times. To explain to the supervisors about Indigenous ways of working for the student. This is not up to the student.*

These proposals and anticipated outcomes are all conditional on an increase in funding that is specifically designed to cater for an increase in Indigenous Support Units/Schools/Centres/Faculties and Indigenous research projects.

4.2.6 Summary of the findings relating to supervision

The key challenge related to supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students was found to be the provision of supervision that Indigenous postgraduate students themselves deem to be appropriate. However, trying to apply this generically poses significant problems because what one student considers appropriate is not necessarily echoed by the next. The findings further indicate that the cultural appropriateness of supervision was important to Indigenous postgraduate students; however, ethnicity of a supervisor is not overly important as many non-Indigenous people provide suitable support. This supports the claim by Coopes (2007:201) that non-Indigenous supervisors can provide 'appropriate and effective supervision for Indigenous postgraduate students'.

The findings similarly indicate that supervisory support from other Indigenous Australians should be encouraged wherever possible and that an increase in the number of Indigenous academics in the tertiary sector is imperative to success. One suggestion to enable this type of support for Indigenous postgraduate students is by involving Indigenous community members and elders in the supervision process. These outcomes further support the research findings of Coopes (2007) and DEST (2002) who noted the importance of credentialing Indigenous people to act as co-supervisors despite not possessing the appropriate tertiary qualifications.

In terms of future postgraduate supervision these findings raise several issues, including the need to ensure that a diverse range of supervision strategies are available to Indigenous postgraduate students. It is evident from these findings that there is a range of needs in terms of the supervision Indigenous postgraduate students desire. It is therefore necessary that the students are considered individually in order to provide the best support to all Indigenous postgraduate students. Clearly consideration will need to be given to ensuring that Indigenous postgraduate students have Indigenous voices that are available to assist them in an academic and cultural capacity.

4.3 Indigenous Support Units

This section will analyse the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students by Indigenous Support Units (ISUs) utilising the data collected in Section 4 of the questionnaire, titled Indigenous Support Units (refer to questions 23 to 27 in Appendix 1).

4.3.1 Access to ISUs

Question 23 of the questionnaire asked participants 'How often do you access the Indigenous Support Unit at the University where you are currently enrolled?' (refer to Appendix 1). The responses represented in Figure 4.7 show that approximately half of the participants never accessed their ISU or accessed it less than five times per year. In short, half the clientele of ISUs were not availing themselves of ISU support. In contrast, 27.3% of respondents accessed their ISU on a weekly basis.

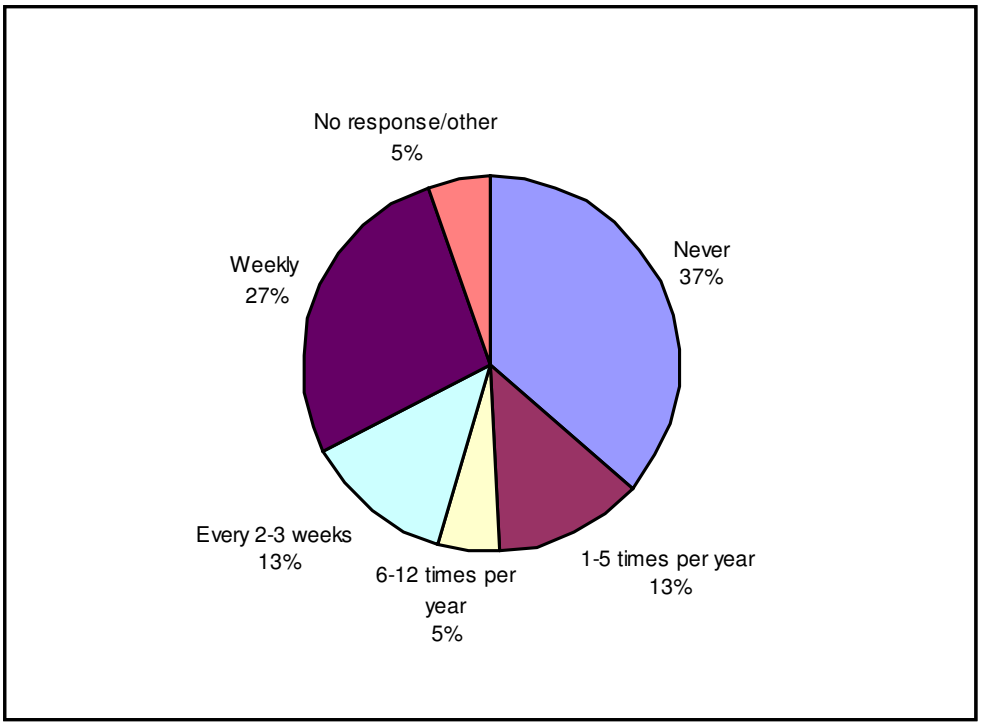

Figure 4.7 Frequency of respondent access to Indigenous Support Units

The analysis of the data demonstrate that only 38.2% of participants were enrolled in internal studies (refer to section 4.1.1). The remaining 61.8% were external, mixed mode or block release students. It can therefore be inferred that the bulk of participants did not have the proximity to directly access their ISU as frequently as desired.

The question of whether participants' rural or urban location influenced the frequency of access to ISUs was also considered. From the data shown at Figure 4.8 it can be seen that the patterns are similar; however some respondents indicated that they work in ISUs, which introduces some bias to the result.

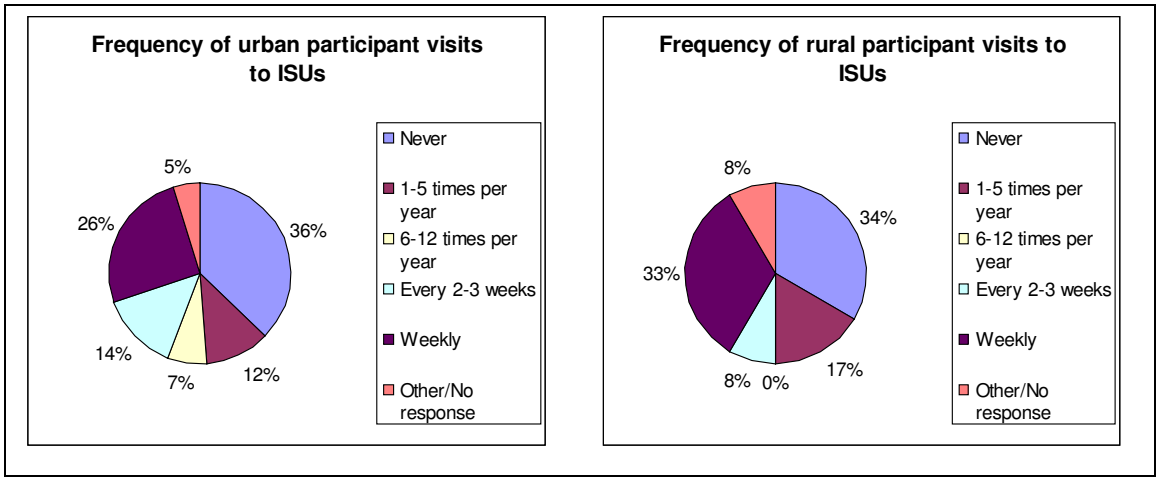

Figure 4.8 Frequency of urban and rural respondent access to Indigenous Support Units

The major issue resulting from this analysis is the risk that low physical proximity is likely to equate to low levels of face-to-face interaction. In an environment where isolation is potentially a major issue for Indigenous students (refer to section 2.2.2.3) high levels of contact are desirable. This would ideally involve developing relationships between ISUs and students rather than simply interacting on a transactional or needs basis. The crux of the issue emerges as a need to increase effective communications between ISUs and their clients.

4.3.2 Assistance by ISUs with administrative matters

Question 24 of the questionnaire asked 'Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you with administration matters?' (refer to Appendix 1). In reply, 56.4% responded 'yes'; 14.5% indicated 'no'; 18.2% did not answer the question; and a further 10.9% noted 'unsure' or 'don't know'.

Analysis of the responses to this question was complex. Two participants believed that they were unable, or not qualified, to respond to this type of question because they were unfamiliar with their respective ISUs as shown below:

Jan – *I don't know – never met them, don't know where the support centre is.*

Joseph – *I don't know? I have not been contacted.*

Whilst the impact of participants' limited knowledge of the ISUs makes it difficult to draw conclusions, it is clear from the data that slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that their ISU was suitably qualified to assist them with administrative matters.

4.3.3 Assistance by ISUs with academic matters

This section has a similar focus to the preceding one, however it concentrates on academic rather than administrative matters. Question 25 of the questionnaire asked participants 'Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you academically?' (refer to Appendix 1). In reply, 49.1% responded 'yes'; 23.6% indicated 'no'; 12.7% provided no response; and 14.5% noted 'unsure' or 'don't know'. Again, 33% of the participants had not accessed their ISU and indicated that they were not in a position to comment on the academic services of ISUs.

It is interesting to note that whilst gender had no bearing on participants' responses about whether ISU staffs were able to assist with administrative matters, responses about

academic assistance did differ between the genders. Of the 38 female participants, 60.5% indicated 'yes'; 10.5% replied 'no'; and 28.9% provided inconclusive responses. Of the 17 male participants, 29.4% replied 'yes'; 47.1% indicated 'no'; and 23.5% responses were inconclusive. Based on the data, only half as many males indicated that ISU staff members were able to assist them academically and there may be several reasons for this. Data from DEST notes in 2005, Indigenous females constituted 75% of all Indigenous employees in positions categorised as 'Teaching Only'; 70% in 'Research Only'; and 70% of 'Teaching and Research' in Australian universities (DEST 2007b:128). This majority representation of female Indigenous personnel may explain the greater likelihood of female students to seek academic assistance than male students.

Participants such as Christopher provided feedback on why they believed they were not supported academically by their ISU:

> *No. Currently I am the only staff member with post grad qualifications. This may change in the future. However the support I seek from Indigenous Services is not of an academic nature.*

There was some inconsistency in the responses of several participants who indicated that they received adequate academic support from their ISU. For example, Tracy indicated that her ISU was able to assist her with academic matters, however her comments suggested some discontent:

> *Yes. But despite my requests and explanations about needing maths help I was allowed to fail a subject before they finally put me on the tutoring program. The effective tutors I had were non-Indigenous.*

Two respondents explained that there was one key person who was able to assist them academically, though they believed the remainder of the ISU staff were not able to do so:

> Sharon - *Yes – the IASU [Indigenous Academic Support Unit] staff member that works with me is but not the others.*

Irene - *Yes (Martha (pseudonym used) is as she is a published academic herself) – but usually support staff are not. As far as I know SAIKS [School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems], manager of student support is non-academic position and I find that both odd and unusual.*

Patricia stated that she would not approach her ISU for academic guidance:

Difficult to say yes or no, although I probably would approach the school of psychology for academic matters.

Another participant, Angela, was undecided, responding '*Yes and no. The ones qualified do not have anything to do with the students*'. Angela was contacted for further in-depth exploration and asked to expand on her initial response. She replied with the following statement:

I found that the administrative staff spent more time with the students than the academic staff. I think the academics just assumed that the students were there to seek support from the student support officer (who is not academic) and the person who organises tutorial support (who is also not academic). I found that 'academic advice' came from a tutor (employed by DEST) and most times this was a non-Aboriginal person, whereas the academic person (during my time of study) was Aboriginal. Therefore I think an Aboriginal academic would have had a more positive effect on an Aboriginal student whether it was for seeking academic advice or just yarning about uni.

These findings are generally supportive of the findings of the AVCC (2006a) and the Jordan Report (1985). The AVCC (2006a) highlighted that Indigenous students were impacted by not receiving the right academic support when they commence tertiary education. If ISUs are unable to provide appropriate academic support to students commencing tertiary education it is highly unlikely they will be able to provide such support at postgraduate level. In the same way, the Jordan Report (1985) likened Indigenous co-ordinators without tertiary qualifications to community workers. The Jordan Report (1985) did note that that the majority of staff members tended to be non-Indigenous people possessing either a masters or doctoral degree however it is unclear from the report whether this referred to ISU staff or broader university personnel. It is

also important to note that Jordan's (1985) findings related to circumstances that existed 23 years ago and it is highly likely that some aspects have changed.

4.3.4 Satisfaction with the support provided by ISUs

Question 26 of the questionnaire asked 'Are you satisfied with the support provided by the Indigenous Support Unit?' (refer to Appendix 1). In reply, 50.9% responded 'yes'; 20% indicated 'no'; 14.5% provided no response; and another 14.5% noted 'unsure' or 'don't know.' Participants Ruby, Daniel and Karen all indicated that they did not interact with their ISUs:

> Ruby - *Unaware of what they do or who they are.*
>
> Daniel - *I'm studying under the Business School and haven't sought assistance this far from the Indigenous Support Unit.*
>
> Karen - *Haven't tried to access.*

Comments made by some of the participants who indicated that they were satisfied with the support provided by their ISU highlighted the various ways in which ISUs assist Indigenous postgraduate students. Part-time Masters students, Darlene and Albert, stressed the need for basic support ISUs provide them:

> Darlene – *Student support is vital, even when it is only there to give moral support. The facilities available for students i.e. tea, coffee room, computer room is of most value.*
>
> Albert –*They are there if you need them, for a chat, encouragement, support etc.*

Respondents Cathy, Patricia, Barbara and Beverly stated that the ISU staff members at their university were extremely helpful and responsive to their queries:

Cathy – *The staff are always helpful and approachable and respond to requests in a timely manner.*

Patricia – *Staff were very helpful when I first arrived at the university (i.e. showing me where the computers and printers were) – although I have not had any need to approach staff for assistance with other issues.*

Barbara – *Easily accessible and timely in their responses.*

Beverly – *They are always available to assist with any type of query and have done so each time I have contacted them.*

Rachel and James asserted that they were provided with culturally based support from ISU staff members:

Rachel – *Highly satisfied. 1. They provided moral, cultural and physical (accommodation) support. 2. They also provided an Associate Supervisor (who read for cultural content and provided encouragement when needed).*

James – *In most cases I was able to talk with staff members (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to discuss my issues both culturally/academically and found that having the feedback to problems/issues often allowed me to rethink and apply alternative ways of doing.*

Other participants explained that the ISU staff made the effort to contact students and ensure they were aware of the services available to them. Despite the fact that some participants clearly identified that they did not use the ISU services often, they indicated that they appreciated the ISU contacting them:

John – *There is frequent offers of support and follow up by staff. Excellent to know that the services are available if needed.*

Donna – *Although I don't use the services I get regular emails and calls to make sure I have received the emails and am aware of the services offered. I appreciate the fact that they go to so much effort to include me.*

Tom – *I know I have never used the unit, but they have always been there and they have always made regular contact to let me know of what services are available. The only real reason I have not used them is that when I am at Uni I want to get things done ASAP and then get home.*

As noted above, participants provided a variety of explanations as to why they were satisfied with the support provided to them by their ISU. These were primarily identified as moral support, encouragement, use of facilities such as computers, assistance with general queries, cultural based support and regular liaison through email reiterating the support available. Contentment can also be indirectly linked to social interaction, thus supporting Weir's (2000) view that Indigenous students constitute a new social group. Satisfaction with administrative support by ISUs will have a key impact on the overall social fit for this group within the tertiary system.

4.3.5 Dissatisfaction with the support provided by ISUs

In contrast to positive feedback, comments were also made by 20% of participants that they were not satisfied with the service provided to them by the ISU at their university. When asked 'Are you satisfied with the support provided by the Indigenous Support Unit?' (refer to question 26 of Appendix 1), Angela responded '*No. I believe they have not established a 'user friendly' service. They make you feel like you are intruding'*. In-depth exploration was employed in this instance and the participant was asked 'Can you explain this further? For instance, how do they make you feel like you are intruding?' Angela's response was as follows:

I found the team leader very arrogant and unfriendly. She changed the rules around what areas the students should be allowed to 'hang out', and I think that's fine, however the allocated student area was very poorly resourced. For example none of the computers worked properly, furniture was old and 'run down', no tea and coffee facilities and no

privacy when you met with a tutor. In saying this now, I believe there is a new building and I haven't visited it so maybe things have improved – one would hope that they have!

Julie raised similar concerns:

No staff qualified or experienced in supporting PG [postgraduate] researchers, and no alternative mechanism provided in the absence of this service. Whilst the staff are friendly and helpful, the facilities are drab and outdated, room provided for PG [postgraduate] students is not secure, not air conditioned or heated, and has old IT facilities. There is no library or research room set aside for Indigenous researchers.

Some participants noted that ISU staff at their universities lacked motivation and indicated that they did not go out of their way to assist students:

Matthew – *They have all good intentions, just basically half-assed with help and advice. They lack motivation. Too busy gossiping and playing internal politics.*

Lorraine – *I would like a more proactive approach rather than a reactive approach i.e. They wait for me to approach them. I'd like the Unit to be aware of my program and follow my progress more closely.*

Similarly, Jim and Alan argued that staff members at their ISUs are unqualified and not informative:

Jim – *When I emailed a question about financial or academic matters I usually get a shallow and trivial reply. Friendly they are, informative they are not.*

Alan – *Since they brought in specialised student support staff things just have not been the same. Not all the student support staff even have degrees, so how can they understand the problems of uni. As for help, they are fine I would imagine for undergrads but are useless to me in academic matters and administrative matters. I am lucky in that I have lots of academic friends including indigenous staff and so have access to people I can talk to. But these are personal friends, not student support.*

Matthew argued that Indigenous postgraduate students should enrol as mainstream university students:

> *Current indigenous units are great for undergrads – anyone who goes beyond that needs to mainstream due to lack of academic talent embedded in these [Indigenous] units.*

In using the term 'mainstream' Matthew is referring to participation in courses offered by the various Faculties and Schools within a university where non-Indigenous students would also enrol. Matthew's opinion is that ISUs are not sufficiently skilled to provide Indigenous postgraduate students with the academic assistance needed at that level of study.

Full-time Masters student Kristie provided evidence that she felt left out from the beginning of the academic year suggesting that orientation should have included postgraduate students:

> *Being a postgrad, the project officer did not invite me to attend the indigenous orientation at the start of the year. I missed out on meeting all the other students and therefore felt left out as the session kicked in to full-swing and everyone went off to do their own thing. We have one permanent officer for over 90 students and everyone just expects that you know how and where to find what you need, simply because you are at a postgrad level, even if you are new to the uni.*

Analysis of the data suggests that some ISUs have created a perception that once Indigenous students reach postgraduate level they no longer require orientation programs. Participants indicated that they would like to have been included in orientation, particularly as it provides a pathway to develop friendships and a support network amongst peers.

Further dissatisfaction was evident in inferences relating to 'political problems' between ISU staff and non-Indigenous academics. Irene provided an interesting response when asked in question 19 of the questionnaire 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to Appendix 1). Irene's response indicates a good deal of hostility and is worth serious consideration as Irene is a

senior Indigenous academic who has completed her postgraduate studies. She provided comments about her personal experience:

> *Dealing with the resentment of the non-indigenous academics toward indigenous academics – mostly the interaction is a quiet hostility. I believe this is so because the serious indigenous scholar is a HUGE threat to the co-dependent relationship between whitefellas and lazy, uninspired blackfellas… especially in those interactions that take place in so-called "indigenous support" situations (most Centres). These pressures and problems are REAL, yet under-stated, and certainly never acknowledged – as most serious indigenous scholars undertake postgrad Studies while up to their necks in university leadership management, fixing "political" problems that whitefellas usually cause but run away from when it gets too hot to handle… then they also have someone (indigenous) else to blame.*

Full-time Doctorate student Elizabeth pointed out that she did not believe her ISU was a safe environment:

> *The centre I feel does not provide a safe space to speak openly without any form of repercussion from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.*

Overall, some participants were dissatisfied with the support provided by their ISU. The primary reasons included staff deemed to be unfriendly, arrogant, unqualified and/or lacking in motivation. The facilities of some ISUs were identified as poor and old, including computers that did not work. Participants also indicated that they felt alienated and viewed their ISU as an unsafe environment.

These outcomes are consistent with the findings of Bourke, Burden and Moore (1996) who claim that attitudes of university staff were often a problem; that staff attitudes were deemed particularly important for internal students; and that many students did not feel welcome at ISUs and, by extension, at university. The findings support Bin-Sallik's (1989) conclusion that students in more than 20 of 36 programs examined were not happy with the support services they received.

The data from this inquiry demonstrate that there is clearly an issue around the adequacy of support provided by ISUs which has significant implications for the effective support of future Indigenous postgraduate students. If the support issues are not addressed then it is likely that ISUs will continue to reach only a portion of their clientele. Those Indigenous postgraduate students not provided with this support mechanism could struggle with their studies or, in some cases, may even leave university prior to completing their course. It is therefore crucial that the support provided by ISUs be identified as extremely important to Indigenous postgraduate students.

Having acknowledged the critical nature of ISU support requirements, a number of suggestions for improvement will be provided in the next section and further considered in the recommendations (refer to section 7.2).

4.3.6 Suggestions to improve the support provided by ISUs

Question 27 of the questionnaire asked participants 'Is there anything Indigenous Support Units staff members could do to improve the support they provide to Indigenous Postgraduate students?' (refer to Appendix 1). Suggested improvements related to communication and interaction; employment and staffing matters; facilities; and other suggestions, all of which are outlined below. The suggestions were provided by the participants. The categories emerged from the data and were not a suggested format within the questionnaire (Appendix 1).

Interaction and communication:

- Be more welcoming;
- Provide more information workshops;
- Be more open and non judgemental;
- Provide more opportunities for social interaction;
- Increase awareness of social events and services;
- Provide an information/orientation day to meet staff and students;

- Provide more networking with other postgraduate students;
- Provide more assistance;
- Develop closer links with supervisors of Postgraduate students;
- Communicate more with Indigenous lecturers in the university;
- Promote ISU services better;
- Produce a newsletter detailing information about other students e.g. graduation ceremonies and achievements.

Employment and staffing:

- Employ more academically astute staff members;
- Employ more qualified staff members;
- Employ more staff focussed on postgraduate students;
- Ensure staff are suitably qualified and experienced;
- Implement a performance planning and review system;
- Employ more qualified people available to assist emerging graduates;
- Only employ Indigenous Australians;
- Employ student support with appropriate qualifications;
- Employ local community people.

Facilities:

- Improve amenities;
- Provide adequate on-site facilities for researchers;
- Provide office space for postgraduate students;
- Provide laptops;
- Increase access to computer laboratory after hours.

Additional suggestions:

- Reduce the level of segregation;
- Improve ITAS;
- Provide assistance with academic writing skills;

- Provide more scholarships.

Given the variety and number of suggestions provided by participants, it is clear that ISUs have a considerable need for improvement. It is critical that these suggestions are given due attention and considered as possible future directions to ensure that ISUs provide effective support to Indigenous postgraduate students.

4.4 Indigenous Postgraduate Support Groups

The relationship between Indigenous postgraduate students and postgraduate support groups impacts on the experience and success of the educational experience. Whilst not specifically asked, several respondents indicated that they desired access to an Indigenous postgraduate support group. This section will consider comments by respondents in relation to this type of support mechanism, followed by a discussion of The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC).

4.4.1 Participants of Indigenous support groups

Some participants identified support available to them in the form of networking or peer/group support. Postgraduate Seminars, in particular, were indicated to be a valuable networking support mechanism, as noted here:

> *The Postgraduate seminar series brings together other Indigenous postgraduates and Indigenous researchers and is useful because you get to hear about other research activity and approaches taken. It also helps develop a collegial approach to study.*

Other respondents indicated that Indigenous Postgraduate students at their universities had established informal students groups. One respondent provides the following comment:

> *Individual and peer support is an initiative that we as students have instigated ourselves, but this is on an informal basis.*

Another explained the evolution of a group at another University:

> *We are beginning to establish an informal Indigenous postgraduate association where we can all support and help each others research.*

The importance of networking cannot be understated:

> *Networking with other students is a great support mechanism.*

Whilst only a small number of participants indicated that they had Indigenous postgraduate support groups or networks available, those who did stressed the importance of their function. Five of the respondents, however, indicated a desire to have such services available.

When asked in question 14 'Are there any support services you would like available to Indigenous postgraduate students that are currently not available?' (refer to Appendix 1), three respondents identified Indigenous groups or networks.

Thus Daniel suggested *'a confidential online support network system between Indigenous postgraduate students'*.

Julie pointed to '*Peer network for PG research students i.e. Seminars, regular student meetings, opportunities to present and critique each others work, opportunities to publish and do collaborative research'*.

Jacqueline similarly stressed '*PostGrad Representative Group (i.e. student rep council)'*.

The theme was consistent when participants responded to question 32, which asked 'Are there any further comments you would like to make about your experiences as a postgraduate student?' (refer to Appendix 1). Patricia and Robert responded as follows:

Patricia – *I think some sort of national Indigenous postgrad linkup would be great – i.e. be able to get in contact with other Aboriginal students studying post grad psychology.*

Robert – *As an Indigenous post graduate I think there could be more social opportunities, networking and community building activities. That is, building a community of Indigenous students generally.*

The data show that numerous participants considered Indigenous support groups and networks to be important, a finding consistent with the 2020 Summit to establish a national Indigenous knowledge centre network (Commonwealth Government of Australia 2008).

These suggestions of support services desired but not currently available indicate a clear gap in services and create opportunities for the possible introduction of online support networks, representative councils and post-graduate networking. These concepts may already be in place in some universities however they are not universally available. Networking continues to emerge as a theme and is consistent with the need to have a sense of belonging from a cultural perspective. One such network is available through the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC).

In summary, the suggestions for more postgraduate seminars, informal student groups, and networking evident in general questionnaire responses indicates there are strong positive implications for this type of support. It also indicates that if ISUs, in particular, focus on channelling Indigenous postgraduate students into these support mechanisms when appropriate, the overall level of support to those students would increase.

4.4.2 National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation

The National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation is the only national group specifically designed as a networking and support mechanism for

Indigenous postgraduate students. NIPAAC membership is open to all Indigenous postgraduate students (NIPAAC n.d:5).

NIPAAC lists its objectives as follows:

> (a) to provide a network for Indigenous postgraduate students;
> (b) to act as advocate for and to represent the interests of Indigenous postgraduate students at a national level;
> (c) to promote reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples of Australia;
> (d) to promote research into Indigenous issues and the training of Indigenous researchers;
> (e) to educate researchers on appropriate protocols when dealing with issues of cultural and social significance to Indigenous peoples;
> (f) to liaise with universities, governments, and other national associations with a view promoting these objectives;
> (g) to promote the participation by Indigenous people as equals in a national community of postgraduate scholarship; and to be a constituent organisation of CAPA and adhere to the rules of CAPA and resolutions of its Council and Executive (NIPAAC n.d:3).

NIPAAC's sister organisation is the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). The recent abolishment of compulsory student unionism has resulted in both NIPAAC and CAPA funding subsiding. Since then, NIPAAC has maintained the framework of Australia's main (if not only) Indigenous postgraduate networking body, however due to a lack of funding, almost all activity has ceased.

The data indicate that respondents have limited knowledge of NIPAAC as there was no reference to it in their responses. This is despite the fact that many participants suggest the need for a national group to assist Indigenous postgraduate students.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 examined data relating to academic-based support available to Indigenous postgraduate students. Demographic data pertaining to the 55 respondents was presented. Patterns emerging from the demographical data analysis revealed that Indigenous postgraduate students are more likely to be female (69%) and have children (61.8%). They reside predominantly in urban areas (78.2%) and are mostly aged 30-59 years (82%). When examining data pertaining to the degrees undertaken by participants it was

found that, whilst students were predominantly female, the male respondents (31%) were more often studying at higher levels than female respondents.

The research found that 60% of participants were enrolled on a part-time basis; with a higher rate of 88.2% of participants aged 40-49 years old studying part-time. These findings suggest that part-time is the preferred mode of study and that this is likely to be a result of work and/or family commitments.

Section 4.2 discussed supervision and it was noted that only 21.8% were supervised by Indigenous Australians. Whilst 41.8% of participants viewed supervision by an Indigenous person as 'irrelevant', 47% of respondents who identified as belonging to a local Indigenous community indicated that Indigenous supervision was 'extremely important'. Several participants noted that an Indigenous supervisor was important in situations where the research topic was related to Indigenous Australian people or culture. Analysis of this data revealed that the ethnicity of supervisors was not overly important, but rather the cultural appropriateness of the supervision was of significance. These findings support the research of Coopes (2007) who found that many non-Indigenous academics provide appropriate and effective supervision to Indigenous postgraduate students.

Apart from relevant academic qualifications, personable characteristics were seen to be critical to the relationship between student and supervisor. The importance of engaging Indigenous people as examiners was also highlighted, however quality supervision and ethnicity were not found to be mutually exclusive.

The majority of respondents supervised by non-Indigenous Australians indicated that they were satisfied with the support they received, although concerns were noted over the lack of cultural guidance available to postgraduate students from their supervisors and culturally inappropriate supervision. Approximately half of the respondents suggested cultural awareness training as a mandatory requirement for people who supervise Indigenous postgraduate students. Analysis of the data identified an opportunity to

engage Indigenous community members in the supervisory process to provide academic support to Indigenous postgraduate students. These findings support the position of Coopes (2007) and DEST (2002) who note the importance of credentialing Indigenous people to the role of co-supervisors, despite the fact that they may not possess the appropriate academic qualifications.

Several suggestions on how to improve the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students were evident in the data. They include the allocation of suitable times to meet with supervisors; involvement of Indigenous community members and Elders in the supervisory process; increased numbers of Indigenous academics in the tertiary sector; and increased funding for Indigenous Centres and Colleges. Most significant was the finding that Indigenous postgraduate students have a diverse range of wants and needs in terms of supervision that require both consideration and action. Of particular importance was the finding that Indigenous postgraduate students require access to other Indigenous people for academic and cultural support.

Section 4.3 analysed participants' perceptions of the support provided by ISUs. It was noted that half of the participants either never accessed their ISU or accessed it only 1-5 times per year; others accessed their ISU on a weekly basis. Some respondents had no contact with their ISU and had little or no knowledge of the support or services available.

Approximately half of the participants were satisfied with the overall support provided by their ISU. Such satisfaction is consistent with Weir's (2000) view that Indigenous students constitute a new social group, and that satisfaction can arise from this; ISUs can provide the foundation for such social interaction. The remaining respondents indicated that their ISU was unable to assist; they were unsure; or they provided contradictory responses. Some respondents expressed negative views of ISU staff members, referring to them as unfriendly, hostile or lazy. These findings supported the research of Bourke, Burden and Moore (1996) and Bin-Sallik (1989) who found Indigenous students are often dissatisfied with the support provided by ISUs.

Respondents' suggestions as to how to improve the support provided by ISUs was synthesised into three main themes: interaction and communication; employment and staffing; and facilities. The outcomes were consistent with the findings of the AVCC (2006a) and Jordan (1985).

Section 4.4 focused on Indigenous postgraduate support groups. Indigenous support networks were viewed by respondents as an important and positive support mechanism; although some participants desired this support, it was not however, available to them. The findings indicate that the development of Indigenous postgraduate support groups needs considerable attention and their instigation would provide an extremely valuable support mechanism.

Having reviewed the academic based support available to Indigenous postgraduate students, the needs of Indigenous postgraduate students were considered across many dimensions, including supervision, ISUs and Indigenous postgraduate support groups. Of key significance is the finding that more needs to be done to ensure that these support structures are culturally appropriate and accessible and, most importantly, that all Indigenous postgraduate students are provided with information outlining the services available.

Issues pertaining to academic based support available to Indigenous postgraduate students were considered in this chapter. Analysis of non-academic support is addressed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS OF NON-ACADEMIC SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO INDIGENOUS POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Five provides data analysis of non-academic support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students. Section 5.1 highlights the support provided to participants by their families and considers the impact of children and grandchildren on Indigenous postgraduate students.

Community support is discussed in section 5.2. This section examines whether or not participants identify as members of local indigenous communities and explores ways in which these communities support Indigenous postgraduate students. Note that this differs from the analysis of the relationship between supervision and participants who identified as belonging to a local Indigenous community, as presented in section 4.2.1.

Section 5.3 considers the importance and adequacy of financial support mechanisms relevant to Indigenous postgraduate students. The impact of the Commonwealth ABSTUDY Scheme is analysed, along with scholarships, HECS and conference funding.

The Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) is central to section 5.4, where the ITAS program and its support of Indigenous postgraduate students is analysed.

Section 5.5 explores other support issues faced by Indigenous postgraduate students. The topics covered in this section include isolation, time constraints and the recognition of Indigenous Knowledges.

Finally, Section 5.6 summarises the main points discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Family Support

5.1.1 The impact of family on Indigenous postgraduate students

Family is central to Indigenous Australian culture as explained by Eckermann et al. (2006:86):

> There is no doubt that family is important throughout Aboriginal Australia and that many Aboriginal people belong to extensive family networks beyond their immediate families. These networks often extend beyond a particular space and even place and are determined by 'blood', that is, direct kinship or indirect kinship such as second or third cousin, or friends.

It is therefore appropriate to investigate the impact of family on Indigenous postgraduate students.

Respondents were asked to indicate the level of support received from their families (refer to question 17 in Appendix 1). Of the 52 participants who responded to this question, 76.9% stated that they had supportive families who provided ongoing moral and emotional support. The types of support identified included patience, respect, love and encouragement. Respondents noted that support was also provided in the form of discussions, understanding participants' needs for study time and space, as well as financial support. Practical acts of support included housework, cooking and shopping. Accommodation and transport were also noted by some participants.

Numerous participants indicated that they required an appropriate amount of time to concentrate on their studies. In this section of the questionnaire (refer to questions 16, 17, 19 and 20 in Appendix 1) many participants clearly identified that their families were supportive by assisting with tasks to create more time to address their academic requirements.

One participant, Daniel, explained that his family supported him in a practical way by allowing '*time to be at Uni instead of [doing] housework*.' Further, he explained that his family made some allowance in order to provide him with more time to study:

I'm from a close knit family that respect my efforts to gain postgraduate qualifications and understand when I can't be present at extended family occasions.

James explains the support provided by his family with an element of humour:

The support was terrific, however I felt that they needed to also suffer the highs/lows of my stress levels whilst I undertook the studies – overall they were very supportive but they suffered (lol).

Several participants with children received significant support from their families in the form of child care. Rose is an Indigenous full-time Masters student in the 20-29 years age bracket with children aged 6 and 4 years old. Both Rose and her husband (also an Indigenous Australian) have studied for over 7 years and plan to continue studying for a further 4 years. Rose is enrolled through the block release method and required to travel interstate to attend block sessions. Her family play an integral role in assisting with the children when Rose is interstate for approximately six weeks per year:

Both our families help us with the children and we have large extended families on both sides. We would not be able to do what we do without them. We try to pay back our families with helping them in what ever way we can.

Tom is an Indigenous doctoral student belonging to the 40-49 years age category. He is enrolled on a part-time external basis and has four children aged 18, 14, 6 and 3 years. Tom comes from a family that demonstrates considerable interest in his studies. He explains one aspect of how family supported him with his studies:

The biggest support from both my family and my parents is that they are generally interested in the area of the research. When I go to uni for residentials and stuff we all go together and stay in a motel, and then I come home for lunch and even if I study at night it's kind of a mini holiday and regular work day.

It is also interesting to note that two participants' partners are academics. In these cases the family (i.e. partner) had first-hand experience undertaking tertiary studies and therefore understand the pressures placed on the participant.

When asked about the types of support participants received from their families, 23.1% indicated that they received no family assistance (refer to question 17 in Appendix 1). Some provided reasons for this lack of support, whilst others felt that their families were a negative impact on their studies:

> Joseph: *Very little. My family just assume that I am superman and will pass my courses no matter what.*
>
> Kristie: *They find university studies intimidating as a topic and it has caused me to have to 'go my own way' to achieve things academically.*
>
> Irene: *Family is always demanding, and sometime extremely selfish.*
>
> Denise: *You know because I am the only person in my family and my Indigenous partners' family that has studied at University, I really don't think that they understand the intensity and workload and pressures that are associated with studying at this level. I therefore don't think that I am as supported as well as I could be if they understood these things from personal experience.*
>
> Elizabeth: *None really as they do not understand what I am doing so it is not spoken about.*

One participant mentioned that he had 'no family'; others noted that they received no support because their families did not live close by.

In reviewing the impacts of family support on respondents, the data supports the findings of White et al. (2002) who found that personal support was critical for Indigenous students and that family was a key provider of this support. The data suggests that this support is certainly applicable to Indigenous postgraduate students. Further, White et al. (2002) identified that the 'typical' Indigenous student was likely to be the first person in their family to attend university and it can be inferred from this that postgraduate students are similarly likely to be the first person in their family to undertake postgraduate studies, thus suggesting that family support is vital at this level.

The data also provide indirect support for the findings of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, which identified family responsibilities as a key reason that prevents some Indigenous Australians from undertaking postgraduate studies (AVCC 2006a). It could be argued therefore, that having family support is a factor that supports Indigenous postgraduate students in undertaking their studies.

Similarly, these findings echo the Jordan Report's (1985) finding (previously noted in section 2.2.1.2) where it was noted that a lack of family support was one of the main problems reported by Indigenous students in tertiary institutions.

5.1.2 The impact of children on Indigenous postgraduate students

Having noted above that respondents were supported by their families in various ways, it is useful to focus specifically on issues pertaining to those students with children, given that 61.8% of participants indicated that they had children. Question 6 of the questionnaire asked respondents 'Are your children currently living with you?' (refer to Appendix 1). Of those who noted that they had children; 64.7% had children living with them; 32.4% had no children living with them; and 2.9% indicated that a child was deceased.

5.1.2.1 Parenting young children

Respondents were asked their children's ages (refer to question 5 of Appendix 1). A total of 36.4% had children aged less than 18 years of age.

Three participants used the terminology 'juggle' or 'juggling' when explaining how children impacted their studies. Their responses are listed below:

Michael – *Juggling parenting and research is a somewhat complicated act.*

Rose – *The children are very young and we juggle them between us.*

Tom – *It means I have to juggle things and do study at different times. Luckily I work for myself and so can schedule work, study and kid time so every one is happy. If I were in regular 9-5 work I don't think we would all cope so well.*

It is relevant to note that the children of these three participants were all 20 years of age or younger and each of the participants had more than one child. Rose's children were 6 and 4 years of age; Tom's were aged 18, 14, 6 and 3; and Michael's children were 20, 17 and 14 years of age.

Many respondents indicated that the act of juggling parenting and academic responsibilities was difficult and required considerable time and thought. It also highlighted that participants who worked full-time and had children often faced an even more difficult task than students without children.

Whilst the elements being juggled are not explicitly articulated in the responses above, it is evident that time is a limiting factor – a constraint within which work, study, childcare and parenting all require a level of focus. It is unlikely that a definitive set of priorities would exist in order to consistently address these demands. Rather it is anticipated that situational variables would determine the relative level of focus on these and other activities for any given day. For example, health of children would likely take priority during times of illness; work might take priority if, say, customer issues arise; and study might take priority when submission deadlines loom.

As the number of elements to be managed increases, so does the level of complexity – often requiring more frequent changes of focus from one element to the next and it is this frequent changing that leads to the sense of 'juggling'. Clearly, this challenge impacts both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

Although the literature review does not directly discuss the impact of children or grandchildren, the Jordan Report (1985) identified illness of children and lack of child care facilities as two of the key problems affecting Indigenous postgraduate students. The findings support the Jordan Report's (1985) conclusion as considerable juggling would be required when children are ill or childcare is not available.

5.1.2.2 The impact of adult-aged children

Question 5 (refer to Appendix 1) asked participants to list the ages of their children. It found that 32.7% of participants had children who were 18 years of age or older. Although participants were not requested to explain how the ages of their children impacted on their studies, some thought it was a necessary consideration. The 'juggling' concept noted above is an indication of how participants with young children coped.

In contrast, some participants with adult aged children provided mixed comments on how their children impacted their studies. For example, when asked 'If you have children, how does that impact on your studies?' (refer to question 16 in Appendix 1), Beverly responded '*it doesn't as they are adults*.' Conversely, Irene specifically indicated that, despite her children being adult-aged, they were still required to take an active parenting role:

> *I think most people only consider such issues if you have young children – forgetting that adult offspring still require support (& mothering) and that the pressures and responsibilities are sometimes much the same as when you have babies/young children – and the financial and other responsibilities do not diminish, especially if they are studying.*

Some of the adult-aged children also had children of their own, making a few of the respondents grandparents. The questionnaire did not include specific questions relating to participants' roles as grandparents, however four respondents identified themselves not only as parents, but also as grandparents. Analysis of the data revealed that being a grandparent did impact participants' academic journeys. Feelings of guilt and stress were

common to Indigenous postgraduate grandparents in this research and some explained that the roles of grandparents could be compromised due to academic commitments:

> Jan – *Not so much with my children but with my grandchildren it is hard to say that you can't read them a book or that you need to be on the computer… it makes me feel guilty if I am not studying but also that I am not spending quality time with my family.*

> Pearl – *I have grandchildren – family responsibilities take time so added stress on trying to study.*

In terms of academic commitments, it is evident that some respondents have additional obligations as grandparents. Given the cultural prevalence of extended families and the strong commitment of Indigenous Australians to family, grandparenting responsibilities will potentially impact Indigenous students to a greater extent than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Overall, it was found that families could have a significant impact on Indigenous postgraduate students. As noted in the literature review, previous research indicates that Indigenous students are almost twice as likely (30.2%) to have dependent children as non-Indigenous students (16.6%). It was also noted that 40.3% of Indigenous postgraduates indicated that they had regularly missed class because of work commitments (AVCC 2007). Based on the issues identified above in relation to juggling and feelings of guilt and stress, it is reasonable to surmise that if Indigenous postgraduates missed class due to work commitments, they may also miss class due to the responsibilities of dependant children and/or grandchildren. Given the greater likelihood of Indigenous students having dependent children and the feedback provided by participants, support for Indigenous postgraduate students with dependent children is deemed to be very important.

5.2 Community Support

5.2.1 Identification as part of a local Indigenous community

In order to understand the significance of broader Indigenous community support (refer to the discussion on community in footnote 1 of section 4.2), respondents were asked to identify whether they were part of a local Indigenous community (refer to question 18a in Appendix 1). In reply 56.4% answered 'yes'; 40% replied 'no'; and 3.6% of responses were inconclusive. Figure 5.1 below summarises these responses.

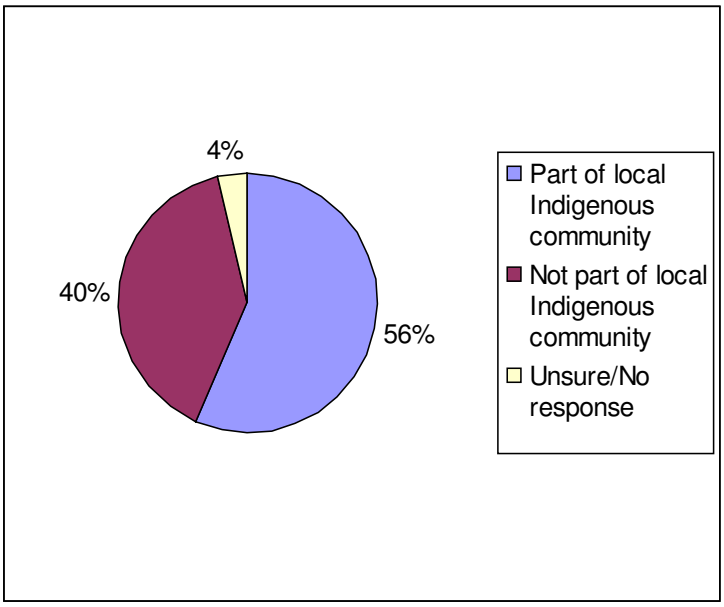

Figure 5.1 Identification with local Indigenous community

5.2.2 Support from local Indigenous communities

Participants were asked to identify ways in which those communities supported their studies (refer to question 18b in Appendix 1). Responses to this question varied considerably.

Some respondents mentioned that the local Indigenous community was instrumental in assisting with their academic studies by providing advice, encouragement, praise and moral support. For example, Daniel is enrolled in a Doctorate on a part-time external basis. Time is of the essence to his studies as he tends to have several large projects and numerous commitments at any given time. He explains how his local Indigenous community embrace his studies:

> Daniel: *They are aware of my commitment to improving my education position and respect my rights to pursue my goal despite the demands at times on me.*

The support of their local Indigenous community also proved to be beneficial for respondents whose research centred on Indigenous issues. Wes, Darlene and Julie explained some of the ways in which their communities supported their studies through providing valuable resources and networking opportunities:

> Wes: *If I need to interview someone, there is always someone in the community.*

> Darlene: *In the past they have assisted by allowing themselves to be involved in past research projects.*

> Julie: *People in community who have been or still are involved in heritage work and native title support guide my project by talking through issues with me, offering advice and expert knowledge on things, sharing their experiences and views with me as part of their participation. Many people know that on a personal level I feel the same way about things as they do so they are pleased that I am doing the work, just because it means 'our story will be written or told by one of us' and not by someone outside the community.*

Others respondents explained that they are viewed as a positive role model in the community. Denise proposed that her dedication is seen as inspiring and motivating to the community. In these instances the positive relationship between the participant and the community is two-fold as both parties benefit.

In contrast to the support outlined above, over one-third of participants (35.7%) who identified as part of a local Indigenous community indicated that their community did not provide them with any substantial support. Some respondents suggested that their community did not support them simply because they did not know how to support students participating at this level of academic study:

> Kristie: *There is no active support. I don't think that they actually know what to do in order to support us. They don't know how to utilise us. It generally takes someone who has been to uni to actually know how to have a conversation about it.*

Kristie's comment is particularly interesting as it highlights the difficulty of breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage. A lack of knowledge of how to support community members undergoing higher education impacts a community's ability to do so. This lack of knowledge reflects lack of experience due to historical exclusion from education in general and, in particular, higher education. It is anticipated that increasing the number of Indigenous completions at universities will improve the experience and knowledge levels within Indigenous communities, thus enabling them to more effectively support a new generation of Indigenous students.

In some instances, respondents indicated that their role in the community actually worked to the detriment of their academic endeavours as noted below:

> Jan: *They don't really, seems to be the other way around – I tend to let myself get roped into community roles.*

> Tracy: *It doesn't really. More distraction. Though there are the ones who have studied themselves who give words of advice and encouragement, providing role models.*

> Irene: *Usually community organisations involvement adds to the workload and stress. Demands on time (and skills) are relentless, and sometimes very selfish.*

Overall, there were mixed findings in terms of community support for participants in their studies. Some respondents viewed community support as beneficial, whilst others

deemed it to be disadvantageous. This latter finding that identified community support as potentially detrimental can be linked to Connelly's (2001) claim that the 'physical' absence of the person from their family and community could be traumatic, particularly in the case of matriarchal women. Many Indigenous postgraduate students have responsibilities within their local community and so their postgraduate commitments can create a natural tension between these responsibilities.

The findings provide some support for NIPAAC's (2002) suggestion that universities need to develop relationships with Indigenous communities to improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students. However, as noted in the literature review, it is unreasonable to expect a local community to effectively speak for all Indigenous students within any specific higher education institution.

5.3 Financial Support

5.3.1 Importance and Adequacy of Financial Support

Information was sought from participants on the importance and adequacy of the financial support available to them as Indigenous postgraduate students (refer to question 21 in Appendix 1). Focusing firstly on importance, 85.5% of participants indicated that financial support while studying was 'extremely important'; 12.7% noted that it was 'somewhat important'; and 1.8% stated that it was 'irrelevant'.

Whilst there was an even distribution of responses across the various age categories of participants, differences emerged when data was analysed according to gender. Notably, 94.7% of female participants, compared to only 64.7% of male participants, indicated that financial support was 'extremely important'.

When participants' age, employment status and responsibilities to children are considered, several findings emerge. Financial support was noted as extremely important

by 95.2% of respondents without children. This 'childless' cohort was more likely to be young – 85.7% of participants aged 20-29 years had no children. Further, 70 per cent of respondents whose primary source of income was through a scholarship had no children. Similarly, 54.5% of ABSTUDY recipients were childless. Only 20.8% of those in paid employment did not have children. This high level of reliance on scholarships and ABSTUDY as the primary source of income helps to explain the extreme importance of financial support indicated by respondents without children. It is likely that this young cohort may have moved directly from school to university and ultimately into postgraduate courses. As such they would be less likely to have entered the workforce and therefore are more reliant on financial support than older students who have previously entered the workforce and subsequently moved onto postgraduate studies.

Less pronounced, but still significant, was the finding that 79.4% of respondents with children rated financial support as extremely important. This group was generally older - 84.6% of participants aged 50-59 had children. In contrast to those without children, 79.2% of these respondents derived their main source of income through paid employment. Regardless of the source, however, financial support was deemed to be extremely important by the majority of respondents.

Moving to the adequacy of financial support whilst studying (refer to question 22 in Appendix 1), 36.4% of participants indicated that support was adequate; 29.1% noted that it was 'only just' adequate; 29.1% responded that it was inadequate; whilst 5.4% of participants failed to respond.

Although participants were not specifically asked to identify their primary source of income, 47 provided this information as part of their response to questions 21 and 22 (refer to Appendix 1). ABSTUDY was identified as a common income source for numerous participants, with 20% noting it as their primary source of financial support. At least 43.6% of respondents worked in paid positions; 18.2% of participants relied on scholarships; and 3.6% of respondents depended on assistance from their families. A further 14.5% of participants did not indicate a source of primary income.

Importantly, responses on the adequacy of financial support whilst studying were not found to be influenced by source of income, i.e. salary, ABSTUDY, scholarship or minimal paid work. A significant difference between responses was identified based on gender. Twice as many males (58.8%) as females (26.3%) indicated that the financial support they received whilst studying was adequate. Based on the data no specific patterns are evident to explain this finding. For instance, of the participants who indicated that they participated in regular paid employment, 70.8% were female and 29.2% male. This is consistent with the overall number of participants, which was 69% female and 31% male. Further, respondents without children were more likely to indicate that the financial support they received while studying was adequate, possibly because they had only themselves to support. It is possible that the young, childless cohort dependent on financial support acknowledge its importance to their wellbeing whilst older postgraduate students, the majority of whom were parents, tended to work in paid employment. This demonstrates some of the additional challenges faced by students who 'juggled' parenting responsibilities, work and study (refer to section 5.1.2.1).

The data provide some support for the findings of the AVCC (2007) in that 58.2% of respondents indicated that their financial support was inadequate or only just adequate whereas the AVCC (2007) identified that 72.5% of Indigenous students and 52.5% of non-Indigenous students were worried about their financial situation. Further, the AVCC (2006a) identified financial pressure as a key factor affecting Indigenous students, particularly in circumstances where the primary income earner is the person undertaking studies. The findings also support the Jordan Report's (1985) claim that finance was one of the main support issues for Indigenous students in tertiary institutions.

Because of the importance of ABSTUDY as a common source of financial support for many Indigenous postgraduate students it will be addressed separately in the next section. Although it was not the most frequently identified source of income for this group of participants, it is the main source of financial support that the Federal Government provides to Indigenous postgraduate students.

5.3.2 ABSTUDY

5.3.2.1 Adequacy of ABSTUDY

Participants receiving ABSTUDY (refer to section 2.2.3.2) as their primary means of income offered mixed opinions on whether the amount they received was adequate. Matthew, Jacqueline and Alison were enrolled in Masters or Doctorate courses and entitled to the higher rate of Living Allowance (refer to section 2.2.3.2):

> Matthew – *ABSTUDY – it's never enough.*

> Jacqueline - *ABSTUDY provide a suitable postgraduate amount as long as you were happy not to socialise.*

> Alison - *ABSTUDY have provided my support. Because I have no mortgage or other credit commitments it has stretched to provide support to my daughter in the form of free rent etc during her studies. It has however meant little spare for anything other than basics.*

Similarly, Amanda maintained that whilst the Masters and Doctorate rate of ABSTUDY does assist Indigenous postgraduate students to meet basic living costs, it does not allow for many extras:

> *The money I receive from Centrelink only just covers my rent, food and bills. There is hardly any money left after these have been paid for.*

In one case, the postgraduate student did not have the financial support to sustain an internet connection:

> Kristie - *I have found that I cannot afford to maintain an internet connection (with phone line) in order to be able to study online or at home. It is actually cheaper for me to maintain a vehicle and drive to the university facilities 7 days a week to access the internet there.*

Two respondents noted that the Incidentals Allowance (refer to section 2.2.3.2) assisted in meeting the costs associated with higher education, although Denise claimed that it did not meet all expenses associated with postgraduate studies:

> *As I also work part-time I am only entitled to Incidentals allowance from ABSTUDY. This is approx. $400 per year. This was beneficial but by no means does it cover the cost of text books, travel, parking fees, stationery etc.*

No participant provided any feedback pertaining to the thesis allowance, despite the fact that some participants had recently submitted their dissertations. It is possible that many were simply not aware that this support is available, or perhaps some had chosen to submit using the online option which is becoming more commonplace in academia.

The ABSTUDY fares allowance (refer to section 2.2.3.2) was established to support Indigenous postgraduate students who commute between their place of residence and the higher education institution at which they are enrolled.

Two participants specifically included the ABSTUDY fares assistance entitlement in their responses. Rachel noted travel in her response to the question 'Is the financial support you receive while studying adequate?' (refer to question 22 of Appendix 1).

> *ABSTUDY provided living costs and money to travel [interstate] (I had to pay upfront and then got refund).*

Similarly, Alison provided the following response when asked in question 13 'What support services are currently available to you (as an Indigenous postgraduate student)?' (refer to Appendix 1):

> *Liaison with ABSTUDY re travel for res schools.*

As there was no explicit question on the ABSTUDY fare allowance the limited comments on its use cannot be used to draw any specific conclusions.

ABSTUDY is a subset of the overarching financial support for Indigenous postgraduate students. The concerns identified, however, do support the findings of the West Australian Aboriginal Council on Higher Education (2004:7.3) that rises in HECS fees combined with restrictions to ABSTUDY have 'compounded the financial obstacles restricting Indigenous participation in higher education'.

5.3.2.2 ABSTUDY justification

One problem identified by participants is the level of scrutiny ABSTUDY places on student enrolments. Participants have noted that the process is rigorous and can sometimes interfere with their academic experience or progress. When asked what some of the most difficult problems faced whilst undertaking postgraduate studies (refer to question 19 of Appendix 1) Malcolm and Joseph stated:

> Malcolm - *The amount of rubbish (duplicated paperwork) needed by Centrelink to verify that I am actually a student and that I am doing my research at the university. They keep hassling me for the same details every three months and take my focus away from my research. This is very frustrating and I get angry the way they always hassle me.*

> Joseph - *I am not receiving any ABSTUDY payments and I am in the process of trying to prove my case to Centrelink for my ABSTUDY allowance.*

It is clearly necessary to ensure that ABSTUDY funding benefits only those entitled to assistance. There may, however, be opportunities to make the ABSTUDY process more user-friendly so that it does not adversely impact students' academic progress. Whilst speculation could be made as to the most effective processes for administering ABSTUDY so that it does not impact students' academic progress, it is beyond the brief of this inquiry, although it should be noted as an area warranting further research.

5.3.3 Scholarships

The findings of the 2006 *Australian University Student Finances Survey* established that Indigenous university students experience greater financial difficulty than non-Indigenous students and that the financial environment of Indigenous students was significantly different to, and more challenging than, that faced by non-Indigenous students (refer to section 2.2.3.1) (AVCC 2007). Literature provided by Coopes (2007) also noted the financial costs associated with higher education present as a barrier to Indigenous students participating in higher education (refer to section 2.2.3.1). For these reasons, along with those presented in the following data analysis, the importance of providing adequate financial assistance through scholarships cannot be understated. And whilst the availability of scholarships may be scarce for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, it is imperative that the financial challenges experienced by Indigenous higher education students, as noted by the AVCC (2007) and Coopes (2007), be addressed – particularly through an increase in scholarships designated specifically for Indigenous students.

In response to the questions relating to financial support, many participants noted that, as a primary source of income, the funding level of scholarships was insufficient. The majority of scholarships held by participants were Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) or similar scholarship. The 2007 rate for an APA Scholarship was $19,616 per annum (University of New England Research Services 2007). It is important to note that this rate is identical to the ABSTUDY Masters and Doctorate Award. Also similar to the ABSTUDY Scheme, recipients of an APA Scholarship held mixed views as to whether the amount was sufficient to meet their living expenses. The general consensus was that whilst the scholarship was ample to meet daily expenses it did not provide sufficient funds for additional necessary expenses.

Elizabeth – *APA scholarship is by no means enough to live on.*

Anthony - *I receive an Indigenous APA equivalent scholarship, which has been a primary reason for taking up a PhD, also a top-up scholarship which has made living much more comfortable.*

Mary – *The scholarship paid for most of my unit fees over the past few years but text books, parking, petrol and other reading materials had to be met myself.*

Other participants identified scholarships as a support mechanism that they desired but did not have. Some indicated a desire for a scholarship to assist with day-to-day living expenses, others sought a scholarship for more specific needs such as computers and conference expenses. When asked 'Are there any support services you would like to see available to Indigenous postgraduate students that are currently not available' (refer to question 14 of Appendix 1), Jacqueline responded:

A scholarship similar to the Commonwealth Learning Scholarships for undergrads that would assist toward conference expenses, laptops etc.

Similarly, in response to 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to question 19 of Appendix 1), Darlene answered:

I want to go on and do my PhD but if there is no financial support and I have exceeded my Fee-help limit, then what am I supposed to do??? Finance will assist by allowing me to buy course materials e.g. books, as well as a laptop and computer facilities to use for my studies and work.

Concerns were also raised regarding the availability of scholarships for Indigenous postgraduate course-work students. Participants such as Darlene believed that there were minimal scholarship opportunities available to them:

I find that there is hardly any money available for course work post grad studies compared to that which is available for research… Whilst there are scholarships available, there are only a few. Need more financial support i.e. more scholarships for coursework post grad studies.

Ultimately it was found that many respondents desired but did not have the financial support available through the provision of scholarships. Those who held scholarships indicated that it was adequate for daily living expenses, but insufficient for additional requirements. This finding is supported by the AVCC (2006a) claim presented in the literature review which argued that scholarships aimed at Indigenous postgraduate students are not adequately funded.

5.3.4 HECS

Higher education students are charged fees under a system referred to as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), or more recently known as the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP). Some participants explained that their employers paid their HECS fees; others maintained that they had a 'HECS free place' at university. The remainder are likely to have deferred their HECS payment and will pay through the Australian taxation scheme at a later date (refer to section 2.2.3.3).

In response to the question about the adequacy of financial support received whilst studying (refer to question 22 in Appendix 1), some participants specifically referred to HECS:

> Samantha – *No. I never received any income but neither have I ever paid fees. Had I not got scholarships or HECS free places I would NEVER have done it.*

> Carol – *Yes, because of the high cost of study. At the end of my undergraduate degree I had a HECS debt that I thought I would never pay off. The cost of postgraduate study is expensive, but I am very lucky in that I won a scholarship which means the HECS debt is minimal compared to the overall cost.*

It should be noted that all Higher Degree Research Students receive HECS exemptions provided that they are within the prescribed DEST timeframe to complete their research.

5.3.5 Conference Funding

Whilst a few small grants or scholarships exist, there is no nationwide scheme currently available to specifically assist Indigenous postgraduate students attend conferences. It can be argued that Indigenous postgraduate students would have greater difficulty attending conferences than non-Indigenous students, consistent with the greater financial difficulty and outside commitments of Indigenous university students than their non-Indigenous counterparts (refer to section 2.2.3.1). Taking into account the disparity in Indigenous participation in higher education (refer to section 1.2), there is evidence to suggest that financial assistance enabling Indigenous postgraduate students to attend research conferences is warranted.

When asked whether the financial support they received while studying was adequate Cheryl answered '*No. Should include conference money'*. This lack of financial support has impacted some Indigenous postgraduate studies. For example, Masters student Jacqueline explained that she was '*unable to attend a conference to present a paper due to lack of funds*.' This was a setback for Jacqueline as the conference was one of the most significant to Indigenous researchers in Australia (the Indigenous Researchers Forum) and she had been accepted to present a paper at the conference.

In order to overcome this dilemma, Julie offered an ideal suggestion that, if implemented, would create important opportunities for Indigenous postgraduate students to attend conferences:

> F*unding readily available through every higher education institution that would support Indigenous researchers to participate in the annual Indigenous Researchers Conference held in Australia, and one opportunity to attend an international forum.*

It is evident that some participants required funding to attend conferences but had not been able to acquire sufficient funds or were unaware of how to obtain such funding.

Overall, the findings indicate that Indigenous postgraduate students consider financial support to be important though often inadequate. This is consistent with the AVCC

(2007) finding that Indigenous students experience greater financial difficulty than non-Indigenous students. Coopes (2007:174) further argued that financial assistance is essential in 'promoting equal opportunity in higher education.' It is therefore critical that this problem is addressed to ensure better support mechanisms for Indigenous postgraduate students.

5.4 Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS)

5.4.1 Background Information on ITAS

In 2005 the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) reviewed what was then referred to as the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) and replaced it with ITAS (DEST 2005). Whilst somewhat trivial, it is important to note the subtle difference in the title because some of the participants referred to ITAS as ATAS. In this inquiry the two acronyms are accepted as referring to the same scheme.

ITAS is a Federal Government initiative designed to assist Indigenous students by providing tutorial assistance. The 2005-2008 budget was $186.7 million (DEST 2005). ITAS has four categories:

1. In-class tuition;
2. Tuition for Year 10, 11 and 12 students;
3. Tuition for Remote Indigenous Students; and
4. Tuition for Indigenous Students at University (DEST 2005:1).

This research is concerned with the last of these elements.

The Indigenous Support Unit at each university receives a sum of money from DEST for ITAS purposes. 'Most universities, through their Aboriginal Education Centres can arrange for supplementary tuition for eligible Indigenous students' (DEST 2004:2). The majority of universities have an ITAS Officer, who is a person employed specifically to organise tutorial support for both undergraduate and postgraduate students and it is their

job to ensure that students are allocated suitable tutors. As a general rule, university students are usually allocated up to two hours tuition per subject per week, with slightly more hours during examination periods (DEST 2004).

5.4.2 Participants fail to access ITAS support

Although respondents were not specifically asked to comment on their experiences with ITAS, only 18.2% of participants listed tutorial support as a service available to them as part of their response to question 13 'What support services are currently available to you (as an Indigenous postgraduate student)?' (refer to Appendix 1). The remaining participants may not believe they are entitled to ITAS support as a postgraduate student; may not know that the support is available; or did not require tutorial assistance. Masters student Donna stated '*I think there are tutors but don't really know*'.

Similarly, in examining responses to question 14 of the questionnaire, which asked participants 'Are there any support services you would like to see available to Indigenous postgraduate students that are currently not available?' (refer to Appendix 1), Alison, Rose, Sally, James and Albert all made reference to tutorial support:

> Alison – *I believe for some ATAS should be available if required – especially for students whose first language is not SAE* [Standard Australian English].
>
> Rose – *More tutoring support. I have needed that but have had only limited funding from the centre. My last application was not even acknowledged, so I am unsure if they received it. I have struggled with the writing of my bound volume that is due in six months. I was only given limited funding as I was a postgraduate student.*
>
> Sally – *Mentor/Tutor to keep me on track and provide direction in study.*
>
> James – *ITAS where needed or additional supervisory/academic provided advice.*
>
> Albert – *Mentors and Aboriginal tutors.*

There is a possibility that these participants held the view that ITAS was only available to undergraduate students. This is demonstrated in the responses to question 15 of the questionnaire, which asked participants 'Does the support available to you now differ from when you were an undergraduate student?'. Doctorate student Daniel, and Masters students Angela and Patricia responded by stating that tutorial support was difficult to access as a postgraduate student:

> Daniel – *I had access to the university Indigenous unit's ATAS program (while an undergraduate).*
>
> Angela – *Difficult to access ATAS now.*
>
> Patricia – *Generally postgrads don't get tutoring like undergrads do.*

Hence there is a perception that ITAS is available to undergraduate students and not postgraduate students. This confusion is not surprising since the ITAS guidelines are not specific and the practice of passing on the ITAS support funds to students differs from one university to the next. Some universities promote the availability of ITAS to all their students – including postgraduate students. Whilst others limit the support to their undergraduate students. Overall, the findings point to the fact that ITAS is a support mechanism that is desired by Indigenous postgraduate students though not well utilised, and that further information regarding its availability needs to be provided to postgraduate students for the program to be more successful. This is an area that requires further investigation, particularly as data relating to the standard and availability of tutors indicate that they can have a significant impact on the support students receive.

5.5 Other Support Issues

This section investigates other support issues for Indigenous postgraduate students - in particular isolation, time constraints and recognition of Indigenous Knowledges.

5.5.1 Isolation

Some participants indicated that they experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation (refer to section 2.2.2.3). This was noted more commonly among participants who studied externally. When asked in the questionnaire 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to question 19 in Appendix 1) Alison and Denise provided the following responses:

> Alison – *The loneliness of the long distance education.*
>
> Denise – *I studied one course externally from NT, I found this very isolating. I then tried to undertake a 2nd course externally but withdrew because it was just too hard a course to do externally without face-to-face contact.*

Other respondents suggested that loneliness was the result of isolation. Tom and Joseph provided comments on the loneliness they have endured as external students:

> Tom – *One thing I have found is that it is a very lonely form of study, especially as an external. I have been trying to get myself up to the uni at least once every 6-8 weeks to work in the library, go to seminars and just get some contact with others in a similar situation. I guess there are lots of this kind of stuff organized for internal students, there seems to be not much for external students.*
>
> Joseph – *This is one of the loneliest journeys that I have ever taken. Everything is online and very impersonal. I do not know if this is a cultural thing or not but it makes the road ahead look quite distasteful. It is not an experience that I am looking forward to in the slightest.*

Isolation clearly had an impact on some Indigenous postgraduate students and this was consistent with the finding of the AVCC (2006a) that social and cultural isolation was an

issue for Indigenous students, who have a tendency to feel isolated from mainstream students and staff members.

The analysis of this information supports the findings of DEST (2002), where it was identified that isolation makes it hard to keep in contact with peers, share feelings and discuss problems. It also provides some support for the findings of Coopes (2007), who noted the isolation of Indigenous students resulting from low levels of representation of fellow Indigenous students at universities.

5.5.2 Time Constraints

Time posed a considerable problem to many of the participants. The group of Indigenous postgraduate students in this inquiry indicated several commitments apart from academic studies including work, family, children and community responsibilities.

Question 19 asked participants 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to Appendix 1). The following responses signified time as a key issue:

> Christopher – *Based on my Masters and the little experience I have had as [a] PhD student time is the biggest issue… more specifically the lack of it.*
>
> Cathy – *Balancing work/ study/ home life. Having time to concentrate on one thing without it impacting on the other.*
>
> Carol – *Time availability – as my work requires management of staff and work hours that leave limited time for study.*
>
> David – *Time, getting enough time to do every thing other than study.*
>
> Sharon – *Juggling work, family and study issues. Pressure from work to complete. Finding time to actually study. I always ask other postgrads who are in full-time*

employment and who have families when exactly they manage to do their work and they have also indicated that finding time and a peaceful environment is an issue.

Jacqueline – *Finding time to study because I work full-time, 2 hours a day of commuting to and from work leaves me exhausted to study after-hours during work days.*

Time was found to be critical to respondents, the management of which posed key challenges. Although the literature review did not specifically discuss the issue of time, previous discussions surrounding family, community and employment responsibilities support the finding that factors associated with time are a challenge for Indigenous postgraduates.

5.5.3 Recognition of Indigenous Knowledges

Investigating the area of Indigenous Knowledges presented several obstacles. As established in Chapter 2, there is no clear definition that effectively describes the nature or characteristics of Indigenous Knowledges (refer to section 2.3.1).

Some participants discussed the lack of recognition and respect for Indigenous Knowledges when asked 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' (refer to question 19 in Appendix 1):

Irene – *Trying to get westerners (colleagues etc.) to engage with philosophical discussion – accepting that indigenous knowledge(s) are valid canons within any learning/teaching environment.*

Elizabeth – *The lack of respect for Indigenous thought and knowledge.*

When asked 'What would improve the overall quality of supervision Indigenous postgraduate students receive?' (refer to question 31 of Appendix 1), one of Rachel's responses was:

To acknowledge that as well as 'Intellectual work' our PhDs are 'cultural work.'

Hence, some respondents suggested that engaging the academic community to acknowledge Indigenous Knowledges had proved to be a difficult process. Specific challenges were identified in regard to the lack of recognition and respect for Indigenous Knowledges within some areas of academia, although it was recognised that addressing these issues would be difficult.

Whilst Nakata (2004) noted that Indigenous people or academics are not the most appropriate arbitrators between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understanding he also noted that there are significant differences in the perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous regarding 'scholarly and intellectual practice' (Nakata 2004:12). The data from this inquiry provides some evidence to support this however the limited number of responses is not sufficient to draw any specific conclusions.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter analysed the non-academic support available to Indigenous postgraduate students. Section 5.1.1 examined support provided to participants by their families. It was found that the families of some participants were supportive, providing encouragement, understanding and financial support. Other respondents revealed that they were not supported by their families or else had no family to support them. Family support was found to be an important mechanism for Indigenous postgraduate students. These findings confirm the literature findings of White et al. (2007), Jordan (1985), and the AVCC report (2006a). It was found that family support assists Indigenous Australians in undertaking postgraduate studies and that such assistance is vital at this level of study.

The impact of children on Indigenous Postgraduate students was considered and in section 5.1.2 it was noted that the majority of participants (61.8%) were parents. Some respondents indicated that their children, and in some cases grandchildren, would always need them and therefore impact on their studies regardless of age; other participants

indicated that their children were adults and did not impact on their studies. The findings further indicated that some Indigenous postgraduate students with children experienced feelings of stress and guilt and that appropriate support was important.

Section 5.2 examined the relationship between communities and Indigenous postgraduate students. More than half the participants (56.4%) identified as belonging to a local Indigenous community and they typically had children and/or resided in urban areas. Some participants were supported by their communities and, in situations where participants' research was centred on Indigenous issues, communities provided precious resources and networking opportunities.

Conversely, other participants (35.7%) explained that they received no support from their local Indigenous community, primarily because their community did not know how to support Indigenous postgraduate students. In some instances, communities were identified as a hindrance to participants' academic studies, primarily due to the time demands placed on participants. NIPAAC's (2002) proposal calling for universities to build relationships with Indigenous communities to advance outcomes for Indigenous students was supported by the findings.

Data pertaining to financial support was analysed in section 5.3. It was noted that 85.5% of participants indicated financial support was 'extremely important'; yet only 36.4% of respondents stated that the financial support they received was adequate.

ABSTUDY was utilised by a number of participants and the Living Allowance was identified as the primary source of income by 20% of respondents. Other components of the ABSTUDY scheme, such as the Incidentals Allowance and Fares Allowance, were acknowledged by some participants; however other parts, such as the Thesis Allowance, were not noted at all in the data. Overall, participants who received ABSTUDY appeared to be reasonably satisfied with the scheme and the assistance it provides to Indigenous postgraduate students, although the findings indicate that the funding available to

students should increase to assist students to better meet their financial responsibilities and obligations.

Participants provided a variety of opinions pertaining to scholarships. Some respondents demonstrated a good understanding of the types of scholarships available to them whilst others appeared to have very minimal knowledge. HECS free places were identified as a key support mechanism for Indigenous postgraduate students, some of whom indicated that they would not have undertaken postgraduate courses if they had to pay a HECS contribution.

The findings indicated that Indigenous postgraduate students are not as well supported financially in the area of ABSTUDY, Scholarships, HECS and conference funding as they could be, given that many continue to struggle. These findings supported the findings of the AVCC (2007) and Coopes (2007). Considerable improvements to the financial support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students are warranted, with particular emphasis on ABSTUDY and scholarships.

Section 5.4 focused on the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS). A small number of respondents (18.2%) indicated that they were aware of ITAS and the support it provided. The majority of participants made no reference to ITAS, suggesting they may have been unaware of the program and its availability to them. The findings indicated that more information about the ITAS program should be provided to better support Indigenous postgraduate students.

Section 5.5 addressed other support issues, including isolation, time constraints and recognition of Indigenous Knowledges. Many participants, particularly external students, described their academic experience as isolating and lonely. It was found that most of the respondents struggled to find time to fulfil academic and other commitments. Further, references to Indigenous Knowledges indicated that some participants believed there was a lack of respect for, and recognition of, Indigenous Knowledges.

Having noted the key findings of the data analysis in Chapters 4 and 5, detailed recommendations to improve support mechanisms and implications of their implementation are provided in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter Six – Findings and Implications

6.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the findings and implications of the inquiry. It draws on the literature reviewed and gaps in current knowledge as identified in Chapter 2 and the analysis of data presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

The major theoretical themes emerging from the inquiry are noted in section 6.1 as colonialism; culture shock; cultural violence; and cultural safety. Each theme is discussed and analysed in the context of Indigenous Australians participating in higher education.

Section 6.2 addresses the four research questions established in section 1.5:

1. What is the nature of the support services available to Indigenous postgraduate students within higher education institutions and do these differ from those provided to Indigenous undergraduate students?
2. What specific support services do Indigenous postgraduate students indicate that they need but do not have?
3. What structures are in place for supervising Indigenous postgraduate students and how effective are these structures?
4. What is the nature of, and how beneficial is, the support that is available to Indigenous postgraduate students outside the higher education institution?

Finally, a summary of the chapter is provided in section 6.3.

It will become evident through this chapter that the theoretical findings underpin the more practical issues related to Indigenous students' positive engagement in postgraduate studies. These two perspectives – the theoretical and practical – will be synthesised in

the final chapter, demonstrating that the theoretical aspects inform the understandings drawn from the research.

6.1 Major Theoretical Themes

The major theoretical themes that emerged from this inquiry were the impacts of colonialism, culture shock, cultural violence and cultural safety. It will be demonstrated through the following discussion how these themes emanate from the literature and the analysis of data, thus revealing how colonialism – its legacy and consequences – continues to impact Indigenous Australians in higher education. Major ramifications stemming from colonialism in terms of Indigenous higher education are noted in the form of culture shock and cultural violence. This then leads to a discussion of the importance of cultural safety in higher education.

6.1.1 Colonialism

Colonialism's legacy and how it relates to Indigenous Australians undertaking postgraduate studies has particular relevance to the inquiry reported here. It has been well established that education is a key player in the colonising process in respect to Indigenous people in Australia. The dominant view of the western world is deeply embedded in academic discourses inside Australian universities. The theoretical tenets of colonialism assume that the way of the oppressor is the 'right way' and that Western epistemologies and ontologies are the canon. As noted by Woods in section 2.1.1.1, the British invaded Australia with a disregard to the education and skills of traditional experts in a variety of fields.

Data in this inquiry indicate that western epistemologies are not the 'right way' for Indigenous people and that this act of colonialism has significantly impacted the participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education. This aspect of colonialist thinking has not shifted inside higher education institutions to accommodate other frames

of reference (such as Indigenous thinking) in more recent times in Australia. Indigenous Knowledges, as discussed in section 2.4.1, are a crucial element in understanding and accommodating the educational needs of Indigenous Australians. Australian universities continue to reflect thinking that aligns with the principles of colonialism and have thus failed to develop to be inclusive of alternate thinking that such as those classified as Indigenous Knowledges.

The relationship between colonialism and Indigenous Australians is most visible when we look at historical aspects such as the 1967 Referendum (refer to section 2.1.1.2). The fact that Indigenous Australians were not recognised as citizens until 1967 indicates that previous governments did not believe that Indigenous Australians were entitled to the same basic rights as other Australians - the issue of education being one such right. As indicated in chapter 2, Whatman (1995) claimed that the referendum was a turning point because enormous progress was made when Indigenous people gained access to, and rightful participation in, tertiary education (refer to section 2.1.2.2). However, contrary to Whatman's (1995) claims, these progressive measures did not greatly influence the framework of thinking in higher education for it still manifests the thinking of colonialism. Forty-one years after the referendum, higher education continues to be governed primarily by Western academics whose agendas exclude incorporating Indigenous Knowledges. This form of discrimination – a legacy of colonialism – must change in order to better support Indigenous postgraduate students.

This inquiry found that within the higher education environment, Indigenous students continue to be labelled as the 'other' through both direct and indirect university policies, regulations and practices. Whilst it is necessary to support Indigenous postgraduate students in a manner that differs from non-Indigenous students (and thus in essence consider them as 'other'), it is the manner of this 'othering' that is under contention – 'othering' that by nature is enacted positive discrimination is not negative 'othering'. The lower participation and completion rates for Indigenous students compared to non-Indigenous students is arguably the strongest indicator that the current system is failing to support Indigenous higher education students, particularly in relation to postgraduate

studies. The reason why this is the case needed to be asked and this inquiry set out to answer that question. The subsequent finding encompassing the process of 'othering' is outlined in the following discussion.

Whilst 'othering' essentially means that Indigenous people are treated differently to non-Indigenous people, this process can have extremely detrimental effects on Indigenous people, hence the danger marks around them. However othering, without danger marks, is sometimes justified in the sense that positive discrimination can create an avenue necessary for structures designed to achieve equity. This type of othering recognises that Indigenous postgraduate students do not share the same playing field as non-Indigenous students. Thus policies and practices are needed to create parity seeking therefore to close the gap of inequitable postgraduate participation of Indigenous people by providing culturally appropriate support mechanisms. Through implementing positive discriminatory policies and practices Indigenous students can be better supported in a way that provides a common starting point with non-Indigenous students.

Positive discriminative practices currently include Indigenous Support Units and the ABSTUDY Scheme. These are examples of policies and practices implemented to better support Indigenous students academically. However, this inquiry found several other areas where positive discrimination practices are warranted but not offered, such as mandatory cultural awareness training for academic staff at universities and the realisation that Indigenous Knowledges is a valid body of knowledge that should be incorporated into academia. Whilst such practices may be viewed as fluid and complex, they are a reality for Indigenous learners.

Universities have failed to create an environment where equity can be assured. This is perhaps an ideal that in reality is not achievable, nevertheless this research demonstrates that a great deal more can be done in moving Australian Universities towards such a goal.

The evidence throughout this inquiry points to the sites of inequity and is most visible through the lens of colonialist theories which dominate higher education institutions

(refer to section 4.2.4). Moreton-Robinson (2002:121) explains that universities are 'part of the colonising process'.

> [It is] important to an understanding of the historical production and reproduction of ideas within the system of Commonwealth universities to recognise that the primary outcome of such a process was, and is, the globalisation of a scientific world view which is ontologically and epistemologically committed to the idea of "white" superiority (Ma Rhea 1998:3 as cited in Moreton-Robinson 2002:121-122).

This assumption of 'white superiority', as noted by Ma Rhea (1998), is evident throughout universities in Australia. As mentioned in the previous discussion, Western ontologies and epistemologies are deemed to be the correct, and most often the only, way to address higher education in Australia. Colonialism has left a legacy that discriminates against other cultures – particularly Indigenous Australians – across all levels of the education sector.

The policies attributed to scientific racism assisted Western academics to lock Indigenous people out of the education sector – especially in relation to higher education. Dominant discourses such as Social Darwinism and deficit thinking (refer to sections 2.1.1.1, 2.1.1.5 and 2.1.1.6) provided the oppressors with the tools to assume a sense of power and superiority over Indigenous Australians. With a premise based on the assumption that Western Knowledges were superior to Indigenous Knowledges, the higher education sector failed to cater for Indigenous people in higher education – unfortunately this continues to be the case today.

The postgraduate students who participated in this research expressed the notion that universities are immersed in Western thinking, which they must adopt throughout their postgraduate studies, and by default deny their Indigenous Knowledges. It was clear that this denial can be detrimental to Indigenous postgraduate students. It is imperative that this remnant of colonialism is acknowledged and addressed accordingly.

6.1.2 Culture Shock

Culture shock is examined here in order to gain a better understanding of how colonialism has impacted Indigenous postgraduate students. When people move into a different cultural environment, they take with them the 'core values and beliefs, customs and behaviours' of their previous culture. Depending on similarities between the two cultures, one's 'values, beliefs, customs and behaviours may clash' (Eckermann et al. 2006:105). As noted in Chapter 2, Eckermann et al. (2006:105) explain culture shock as:

> A loss of familiar signs and symbols including words, gestures, facial expressions, customs or norms can result in confusion, disorientation, misunderstandings, conflict, stress and anxiety.

When applying this definition to the environment surrounding Indigenous Australians in higher education, the impact of culture shock becomes apparent. The values, beliefs, customs and behaviours of the dominant Western culture are embedded in higher education institutions. Many Indigenous postgraduate students experience culture shock because of significant differences between this environment and the culture and customs with which they are familiar. For example, research conducted by Sonn, Bishop and Humphries (2000:131) focused on the experiences of Indigenous students in higher education. One participant explained to them:

> We have all those barriers to overcome which are probably similar to overseas students, but it is different in a way because we are in our own country.

This statement highlights the similarities between Indigenous and overseas students in their experience of culture shock. Whilst this phenomenon might be predicted and consequently addressed for overseas students, it is less likely that the impacts would be anticipated for Indigenous students. However, if the characteristics of culture shock are examined, particularly the differences that may be encountered in values, beliefs, customs and behaviours, then the impacts become more apparent. Most obvious are the impacts of isolation noted in section 5.5.1; the need for family support in what is often a foreign environment, as noted in section 5.1.1; and the sometimes conflicting nature of community support, noted in section 5.2.2.

Higher education participation is a cross-cultural experience for many Indigenous Australians, leading to what Page, DiGregorio and Farrington (1997:1) refer to as 'educational culture shock'. Guanipa (1998) suggests that culture shock sets in after a few weeks of experiencing a new environment. It is therefore important that Indigenous students are provided with appropriate support mechanisms that address issues of culture shock as they arise. The research findings indicate that Indigenous Support Units would be an appropriate place to address these issues (refer to section 4.3). This is supported by Voerman and Phillip (n.d:2) who also argue that ISUs can appropriately address culture shock:

> In establishing Indigenous specific support units there has been recognition for the need for social supports that ameliorate the often significant culture shock that students experience on coming to the university.

The introduction of orientation programs conducted by ISUs would be appropriate for internal students. The data also supports the notion that external students would be better served by ISUs telephoning them and informing the student of their services. Both suggestions provide a means to 'break the ice' with students; to let them know that they are not alone; and confirm that support is readily available. E-mailing the student with information is an alternate option to telephoning, however it is a much less personal approach as it is likely that the e-mail would be generic. The fact that there are other Indigenous Australians who would likely share some similar cultural characteristics and attributes should assist students to deal with the experience of culture shock.

It was also apparent from the analysis that culture shock was evident when people had to relocate to attend university. The following quote supports this view:

> The move from rural and remote to metropolitan areas adds another dimension to the transition experience because of differences in social and community structures (Sonn, Bishop & Humphries 2000:131).

The feeling of fear is deeply integrated into culture shock. The data analysis found that fear is not as transparent as it may initially seem as it can manifest itself in different ways.

6.1.2.1 Fear – A common feeling associated with culture shock

Whilst not directly stated by all participants, one participant – Rachel - did identify fear as a key issue for her, thus her response warranted in-depth exploration as it provided an anecdote explaining how culture shock is experienced by some Indigenous postgraduate students. Rachel was asked 'What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?' Initially she responded with 'fear of putting my words out there' then continued her in-depth response to further probes with the following account:

i. What does the fear feel like?

The fear initially felt heavy or deadening. The head often hurt. This heaviness or deadness surfaced more questions than answers. I struggled with the language of the western world and the western academy. I struggled with western philosophy and how it represented many things including existence and humanity. I struggled with the meanings within many articles about us as Aboriginal people. I also struggled to work back into my people's knowledge system - the Ularaka. The Ularaka is the total system of the Arabana. Early in my study I knew I had to escape the physical and intellectual imposition of colonial hegemony by defining a path acceptable to me and my Elders.

My fear turned to anxiety as the complexity of my challenges from my knowledge position emerged. Notably, there was little discussion on the required interpretation, nor the basis from which this may occur in the writings of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australians. My Elders and drawing from two international authors gave support to my intellectual journey. I came upon these authors in 2003, although I had been working on my thesis for a few years. The authors are:

Smith, L 1999, Decolonizing Methodologies, Dunedin, Zed Books, New York.

Meyer, M. 2003, Ho'oulu Our Time of Becoming Hawaiian Epistemology and Early Writings, Ai Pohaku Press, Honolulu.

I needed to represent in a way which not only affirmed me and my people as knowledgeable Arabana but, also honoured Indigenous knowledge more generally while challenging the

western canon. The fear at this stage was often a 'gut' churning anxiety. There was a mass of work to be undertaken diligently.

Finally, with the Thesis document almost complete this fear turned to a short period of intense internal intellectual debate. I was concerned for the knowledge that exists (visible) and, that which is presence (invisible) within my final document. Moreover, I asked myself, is this really what I want to put out there? I affirmed my capacity to 'stand-up' - from within my own body, mind and spirit as an Arabana Udyurla - to and, for the knowledge within my Thesis.

ii. How does this fear affect your work and/or study responsibilities?

The initial impact of fear on my early work was often slowness and false starts. I searched through numerous documents and discussed matters with others (Elders, peers and supervisors). I was not always sure what I was searching for but I was searching. The workload was intense as I searched for the answers I needed or knew existed.

At other times, my work slowed as I avoided what I could not name. I often wanted to stop – just give up - discontinue my study. But my supervisors and my Aboriginal supervisor in particular and my Elders pushed me on. They said the work needed to be done.

During the whole process I worried about the numbers of words I needed to complete my PhD. English words I struggled with as I had 'grown-up' in remote Australia. This fear about the need for thousands of words came to focus on the meaning of words. I wrote, edited and wrote and edited - in both English and Arabana wangka. Making meaning across and within knowledge systems, philosophical positions and language is not easy. Glitches remain in my Thesis but I completed my dissertation.

iii. Do you think that this fear is something specifically related to Indigenous students/scholars?

I think the searching, the struggle to define methodology and method and the development of the structure of a doctoral is common to all students. However, I would argue that most, if not all, Indigenous students carry an additional responsibility in their doing of research work.

The additional responsibility is a requirement to understand from and represent a different knowledge system – in my case from within the Ularaka. In other words, most Aboriginal students need to understand and apply their knowledge – Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander knowledge - as a frame and lens to their doing. This doing is extremely difficult and complex at each and every aspect encountered within a doctoral study. This is the additional and often 'invisible' intellectual work required of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student.

Working from an Indigenous Knowledge and philosophical (and even language position) is absolutely critical.

Upon reading Rachel's in-depth response I was initially overwhelmed by the similarities we share, even though our life experiences are considerably different. For instance, Rachel identified herself as belonging to the 50-59 year old age group and has 'grown-up' in remote Australia. Her cultural ties to the Ularaka people are deep. She also maintained that her knowledge system allowed her to speak and write in traditional language.

Conversely, I am 33 years of age and have lived in Sydney since the age of four. I've spent this time living in Cammeraygal country, not my traditional Wiradjuri country. I cannot speak or write in traditional language and some may describe me as an 'urbanised Koori'.

Despite these differences, Rachel's experience with fear prompted me to nod with familiarity. Even though I had some fantastic support mechanisms, such as excellent supervisors and family, I also related to a fear of 'putting my words out there' for a Knowledge system that governs universities does not cater for Indigenous Knowledge systems and ways of doing. This is likely to mean different things to Indigenous Australians; but to me it meant that the characteristics that made me ethnically different to non-Indigenous students were not recognised as a valuable asset that could contribute to my own education nor the university community.

Like Rachel, I also had to find a path acceptable to myself and my Wiradjuri heritage. I had minimal opportunities to discuss my cultural position and concerns with fellow Indigenous people at my university. Instead, I consulted Indigenous friends for cultural guidance, the entire time questioning 'are my words doing my mob justice'? I procrastinated with certain issues, regularly doubting myself and thinking 'maybe another Indigenous person would do this extremely important topic more justice than I can'? The fear that I would get it wrong from an academic perspective caused me some concern; however the fear that I would get it wrong from a cultural perspective remained in the forefront of my mind throughout this journey.

Reading Rachel's comments I realised that the fear did not stem from demographic factors such as age or geography. Rather, our fear stems from the burden of not only failing ourselves and our families, but also other Indigenous Australians – past and present.

6.1.2.2 Techniques to combat culture shock

Both the data and the literature indicate that Indigenous postgraduate students do suffer from culture shock when attending university. Participants frequently referred to their higher education experiences as isolating and lonely (refer to section 5.5). The degree of culture shock endured differed from one person to the next and was usually indicative of the previous life and education experiences of Indigenous students. Nonetheless, it is essential that culture shock is acknowledged as an experience that can be attributed to Indigenous Australian students participating in higher education and thus needs to be addressed.

One approach that may lessen such anxiety would be the recognition that Indigenous postgraduate students are a group that desire social and academic interaction with other Indigenous students (refer to section 4.4). This is consistent with Weir's (2000) view that Indigenous students constitute a new social group (refer to sections 2.2.2.2 and 4.3). The data analysis indicated that ISUs could provide a foundation for social interaction (refer

to section 4.3). As identified earlier in this section, Indigenous postgraduate students take on a foreign existence in higher education. It is reasonable to argue that adverse impacts of this new environment may be reduced when there is an opportunity to interact with other Indigenous Australians. In this instance, familiarity may be an ideal concept to help combat culture shock.

Further, postgraduate support groups and networks were found to be a mechanism that Indigenous postgraduate students desired, yet most did not have available to them (refer to section 4.4). Therefore, ensuring that Indigenous postgraduate students are provided information on, and access to, postgraduate support groups and networks could provide an essence of familiarity to assist in combating culture shock in this group.

6.1.2.3 Culture shock summary

Culture shock as a major theoretical theme emerged from the data analysis and adds weight to the claim that Indigenous Australians are likely to find higher education institutions quite culturally foreign. Whilst it is indisputable that there will always be some aspect of culture shock attributed to Indigenous Australians participating in postgraduate education, the research revealed several aspects of culture shock experienced by Indigenous postgraduate students. The underpinning crux of these suggested support processes rely on a framework that encapsulates familiarity. It is therefore essential that Indigenous postgraduate students be provided with support mechanisms that address cultural familiarity - potentially through ISUs, opportunities for social interaction, online networks, or Indigenous postgraduate support groups. In doing so, the foreign nature of these institutions can be effectively reduced.

6.1.3 Cultural Violence

The definition of cultural violence offered in chapter 2 is as follows:

> By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence - exemplified by our religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science

> and formal science… -that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence (Galtung 1990:291 as cited in Eckermann et al. 2006:13).

There is evidence throughout the literature and data findings to suggest that Indigenous postgraduate students are subjected to various forms of cultural violence. To some extent, Indigenous higher education students have been considered a separate entity to non-Indigenous higher education students. The establishment of ISUs verifies that universities have made some effort to cater for the needs of Indigenous students. However, this can be viewed as a tokenistic gesture of goodwill and a form of cultural violence as Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are not recognised throughout institutions and are deemed to be 'dealt with' simply because ISUs exist. The data findings indicate that this is clearly not the case – particularly as approximately half of the respondents indicated that they either never accessed their ISU or accessed it less than five times per year (refer to section 4.3.1).

McConville (2002:17) stated that the inclusion of Indigenous people in higher education as students, teachers, researchers and advisors has been referred to by the term 'guest paradigm' which is 'dependent on the goodwill of those institutions, and of the governments which fund them' (refer to section 2.2.1.5) - this is yet another example of how colonialism impacts on the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Many ISUs are just an appendix of the university and are not considered to be of equal status to other Schools or Faculties within the university. Chapter 2 presented Whatman's (1995) continuum showing how an Indigenous Unit could evolve into a Faculty (refer to Table 2.3). It was noted that roles, responsibilities and terminologies would change over time as ISUs morph into academic units offering their own disciplines of study. The 'Faculty' status was also noted as the most likely aspiration of ISUs at present (refer to section 2.2.1.3); however there are currently very few Indigenous Faculties in Australian universities.

Cultural violence is evident in institutions. This phenomena occurs when the main entity (usually ISUs) responsible for overseeing the teaching and research roles of Indigenous

related matters and people, are a minor player in academic decision-making compared to other teaching and research entities within the university. Such power plays ensure that Indigenous Knowledges are given less opportunity to contest its inferior status compared to Western Knowledges through the decision making processes within higher education. This is again a legacy of colonialism and the thinking it propagated - that Western Knowledges are the only ones worth gaining. This lack of recognition, and sometimes denial, of Indigenous Knowledges is a clear example of how cultural violence manifests itself in the higher education systems. Those units with minimal teaching and research responsibilities that exist primarily for administrative support to Indigenous students are also exposed to cultural violence because they have not been provided with the necessary resources, funding, training, support and/or skills to transform into entities of equal status to other entities within the higher education environment.

The exclusion and denial of Indigenous Knowledges emerged as the most prevalent manner in which cultural violence is manifested in higher education (Coopes 2007) (refer to section 2.4.1). Nakata (2004:7) claimed that 'Western education demands an ongoing denial or exclusion of our own knowledges, epistemologies, and traditions' (refer to section 2.4.1). Further, L.T. Smith (2001) was noted as saying that Indigenous Knowledges are under more threat now then ever before (refer to section 2.4.2).

It is clear that universities are saturated in Western epistemologies and ontologies, and there is little, if any, consideration given to Indigenous methods and 'ways of being and doing.' For instance, DEST (2002:29) argued that the number of Indigenous researchers may be impeded by 'a dearth of Indigenous supervisors and non-Indigenous supervisors with an understanding of ways of knowing and doing' (refer to section 2.2.2.5).

There was evidence in the data that in order for Indigenous researchers to be successful in higher education, they must learn the ways of the Western academy to survive. Comments provided by Fredericks (2006b:7) reiterate these findings:

> My survival with the higher education system and the research academy depends on my knowing how the western academy is structured and operates. That is, I need to know who

> the relevant scholars are, who controls the processes within the research academy, committee procedure and ways of 'doing business' (refer to section 2.4.4).

Participants in this inquiry reinforced this view through their statements that Indigenous Knowledges were not accepted, recognised or respected. For instance, James stated:

> *I found that 'white' theories dominated over the top of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing – Indig[enous] culture/theory seemed less important* (refer to section 4.2.4).

Other participants responded similarly when asked to identify some of the most difficult problems they faced in undertaking postgraduate studies:

> Irene – *Trying to get westerners (colleagues etc.) to engage with philosophical discussion – accepting that indigenous knowledge(s) are valid canons within any learning/teaching environment.*

> Elizabeth – *The lack of respect for Indigenous thought and knowledge* (refer to section 5.5.3).

Indigenous people are immersed in Western discipline thinking but, as Nakata (2007:220) points out, they may choose to 'accept it, refuse it, assimilate it, domesticate it, use it or subvert it' – but, regardless of choice, they cannot escape it (refer to section 2.4.1). The findings of this inquiry indicate that there is no quick-fix solution to address the denial of Indigenous Knowledges in higher education and the dominance of Western beliefs and Knowledges over that of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. However, it can be conjectured that an increased level of Indigenous involvement through participation and contribution would be highly beneficial. In time, this may result in Indigenous people having greater levels of power and authority in the higher education sector, which would create opportunities to implement change and incorporate Indigenous Knowledges. Until then cultural violence will continue to exist and, in doing so, will continue to affect the experience of all Indigenous students participating in higher education.

6.1.4 Cultural Safety

The issue of cultural safety is important to this research because it has the potential to significantly impact Indigenous students in a tertiary environment. Cultural safety is predicated on three principles – reflection, recognition and respect (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005). Although the concept of cultural safety emerged from research concerning Maori health professionals in New Zealand, the principles can also be applied to the field of Indigenous education in Australia. Further, unsafe cultural practice is 'any action which diminishes, demeans or disempowers the cultural identity and well being of an individual' (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005:4). These culturally unsafe practices can be linked back to colonialism - with strong parallels to Said's reflection (1989) that colonised people were thought of as inferior; and Woods' observation (1998) that the British invaded Australia without recognising Indigenous culture or knowledges.

The statistical data presented in Chapters One and Two outlining the low participation and completion rates of Indigenous students provides an example of how cultural safety has impacted Indigenous higher education (AVCC 2006a, 2007; DEST 2005, 2006a; NIPAAC 2002). Until the participation and completion rates of Indigenous people undertaking postgraduate education is equivalent to that of non-Indigenous Australians, it is likely that universities will continue to function in a culturally unsafe manner in respect to Indigenous Australians.

It is also evident from analysis of the data, that higher education institutions are failing Indigenous postgraduate students in terms of providing a culturally safe environment. The dominance of Western ways over Indigenous Australians in the higher education setting is clearly visible. There are numerous examples within the data that could be used to illustrate specific situations where an Indigenous postgraduate student has been impacted by an absence or lack of cultural safety; of particular concern, the lack of recognition for Indigenous Knowledges particularly signifies that universities are failing to adhere to the principles associated with cultural safety (refer to section 6.2.3). As discussed in the previous section, cultural violence is deeply embedded in higher

education (refer to section 6.2.3). This alone indicates that universities are culturally unsafe. Several participants identified that Indigenous Knowledges were not widely accepted or recognised in their experiences of higher education. The recognition of Indigenous Knowledges must be adhered to in order to better address the principles underpinning cultural safety.

The data findings also indicated that Indigenous postgraduate students experience feelings of isolation and loneliness, signalling this as one of the biggest problems associated with postgraduate studies (refer to section 5.5). This was noted as being consistent with the AVCC's (2006a) findings that social and cultural isolation were issues for Indigenous students.

These factors support the view that universities are not culturally safe and fail to maintain reflection, recognition and respect where Indigenous Australians are concerned. It is imperative that these issues be appropriately addressed to ensure a culturally congruent and effective learning environment for Indigenous people participating in higher education. One possible way to overcome this problem would be to address the suggestion that Indigenous community members be included in the supervisory process of Indigenous postgraduate students (refer to sections 4.2.4 and 4.2.5.2). Most importantly, dialogue is essential between the academic and the student to promote mutually understood and agreed upon arrangements.

On the surface, Indigenous Support Units can provide culturally safe environments in terms of adhering to the principles of cultural safety - reflection, recognition and respect - identified above (Nursing Council of New Zealand 2005); however, given the finding that ISUs differ significantly from one another, this approach would be best assessed on a case by case basis. It is also essential to realise that despite the fact some ISUs do adhere to the principles of cultural safety, the larger environment within which they function does not. In this way it demonstrates significant irony – how can one unit be culturally safe when it is just a small subset of a much larger entity that is culturally unsafe?

This situation could be addressed to some extent by encouraging Indigenous academics to contribute more throughout the university. It is, however, imperative that their voices are recognised and respected. Colonialism has left a legacy where Indigenous voices have been silenced. This silence requires transformation to a point where universities realise the valuable asset they have in the pool of knowledge, experience and cultural richness amongst their Indigenous staff members.

Cultural safety therefore does have a place in higher education. It is an important component in ensuring that Indigenous Australians receive the best chances to succeed academically. Whilst not a support element in the traditional sense, it is an essential mechanism in supporting Indigenous postgraduate students through the provision of an academic environment that is safe and welcomes the cultural diversity they bring to the university community.

6.2 Conclusions Regarding the Research Questions

The objective of this research was to investigate the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia. The four research questions posed in Chapter One formed the foundation of the research (refer to section 1.5) and conclusions pertaining to these questions are discussed below.

6.2.1 What is the nature of the support services available to Indigenous postgraduate students within higher education institutions and do these differ from those provided to Indigenous undergraduate students?

The primary support services available to Indigenous postgraduate students were identified as:

- Support provided by supervisors (refer to section 4.2);

- Indigenous Support Units – ideally providing both academic and administrative assistance to students (refer to section 4.3);
- Postgraduate seminars/workshops (refer to section 4.4.1);
- ABSTUDY – Living Allowance, Incidentals Allowance, Fares Allowance and Thesis Allowance (refer to section 5.3.2);
- Scholarships (refer to section 5.3.3); and
- Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) (refer to section 5.4).

The difference in support provided by supervisors is self-explanatory, given that undergraduate students do not have a requirement for supervisory support whereas it is a requirement of postgraduate research students. Further differences therefore cannot be assessed, as it is a support mechanism that is assigned based on the individual needs of postgraduate students.

Indigenous Support Units are arguably the primary support mechanism for Indigenous students within tertiary institutions. The research findings indicate that the academic support offered by ISUs is likely to differ significantly between undergraduate and postgraduate students due to the relatively low number of ISU staff possessing postgraduate qualifications. Although this investigation did not set out to directly research the specific qualifications of ISU staff members, it can be inferred that they are more appropriately qualified to assist undergraduate students than postgraduate students. This is reflected in the data, which found that just less than half (49.1%) of the respondents indicated that their ISU was able to assist them academically (refer to section 4.3.3). As a group, undergraduate students can logically be supported by staff with a lower level of expertise in academic support than postgraduate students and hence are likely to be better supported academically. Importantly, the level of academic support provided to postgraduate students should increase with time as more Indigenous people achieve postgraduate qualifications and actively participate in the knowledge pool available within ISUs.

This leads to consideration of the administrative support provided by ISUs. Based on the research there appears to be no significant difference in the quality of administrative support provided to undergraduate and postgraduate students. Whilst 56.4% of participants indicated that ISU staff are suitably qualified to assist them with administrative matters (refer to section 4.3.2), this figure shows that there is significant scope to improve the administrative support provided to postgraduate students.

The concept of postgraduate seminars and workshops is not new to academia. Postgraduate students have always had access to some form of seminar or workshop through their university Faculty or School. It is, however, a relatively new phenomenon to offer seminars and workshops that are Indigenous-specific – catering to the needs of Indigenous postgraduate students – as opposed to those designed to service the wider academic community. There is now a demand for such programs as they can provide an environment for postgraduate students to share their research and offer an opportunity to seek feedback within the context of a culturally safe environment (refer to section 4.4.1). This is an example, supported by the data, of a support mechanism that could be effective and one that specifically caters to the needs of postgraduate students. Whilst only a few universities currently offer such support mechanisms, based on participant feedback it is desirable that they become more prevalent throughout Australian universities.

There are several components of the ABSTUDY Scheme that differ between undergraduate and postgraduate students; whilst other aspects are common across both groups. Firstly, in comparison to the rate provided to Indigenous undergraduate students, the ABSTUDY Living Allowance is higher for some Indigenous postgraduate students. Masters and Doctorate students receive a higher rate than undergraduate students; however postgraduate students enrolled in an Honours Degree or Graduate Diploma/Certificate only receive the same Living Allowance as undergraduate students (refer to section 2.2.3.2). The need for a standard postgraduate rate can be justified on the basis that postgraduate students are more likely to be older than undergraduate students, with an average age of 38.7 years (refer to Section 4.1.1). Further, 61.8% of participants in this research indicated that they had children (refer to section 5.1.2) and

45.6% of the participants who were reliant on ABSTUDY had children (refer to section 5.3.1.). Based on the majority of Indigenous postgraduate students in this research having family commitments, and the increased financial demands that go with them, it is important that ABSTUDY addresses the financial needs of all Indigenous postgraduate students. This presents an opportunity to address the gap between Masters and Doctorate students and other Indigenous postgraduate students.

The ABSTUDY Incidentals allowance is provided to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. The base rate of the allowance is consistent for both groups; however postgraduate students may claim a slightly higher amount through a reimbursement process. Similarly, the Fares Allowance is identical for both undergraduate and postgraduate students (refer to section 2.2.3.2). Whilst the Thesis Allowance is only applicable to postgraduate students, the data demonstrates that it does not appear to be well utilised. Having examined the major components of ABSTUDY, there is evidence in the data to suggest that the Scheme has considered postgraduate students as a separate clientele to undergraduate students, particularly as demonstrated through the higher rate of ABSTUDY living allowance for Masters and Doctorate students and the thesis allowance (refer to sections 2.2.3.2 and 5.3.2).

There are a number of scholarships available to Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate students that are specific to particular institutions, whilst most other scholarships are nationally based. Postgraduate scholarships are typically of greater value than undergraduate scholarships, primarily because the bulk of postgraduate scholarships available to Indigenous postgraduate students are designed to reflect the Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) Scholarships. Despite the parity with APAs available to all postgraduate students, the Indigenous respondents indicated that this rate was insufficient to meet their needs (refer to section 5.3.3). The APA Scholarships were identified as consisting of an identical rate to ABSTUDY Masters and Doctorate Rates (refer to section 5.3.3), making the financial concerns and pressures identified in the findings associated with ABSTUDY similarly applicable to scholarship recipients e.g.

Indigenous postgraduate students are more likely to be older and have a family to support.

It was noted by some participants that they desired ITAS Support but believed it was not available to postgraduate students (refer to section 5.4.2). This highlights the complexity of this bureaucratic scheme, rather than a deliberate intent by ITAS to focus on undergraduate students. It would, however, be ideal for ITAS personnel to ensure that all Indigenous postgraduate students are better informed of the support available to them.

In summarising the differences between the support provided to Indigenous undergraduate and postgraduate students, the data reveals that administrative support mechanisms are similar for undergraduate and postgraduate students; however academic support mechanisms (discussed further in section 6.2.2) differ considerably between undergraduate and postgraduate students - primarily due to the fact that the two groups have different needs. It is important to establish that the key additional support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students, such as supervisors and postgraduate seminars/workshops, are support mechanisms that are available to all mainstream postgraduate students. Unless they are facilitated through an Indigenous Unit, Faculty or School, they are not culturally specific.

Many Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia do not have culturally appropriate support mechanisms that are designed specifically to cater for their academic needs, such as culturally appropriate supervision and culturally sensitive seminars/workshops. This could explain the lower completion rates of Indigenous postgraduate students compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (refer to section 1.3). A concerted focus on ensuring that these support mechanisms are made available in a culturally appropriate manner may lead to significant improvements in both the experience of Indigenous postgraduate students and the outcomes they achieve.

6.2.2 What specific support services do Indigenous postgraduate students indicate that they need but do not have?

The main support mechanisms identified in this research that Indigenous postgraduate students currently need, but do not have available are:

- Mandatory cultural awareness training for all academic staff members in Australian universities (refer to section 4.2.4);
- An online database of all Indigenous people who are able to supervise Indigenous postgraduate students (refer to section 4.2.5.3);
- A national Indigenous group or network specifically designed for Indigenous postgraduate students (refer to sections 4.4.);
- HECS-free places for all Indigenous postgraduate students (refer to section 5.3.4);
- A Commonwealth funded scheme that financially assists Indigenous postgraduate students to attend conferences (refer to section 5.3.5).

In terms of support services that are desired but not available to postgraduate students, the introduction of mandatory cultural awareness training for all academic staff members in Australian universities emerged as the most common suggestion throughout the data (refer to section 4.2.4). The research provided significant evidence that Indigenous postgraduate students believed that they were often treated inappropriately in terms of issues relating to culture. It is vital that mandatory cultural awareness training is introduced to create a better environment where students feel safe and understood. This research does not make any claim as to what the nature of an appropriate cultural awareness package might entail, for this is a very complex issue and would need to avoid any notions of essentialism in respect to Indigenous culture and nuances, however the data suggests that it should be conducted by local Indigenous community members. It is particularly important that non-Indigenous supervisors are made aware that Indigenous students may present with non-Western traditions of thinking, which should be nurtured and respected.

An online database of Indigenous supervisors was also identified as desired but not available (refer to section 4.2.5.3). This database could be introduced as a component of a national online Indigenous Network specifically designed to support Indigenous postgraduate students – identified in the research as a gap in current support mechanisms (refer to section 4.4). A national Indigenous Support network would be beneficial in providing students with an opportunity to liaise with one another. Information technology could be used to enable virtual communities of Indigenous postgraduate students to converse via the internet, using email, voice and/or visual communications; and to exchange ideas and provide mutual support, regardless of geographic location. Such support could address the feelings of isolation and loneliness expressed by some respondents (refer to section 5.5.1). It is therefore important that this technology be made available, be promoted and consequently utilised to ensure that Indigenous postgraduate students receive the highest quality of support.

The data provide evidence that Indigenous people would be more likely to undertake postgraduate studies if places were HECS-free (refer to section 5.3.4). However, this support mechanism is currently not available to postgraduate coursework students. Creating HECS-free places for all Indigenous postgraduate students is likely to result in an increased participation rate for Indigenous Australians undertaking postgraduate studies.

Another financial limitation relates to professional development, with the data indicating that Indigenous postgraduate students were frequently not in a financial position to attend conferences (refer to section 5.3.5). In some cases, students may have had a small amount of funding available to them through their School or Faculty, however this appears to not always be the case. Considering factors associated with the socio-economic status, every effort should be made to ensure that Indigenous Australians as a group have the opportunity to attend events that will assist them academically.

Finally, data reveals some additional areas where Indigenous postgraduate students felt change was necessary to bring improvements to the service mechanisms that are already

available. These suggestions include an increase in the number of scholarships designated for Indigenous postgraduate students and the need to ensure that students are informed about these scholarships (refer to sections 4.3.6 and 5.3.3); provision of a Commonwealth funded Postgraduate Conference Scheme would be beneficial to students in terms of their current studies and their future careers (refer to section 5.3.5); improvements to the facilities provided by ISUs (refer to section 4.3.6); allocation of a discrete space for postgraduate students to work (refer to section 4.3.6); and improved technology that is easily accessible (refer to section 4.3.6).

Overall, numerous support services were identified as being needed although not currently available. Several recurring themes emerged from these issues; particularly around cultural appropriateness and sensitivity; access to, and support from, others including potential supervisors and fellow students; financial relief; and facilities. Addressing these issues would improve the current support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students – with the desired outcome of increasing both participation and completion rates.

6.2.3 What structures are in place for supervising Indigenous postgraduate students and how effective are these structures?

The data analysis reveals that there are no structures in place that are designed to specifically support the supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students (that differ from those available to non-Indigenous students) (refer to section 4.2). This issue is problematic and the data shows that it affects the higher education experience of Indigenous postgraduate students.

The literature review and the data analysis revealed that Indigenous people with relevant qualifications make ideal supervisors for Indigenous postgraduate students; however there are a very limited number of Indigenous people possessing the necessary academic qualifications. There is also evidence advocating the role non-Indigenous academics have in supervising Indigenous postgraduate students; however Indigenous postgraduate

students who identify as part of a local Indigenous community are more likely to desire an Indigenous supervisor than those who do not. It can also be inferred that Indigenous supervisors would normally come equipped with a command of cultural awareness and related issues, therefore eliminating this underlying problem that often exists between a non-Indigenous supervisor and Indigenous student. The task of identifying and recruiting appropriately qualified supervisors is difficult, as explained by Coopes (2007:200):

> There are few Aboriginal academics employed in positions within universities who meet the institutional requirements of providing postgraduate supervision; therefore simple statistics dictate that many supervisors will be from a different cultural background to the postgraduates with whom they work.

Analysis of the data also reveals that there are currently no significant structures in place to address cultural diversity issues between students and supervisors. In an ideal world, ISU staff members would act as a cultural liaison mechanism between students and academics, however they are generally not experienced in such a liaison role.

Good supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students is not solely based on knowledge, but also requires a personal connection (refer to section 4.2.1). This is an important component of quality supervision; however such a criteria cannot be formalised and hence it is not possible for any given structure or set of instructions to guarantee a rapport between supervisor and student. Current processes suggest that there is a strong element of 'luck' in respect to the connection between student and supervisor and it should be noted that this is also true for non-Indigenous postgraduate students.

Given that there is no single ideal formula that could guide the supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students, the suggestion of mandatory cultural training, discussed in sections 4.2.4 and 6.2.3, would go some way in creating a stronger awareness of the cultural considerations and potential sensitivities that should be considered when supervisors are assigned to Indigenous students. The data indicate that this would assist in providing a more consistent and positive environment within which to establish effective relationships between Indigenous postgraduate students and their supervisors. One suggestion emerging from this research would be the establishment of some stipulations around supervisory selection, such as supervisors of Indigenous postgraduates having at

least a connection to an Indigenous community or Indigenous issues; or a research background in Indigenous issues so as to provide an appropriate orientation when entering the supervision relationship.

6.2.4 What is the nature of, and how beneficial is, the support that is available to Indigenous postgraduate students outside the higher education institution?

Other important sources of support outside educational institutions were identified in the research. Firstly, it was found that local Indigenous communities can provide Indigenous postgraduate students with effective support through advice, encouragement, praise and moral support. Communities were also identified as a valuable resource that provide networking opportunities for Indigenous students (refer to section 5.2.2).

Secondly, the families of Indigenous postgraduate students also play a very important role. It was identified that families provide support through patience, respect, love and encouragement. Practical acts such as assistance with, or relief from, housework and childcare responsibilities were found to be vital for many students. Some families were also able to provide financial support to students (refer to section 5.1.1). Whilst this support is important, it is essential to note that not all students have community connections nor supportive families available to them (refer to sections 5.1.1, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).

In summary, the external support available to Indigenous postgraduate students is minimal. This finding therefore places a greater emphasis on the support provided through formal mechanisms, particularly within the universities and through government funding, to ensure that Indigenous postgraduate students have appropriate and adequate support to complete their studies.

6.3 Chapter Summary

Two centuries of colonialism have laid a foundation upon which Indigenous people continued to be challenged in their efforts to achieve equity. The effects of colonialism are deeply embedded in Australian society. The lives of contemporary Indigenous Australians are affected by it - as is evidenced in the socio-economic disadvantage of Indigenous Australians, which is a direct result of colonialism. Of key significance to this inquiry are the mechanisms through which education institutions perpetuate this disadvantage, resulting in the experiences of culture shock and cultural violence.

Culture shock emerged as a major theoretical theme that impacts Indigenous postgraduate students. The thinking emerging from colonialism continues to contribute to the culture shock Indigenous people experience when they are put into a new environment with which they are not familiar. It is important that culture shock is not overlooked; that higher education institutions recognise this phenomenon as a real feeling; and that the fear associated with culture shock no longer has the potential to 'scare' Indigenous people out of university and back to their families or communities. The evidence presented in this inquiry suggests that not enough has been done to combat culture shock and this needs to change if Indigenous Australians are to be provided with an effective learning environment and appropriate support.

The data analysis found that there have been some efforts to improve Indigenous participation in higher education, primarily through the implementation of ISUs, although not all participants were familiar with their ISUs. ISUs appear to be reaching only half of their potential clientele. The data also indicated that little has been done to include Indigenous Knowledges in higher education. This demonstrates considerable irony as many institutions claim to cater for Indigenous students but have not demonstrated a willingness to accept Indigenous Knowledges in the pedagogy/epistemology/ontology they adopt. The fact that Western Knowledges are accepted whilst Indigenous Knowledges are not recognised in higher education presents clear evidence that the dominant culture continues to assume superiority.

The main implication of the denial of Indigenous Knowledges – through the assumption that non-Indigenous Knowledges are superior - is the creation of an environment that is imbued with cultural violence. Universities have been identified as institutions that are guilty of harbouring cultural violence as they have a tendency to overlook the attributes and characteristics that make Indigenous culture unique by ignoring Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. In turn, this can lead to a culturally unsafe environment that threatens the likelihood of Indigenous postgraduate students completing their academic qualifications. It is essential that higher education institutions carefully examine their learning environments to ensure they are culturally safe. The literature and data analysis have provided significant evidence to suggest this is imperative to provide necessary support to Indigenous postgraduate students.

By way of a final note, the main support services available to Indigenous postgraduate students were found to be the support provided by supervisors, Indigenous Support Units, postgraduate seminars/ workshops, ABSTUDY, scholarships and the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme. Support provided by Indigenous communities and families is important, though unfortunately often minimal. The data found that many Indigenous postgraduate students do not have these support mechanisms. This places additional emphasis on more formal support mechanisms from sources such as universities and governments. All of these support mechanisms are also available to Indigenous undergraduate students or non-Indigenous postgraduate students. Hence, there are no support structures that have been specifically created to address the fact that Indigenous Australians are not participating in higher education at the same rate as non-Indigenous people. This must be addressed if change is to occur.

In summary, the data revealed several areas where such change could be targeted in order to better support Indigenous postgraduate students. The Federal Government could provide HECs-free places to all Indigenous postgraduate students – both coursework and research. A Commonwealth funded Scheme to assist Indigenous postgraduate students to attend conferences is also warranted. Information technology should be better utilised as

it can also act as a valuable tool to support Indigenous postgraduate students – for example an online database, detailing all Indigenous supervisors available in Australia, emerged as important. Similarly, a national Indigenous group or network for Indigenous postgraduate students could also provide support to this group. Universities have a crucial role in supporting Indigenous postgraduate students, particularly as they are the primary foundation and point of contact for students. Many participants indicated that mandatory cultural awareness training for all academic staff is necessary in all universities throughout Australia. Mandatory cultural awareness training would particularly assist non-Indigenous people to provide culturally appropriate supervision to Indigenous postgraduate students. The data supports the view that whilst there is no single ideal formula for supervising Indigenous postgraduate students, non-Indigenous supervisors should have some connection to Indigenous people and research issues.

All of these suggestions must be considered in order that Indigenous postgraduate students be given the best opportunities to participate and complete postgraduate studies. Until these interventions are implemented, there will be no real effective support services that are designed specifically to address the needs of Indigenous postgraduate students.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion, Recommendations and Future Research

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of this inquiry and offers future research suggestions. Section 7.1 presents conclusive statements from analysis of the data and from the literature presented in previous chapters. A series of recommendations emerge from this inquiry and are listed in section 7.2. Section 7.3 offers various opportunities for future research and section 7.4 provides a final summary of the inquiry.

7.1 Conclusion

It is important that Indigenous people participate alongside non-Indigenous people throughout all realms of the education sector in order to close the gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across the indices e.g. health, employment, housing and justice issues. Such a task is neither simple nor easy because the higher education sector is characterised by many biases that favour non-Indigenous students by virtue of the fact that it replicates Western Knowledges, languages, customs, cultures and epistemologies. At no stage of the Australian higher education architectural process has consideration been given to Indigenous people and their Knowledges. Scientific racism helped the colonisers justify why, as a group of people, Indigenous Australians should be overlooked, ignored or even ridiculed for desiring an education. Structural discrimination and racism have always been, and continue to remain, deeply embedded within the framework of higher education.

This inquiry found that there is a place for non-Indigenous academics to assist Indigenous people participating in postgraduate studies as there is evidence that many Indigenous

postgraduate students have been well supported academically by non-Indigenous supervisors. Unfortunately the findings also indicate that many non-Indigenous academics are not culturally aware and therefore mandatory cultural awareness training is essential within all higher education institutions in Australia. This emerged as a factor impacting the postgraduate experience of many students and requires extensive consideration.

There is also strong indication of an emerging trend where Indigenous people want control of Indigenous related research. This trend is likely to be more visible in Indigenous academic circles than in the wider university community; however there is evidence that Indigenous education has entered a new phase as non-Indigenous academics themselves are arguing that Indigenous research should be placed in Indigenous hands:

> For too long non-Indigenous people have prescribed policy on Indigenous education. To the extent these prescriptions have failed to deliver a better deal and to the extent that research drives the policy and practice prescriptions, it can be argued that non-Indigenous researchers get it wrong and that the research should be done by Indigenous people themselves (Osborne 1995:5).

> Perhaps now is an appropriate time for them to step aside and allow credentialed Indigenous researchers to make the representations of their own people. As oppressors we have been inattentive to their elders, the spokespersons without Western credentials; maybe Indigenous educations researchers can bridge better than we have the gulf between the elders and educational practice (Osborne 1995:10).

The underpinning philosophy of the drive for Indigenous research to be controlled by Indigenous people may have existed for some time. The difference now is that the number of Indigenous Australians who have completed postgraduate qualifications has increased significantly in recent years. Major progress has been made in the advancement of Indigenous education since Charles Perkins made history as the first Indigenous person to earn a degree in 1966. In terms of Western education, the Indigenous Knowledge pool has developed to a standard comparable to non-Indigenous Knowledges. This has not been easy as it signifies that Indigenous people have had to learn and adapt to the ways of the colonisers' education system and, in doing so, have succeeded at the highest levels. When provided with appropriate resources, tools,

funding and support, Indigenous academics can continue to develop the knowledge pool so that it supports future Indigenous postgraduate students.

The inquiry found that Indigenous postgraduate students are not as well supported as they need to be to achieve their potential. Apart from the establishment of ISUs, very little has been done within universities to cater for the specific needs of Indigenous students. The recommendations offered in section 7.2 suggest how Indigenous postgraduate students could be better supported.

Postgraduate qualifications can provide the skills for Indigenous Australians to engage with non-Indigenous hierarchical figures and demand equality and recognition. As greater numbers of Indigenous people complete postgraduate qualifications, the more they can challenge those in academic control and refute the view that Indigenous Knowledges are inferior. However, for this to occur, Indigenous Australians must be provided with appropriate support mechanisms whilst studying.

The way towards autonomy and self-determination is through education and this needs to be undertaken at the highest level – postgraduate study. To ensure progress towards this goal it is essential that appropriate support mechanisms are implemented. The research recommendations in relation to this support are listed in the following section.

7.2 Recommendations

The recommendations stemming from this research are noted below. They are grouped based on logical responsibility for their consideration and implementation. For the purpose of this exercise each recommendation has been linked to the area deemed most responsible for their implementation and/or management, though many are fluid in nature and could be considered the responsibility of more than one sector.

The responsibility of the Federal Government

Recommendation 1:

Create a comprehensive database of people who are available to assist Indigenous postgraduate students through the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.

Recommendation 2:

Increase the funding provided by Governments and Institutions to Indigenous Support Units (so that many of these other recommendations can occur).

Recommendation 3:

Substantially increase the number of scholarships available to Indigenous postgraduate students. This would involve an increase in funding from the Commonwealth and State Governments, higher education institutions and the private sector.

Recommendation 4:

Offer all Indigenous postgraduate students a HECS-free place. This should be inclusive of both coursework and research students.

Recommendations 5:

Make Commonwealth Government information relating to ABSTUDY more accessible to Indigenous postgraduate students. Ideally, an information package detailing all benefits provided under the ABSTUDY Scheme should be sent to each Indigenous postgraduate student at least annually.

Recommendation 6:

Increase the ABSTUDY Living Allowance for Honours and Graduate Certificate/Diploma students. This would ideally reflect the ABSTUDY Living Allowance for Masters and Doctorate students.

Recommendation 7:

Establish a national website specifically to support and inform Indigenous postgraduate students. It should include an online 'chat' area and an electronic noticeboard for Indigenous postgraduate students to network with one another. Information detailing conferences should also be incorporated.

Recommendation 8:

Establish a database detailing all Indigenous Australians possessing appropriate qualifications and who are in a position to supervise other Indigenous people. This database needs to be a national initiative with Commonwealth funding supporting the project.

Recommendation 9:

Provide Commonwealth Government funding for Indigenous postgraduate students to attend conferences throughout their candidature. This should include the cost of accommodation, transport, meals and the conference registration fee.

Recommendation 10:

The Government must clearly stipulate to each university how the ITAS funds should be used. Separate funding packages should be made available to undergraduate and postgraduate students. People responsible for overseeing and delivering the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS Officers) must inform all Indigenous postgraduate students that they are entitled to assistance. ITAS information packages should be posted to every Indigenous postgraduate student in Australia at least annually.

The responsibility of Indigenous Support Units

Recommendation 11:

Ensure that Indigenous Support Unit staff members be welcoming and approachable to all Indigenous students.

Recommendation 12:

Require Indigenous Support Units to employ more Indigenous Australians who possess tertiary qualifications and demonstrated research experience.

Recommendation 13:

Ensure that all Indigenous Support Units have an Indigenous Postgraduate Support Officer. This person would be employed specifically to assist Indigenous postgraduate students enrolled within the university.

Recommendation 14:

Conduct regular seminars or workshops for Indigenous postgraduate students. This would ideally, be conducted by the Indigenous Support Units.

Recommendation 15:

Have Indigenous Support Units contact all Indigenous postgraduate students enrolled at their university, introduce themselves and inform students of their services.

Recommendation 16:

Offer an orientation day conducted by Indigenous Support Units to all new students.

Recommendation 17:

Provide opportunities for social interaction amongst students hosted by Indigenous Support Units.

Recommendation 18:

Ensure Indigenous Support Units inform Indigenous postgraduate students well in advance of available scholarship opportunities.

Recommendation 19:

Establish an Indigenous postgraduate support group at each university. This would provide a space for students to discuss and explore academic life and processes, within the realms of their institution.

The responsibility of universities

Recommendation 20:

Make Non-Indigenous supervisors aware that Indigenous postgraduate students may present with non-Western traditions of thinking. It is important that this thinking is nurtured and respected.

Recommendation 21:

Introduce mandatory cultural awareness training to all academic staff members in Australian universities. This should be conducted by Indigenous people, ideally from the local community.

Recommendation 22:

Appoint Indigenous community members who possess appropriate qualifications and Knowledges to co-supervisory or advisory roles.

Recommendation 23:

Encourage all Indigenous Support Units to undertake teaching responsibilities beyond bridging programs. This includes the supervision of Indigenous postgraduate students and providing courses to mainstream students.

Recommendation 24:

Increase the number of Indigenous academics in Australian Universities.

Recommendation 25:

Provide modern and accessible amenities for all Indigenous postgraduate students to utilise on a 24-hour basis within each Indigenous Support Unit.

Recommendation 26:

Allocate facilities, at least equivalent to that of other postgraduate students, to Indigenous postgraduate students who are enrolled through an Indigenous Centre/School/Faculty. As a minimum, full-time internal students should be provided with desk space, a chair, bookshelf space, lockable filing cabinet and a telephone with answering service that permits local calls at no cost to the student. These facilities should also be made available on a needs basis to full-time external and part-time students when on campus.
In addition, access to technology would be beneficial to all Indigenous postgraduate students including a computer with internet access, an e-mail account, IT support and computer packages suited to Higher Degree Research. Indigenous postgraduate students should also be provided with access to a photocopier, printer and facsimile machine.

Note: These recommendations have been written in response to this particular research topic, which set out to investigate the support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students. However, it is worth noting that many of the recommendations noted above can also be applied in the context of Indigenous undergraduate programs.

7.3 Future Research

During the course of this research, several opportunities for future research were identified. Through education, people have the potential to contribute significantly to improving the socio-economic outcomes of Indigenous people in Australia.

Given the focus on Indigenous postgraduate students, a logical extension would be an investigation into the support provided to Indigenous undergraduate students. This would enable an assessment of the similarities and differences between the experiences and challenges of undergraduate students in comparison to their postgraduate counterparts.

A related issue is the incidence of Indigenous people in Australia leaving university before completing their postgraduate degrees. Research into those students who fail to be retained in higher education courses could lead to better understanding of why retention rates are lower for Indigenous students, and would provide a basis for redressing this issue. There is also a need to examine whether the underlying reasons are internal or external to the academy. For instance, internal reasons may include; insufficient academic progress, culture shock, cultural violence, institutional racism or a lack of effective engagement between students and their supervisor. External factors may include pressures placed on the student by family circumstances, the community or through employers. Alternately, they may have taken a career path where postgraduate qualifications are not essential to be 'successful'.

Following this line of thought, opportunities exist to examine the experiences of Indigenous Australians who have enrolled and completed postgraduate qualifications. Many further questions arise as an outcome of this investigation, such as: How have students' successes influenced their families? Has the qualification led to a change in employment? Have students continued their participation in academia i.e. as a supervisor for other Indigenous postgraduate students?

Given the key role of ISUs identified in this research, further investigation into the functions, services and political attributes of Indigenous Support Units in Australia is warranted. Such research could be based on the interaction between ISUs and Indigenous students; qualifications of ISU staff members; teaching responsibilities of the ISU; status of ISUs (i.e. Centre, School or Faculty) and how the units are positioned in terms of the university. Such a study might also consider the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme, in particular examining whether, and to what extent, ISUs encounter difficulties recruiting tutors to assist with the program; the experience and teaching standards of tutors; the extent to which students are aware of ITAS; and the extent to which students have utilised this scheme.

Finally, an inquiry into the effectiveness and 'user-friendliness' in administering ABSTUDY to Indigenous students is suggested. Such investigation might consider the extent to which current processes impact, or interfere with, the academic progress of Indigenous students, with a view to identifying ways in which this service can be improved.

7.4 Summary

This research set out to better understand the proportionally lower representation of Indigenous participation in higher education in Australia. Focus was given to the support for Indigenous postgraduate students, linking theoretical perspectives of colonialism with a qualitative study that engaged Indigenous students currently enrolled in a postgraduate course, or who had completed a postgraduate qualification in the previous 12 months.

Numerous services that support Indigenous postgraduate students were identified and compared to those provided to undergraduate students. Key postgraduate services provided externally to Indigenous Units/Faculties/Schools were not found to be culturally appropriate. This finding could help to explain the comparatively lower completion rates of Indigenous postgraduate students and addressing this issue could improve the experience of Indigenous postgraduate students and their academic outcomes.

Several support services were identified as being needed, but not currently available. A focus on issues such as cultural appropriateness, financial relief and facilitated contact with potential supervisors and fellow students would likely increase participation and completion rates of Indigenous postgraduate students.

Structures for supervising Indigenous postgraduate students were examined, however no single effective structure was identified. Improving cultural considerations when assigning supervisors to Indigenous students would promote a positive environment and effective relationships between Indigenous postgraduate students and their supervisors.

Finally, support available to Indigenous postgraduate students outside the higher education institution was considered. Community and family support were identified as important but not universally available to Indigenous postgraduate students. Support outside the institution was generally minimal, emphasising the need for formal support mechanisms to help improve the participation and completion rates of Indigenous postgraduate students.

Overall, the research has provided insights and an archive that can facilitate an increased awareness of the issues impacting Indigenous participation in higher education. The findings are important in that, they offer insights into these issues, and suggest opportunities that can be created to address them and thereby significantly increase postgraduate completions by Indigenous Australian students.

This increase in participation is crucial to the realisation of self-determination for Indigenous Australians – my hope is that I have been able to contribute to the debate surrounding this significant issue through the creation of the data that forms the basis of the 26 recommendations that emerge from the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Dear Postgraduate Student,
This survey is designed to collect data from Indigenous Postgraduate Students throughout Australia. It will be used as the primary data collection method towards research investigating the support provided to Indigenous Postgraduate students.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Please make sure you have read the Information for Participants sheet and signed the consent form. No consent form is required if you are completing the questionnaire online. However, please understand that your response will not be considered anonymous but will be kept completely confidential.

The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated. This research is not possible without the assistance of fellow Indigenous postgraduate students. It is a topic crucial to improving Indigenous outcomes in education at a Postgraduate level. Most importantly, it is a topic researched by one Indigenous Australian for all Indigenous Australians. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Please complete this questionnaire as soon as possible and return to:
Email: shell_trudgett@hotmail.com
Postal: Michelle Trudgett
PO Box 6080
North Ryde
NSW 2113

SECTION 1 - Personal information

1) What is your gender?
□ Female □ Male

2) Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?
□ Aboriginal □ Torres Strait Islander □ Both

3) What age group do you belong?
□ 20-29 □ 30-39 □ 40-49 □ 50 – 59 □ Over 60

4) Do you have children?
□ Yes □ No (Go to question 7)

5) How old are your children?
_____

6) Are your children currently living with you?
□ Yes □ No

7) Do you live in an urban or rural area?
□ Urban □ Rural

SECTION 2 - Course information

8) At which university are you currently enrolled?
_____

9) What course are you currently enrolled?
□ Doctorate
□ Masters
□ Honours
□ Graduate Diploma/Certificate

10) What is the highest qualification you have completed to get into the postgraduate course you are enrolled in?
_____
_____

11) Are you studying full-time or part-time?
□ Full-time
□ Part-time

12) Are you enrolled as an internal, external or mixed mode (block release) student?

□ Internal
□ External
□ Mixed mode/block release

SECTION 3 - Support issues

13) What support services are currently available to you (as an Indigenous postgraduate student)?

_____
_____
_____
_____

14) Are there any support services you would like to see available to Indigenous postgraduate students that are currently not available?

_____
_____
_____
_____

15) Does the support available to you now differ from when you were an undergraduate student?

□ Yes □ No

If so, please explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

16) If you have children, how does that impact on your studies?

_____
_____
_____
_____

17) What sort of support for your studies do you get from your family?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18) a. Are you part of a local Indigenous community?

□ Yes □ No (Go to question 19)

b. In what ways does your community support your studies?

_____
_____
_____
_____

19) What are some of the most difficult problems you have faced while undertaking postgraduate studies?

_____
_____
_____
_____

20) Who has been most supportive while you have been undertaking postgraduate studies? Please explain in what way their support has helped.

_____
_____
_____
_____

21) How important is financial support to you while studying?

□ Extremely important □ Somewhat important □ Irrelevant

22) Is the financial support you receive while studying adequate?

□ Yes □ Only just □ No

Please provide details.

_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION FOUR – Indigenous Support Units

23) How often do you access the Indigenous Support Unit at the University where you are currently enrolled?

□ Never □1-5 times per year □ 6-12 times per year
□ Monthly □ Every 2-3 weeks □ Weekly

24) Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you with administration matters?

□ Yes □ No

25) Are the Indigenous Support Unit staff members suitably qualified to assist you academically?

□ Yes □ No

26) Are you satisfied with the support provided by the Indigenous Support Unit?

□ Yes □ No

Give details:

_____
_____
_____
_____

27) Is there anything Indigenous Support Unit staff members could do to improve the support they provide to Indigenous Postgraduate students?

□ Yes □ No

Give details:

_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION FIVE – Supervision

28) Are any of your supervisors Indigenous Australians?

□ Yes □ No

29) How important is it for you to be supervised by other Indigenous Australians?

□ Extremely important □ Somewhat important □ Irrelevant

30) Do you believe the supervision you receive as a postgraduate student is culturally appropriate?

□ Yes □ No

Give details:

_____
_____
_____
_____

31) What would improve the overall quality of supervision Indigenous postgraduate students receive?

_____
_____
_____
_____

SECTION SIX – Further Comments

32) Are there any further comments you would like to make about your experiences as a postgraduate student?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

33) Do you consent to the researcher contacting you at a later date to discuss the information you have provided?

□ Yes □ No

If yes, please provide best contact details_____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME!

Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Participants

The University of NEW ENGLAND

School of Professional Development and Leadership
Armidale NSW 2351 Australia
Telephone (02) 6773 2581 Facsimile (02) 6773 3363
Telephone International +61 2 6773 2581 Facsimile +61 2 6773 3363

Information Sheet for Participants

Research Project: ***An investigation into the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia.***

This research project is carried out by Michelle Trudgett, a descendent of the Wiradjuri Nation. Please allow me to introduce myself to you. I have studied Indigenous education over the past decade while working in a variety of roles in Universities on a casual basis. I am extremely passionate about equality in education for fellow Indigenous Australians. Such passion has inspired me to undertake this research project.

The data collected will be used to write a thesis for the Doctor of Education degree at the University of New England, Armidale. Professor Anne-Katrin Eckermann is the supervisor responsible for overseeing the project.

Indigenous Australians are noted as being the most socially and economically disadvantaged of any group of people in Australia. These factors are strongly linked to the lower levels of education attained by Indigenous Australians. Completion rates in higher education are imperative to improving this situation. Most importantly, Indigenous postgraduate completions are considerably lower than Non-Indigenous Australians. This research will investigate the support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students, and highlight those that are desired but not available. A series of recommendations will be offered at the conclusion of the research. Implementation of these recommendations has the potential to increase the participation and completion rates of Indigenous Postgraduate students. The benefit to this is vast as it would not only empower an individual student, but also Indigenous Australians as a community and potentially Australia as a nation. It is a problem that requires immediate investigation.

This project requires me to gather information from Indigenous postgraduate students. I am interested in exploring your thoughts on the types of support you do receive, along with those you desire but do not have available. Initially I will be collecting data in the format of questionnaires. Participants will have the option to partake in an interview at a later date, though this is not a necessary requirement of the questionnaires. If participants agree

interviews will be tape recorded. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be locked in a filing cabinet at my home and destroyed after five years.

The thesis is a key component of the Doctor of Education degree at the University of New England. I intend to complete the data collection in October 2007 and submit the doctoral thesis by mid 2008.

If you have any questions please contact:
Michelle Trudgett
Ph: 0402 242 062
Email: shell_trudgett@hotmail.com

Professor Anne-Katrin Eckermann
Centre for Research in Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies
University of New England
Ph: 02 6773 3849
Email: aeckerm2@une.edu.au

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No. HE07/085, Valid to 07/05/2008).

Should you have any complaints concerning the matter in which this research is conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:
Research Services
University of New England
Armidale, NSW 2351.
Telephone: (02) 6773 3449 Facsimile (02) 6773 3543
Email: Ethics@pobox.une.edu.au

Appendix 3: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

An investigation into the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia.

Please sign below if you have read the Information Sheet for Participants and are satisfied that you are able to make a free and informed decision to agree to participate. You must also be satisfied that the research will be no threat to your physical, emotional or psychological safety.

I _____ have read the information contained in the Information Sheet for Participants. I acknowledge the project relates to the support provided to Indigenous higher education students. I realise that the project is undertaken by Michelle Trudgett and supervised by Anne-Katrin Eckermann of the University of New England. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name is not used.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Appendix 4: Letter to Directors of Indigenous Support Units

PO Box 6080
North Ryde
NSW 2113

8th June, 2007

Dear _____,

I am currently writing a thesis for the Doctor of Education degree at the University of New England, Armidale. The project is titled 'an investigation into the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia.' Professor Anne-Katrin Eckermann is the supervisor responsible for overseeing the project.

This research is concerned with the low completion rates of Indigenous Australians at postgraduate level. To understand why Indigenous people are experiencing such inequality, this research will look at the issue of support for postgraduate students in higher education. In doing so, it will investigate the support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students, and highlight those that are desired but not available. A series of recommendations will be offered at the conclusion of the research. Implementation of these recommendations has the potential to increase the participation and completion rates of Indigenous Postgraduate students.

This project requires me to gather information from Indigenous postgraduate students. Initially I will be collecting data in the format of questionnaires. Participants will have the option to partake in an interview at a later date, though this is not a necessary requirement of the questionnaire. If participants agree interviews will be tape recorded. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Information will be locked in a filing cabinet at my home and destroyed after five years.

In order for this research project to be successful, it is imperative that data is collected from a sufficient sample of Indigenous postgraduate students. For this reason, I am writing to ask for your assistance with this project. I would like to provide (ISU name here) with a copy of the questionnaire. It would be greatly appreciated if you would then forward the questionnaire to all Indigenous Postgraduate Students affiliated with the Unit (via e-mail). The student will then have the choice of completing the questionnaire. At no time will I be given students personal details. Email addresses will be provided by the student themselves only if they choose to complete the questionnaire and forward it directly back to myself. (ISU name here) will not be required for any further assistance.

As I'm sure you are aware, the opportunity to contact postgraduate students is of crucial importance to this project. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for

your consideration. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 0402242062. I look forward to your reply.

Kind Regards,
Michelle Trudgett
(Descendent of the Wiradjuri Nation).

Appendix 5: Letter to the Koori Mail Newspaper

PO Box 6080
North Ryde
NSW 2113

Koori Mail
PO Box 117
Lismore
NSW 2480.

12th June, 2007.

Dear Koori Mail,

It would be wonderful if you could publish the following letter in the next edition of The Koori Mail. Could you please reply to this email as soon as possible to inform me if it will make the next edition.

Kind regards,
Michelle Trudgett.
(0402242062)

Postgraduate students urgently needed for questionnaire .

I am an Indigenous student enrolled in a Doctor of Education degree at the University of New England who is urgently seeking assistance from fellow Indigenous postgraduate students. My research topic is 'an investigation into the support provided to Indigenous postgraduate students in Australia.' The research will investigate the support mechanisms available to Indigenous postgraduate students, and highlight those that are desired but not available.

If you are an Indigenous postgraduate student who is willing to assist me by completing a 20 minute questionnaire please contact me on 0402242062 or email shell_trudgett@hotmail.com If you have any questions or would like more detailed information about this research project please contact me. Any assistance will be greatly appreciated!

Kind regards,
Michelle Trudgett.
(North Ryde, NSW)

Appendix 6: Letter of support received from the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC)

Attn: Professor Anne-Katrin Eckermann
University of England

The National Indigenous Post Graduate Association fully support and endorses the doctoral research proposal of Michelle Trudgett (descendant of the Wiradjuri Nation) that will be examining the concern of the low rates of Indigenous Australia at the post graduate level.

NIPAAC was formed to support Indigenous Post Graduate Students and is an affiliate of the Australia Council of Post Graduates. It is felt that the present research proposal will assist to open doors to the much needed support that Indigenous Post Graduates are always wanting but most times fall on deaf ears.

Yours in Unity.

John Browne

John Browne JP
NIPAAC President 2006/7
NIPAAC National Secretariat Office
UniSA
Yungondi Building
City West Campus 70 North Tce
Adelaide SA 5000

Appendix 7: Apology to the Stolen Generations

This is the wording of Federal Parliament's full apology to the Stolen Generations:

"Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia."