Worldview, Religion and Indigenous Studies: A case study of a long running Victorian school’s program

Andrew Schmidt
B. Sc., Monash University
Dip. Ed., Deakin University
M. Ed. St., Monash University

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In the

Faculty of Education, Monash University

August 2010
The satisfactory completion of the Doctor of Education degree at Monash University required the completion of four course work units as well as a major thesis. The coursework units completed and the results obtained in each of the units are listed below:

ADVANCED STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH & PRACTICE 1 (CREDIT)

ADVANCED STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH & PRACTICE 2 (DISTINCTION)

RESEARCH IN SPECIALIST CURRICULUM AREAS (HIGH DISTINCTION)

RESEARCH ESSAY (HIGH DISTINCTION)

The five paintings shown in this work have been used by permission from the owners (MECS).

Please note this work contains the names of Indigenous Persons who are deceased or may be at the time of reading. Out of respect please do not read their names out aloud.
# TABLE of CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES viii  
ABSTRACT ix  
DECLARATION x  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi  

**Chapter 1 Initial impressions and the Context of Indigenous Studies Programs**

1.0 The Meeting 2  
1.1 Initial Impressions of the Program 2  
1.2 Early Understandings 4  
1.2.1 The 1960s and early 1970s 5  
1.2.2 Winds of change and a new paradigm - The Eighties 6  
1.2.3 Recent Developments 7  
1.2.4 Conclusions 10  
1.3 Implications for Implementing Indigenous Studies 11  
1.3.1 A focus on perspectives 12  
1.3.2 Renewed focus on language 12  
1.4 How have Schools Responded to these Calls? 14  
1.5 The Mt Evelyn Christian School’s Response: What is it really a case of? 17  
1.6 The Journey of this Research and an Outline of the Chapters 19  

**Chapter 2 Literature Review** 24  
2.0 Key Ideas 24  
2.1 Views on Culture 25  
2.1.1 Culture as object 26  
2.1.2 Culture as a perspective 28  
2.1.3 Culture as language 30  
2.2 Who should Teach? 33
2.3 Ideas about Curriculum and Knowledge
  2.3.1 Curriculum as subject: Knowledge as facts 38
  2.3.2 Curriculum as process and skills: Knowledge as ability 40
  2.3.3 Curriculum as Social Critic: Knowledge as socially constructed 40
  2.3.4 The Integral curriculum: Knowledge as wisdom 41

2.4 Worldview
  2.4.1 The nature of worldviews 44
  2.4.2 Elements and features of a worldview 45

2.5 Worldview and Language

2.6 Worldview and Being Religious

2.7 Learning about and Being Challenged by Worldviews

2.8 Conclusion

Chapter 3  Methodology

3.0 Introduction 59

3.1 Methodology Considerations 60

3.2 Ethical Considerations 63
  3.2.1 Confidentiality 64
  3.2.2 Insider/Outsider 65
  3.2.3 The Impact of the participant observer 66
  3.2.4 Power and persona 66
  3.2.5 Ownership 66
  3.2.6 Dissemination 67

3.3 Shaping the Initial Research Questions 67

3.4 Gaining experiences of the program 68
  3.4.1 Initial visit to the Yuendumu Community 69
  3.4.2 Becoming a participant observer 70

3.5 Collecting the Data 71
  3.5.1 Journaling 71
  3.5.2 Oral histories 72
  3.5.3 Interviewing the key teachers 73
  3.5.4 Interviewing the students 73
  3.5.5 Samples of Students' Work 74
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Silences</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10 Summary-New Questions and Directions</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6  Being Religio–Critical: Putting together some answer</strong></td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.0 Introduction</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 The Centrality of Worldview and the <em>Religio-Critical</em> lens</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Learning from the Case study</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1 Presenting Indigenous worldview with appreciation and respect</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2 The difficulty of understanding your own and others' worldview:</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of direct experience and language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3 Explaining humans as “being religious” and central to human life</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.4 Dealing with the complexity of Aboriginal Christianity</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.5 Knowledge as wisdom</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.6 Meeting people on their home turf</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Sustaining Relationships and Programs</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Equal Partnership?</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7 Final Comments and Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.0 Revisiting the story of this study</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Future directions</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 In Conclusion</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REFERENCES</strong></td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1  Description of MECS course in the Koori Resource Index</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2  Observation Schedule used in Class</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3  Stimulus Chart used to Interview Student Groups</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4  Warlpiri Subsections as taught By MECS</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Mala (Rufus hare wallaby) Dreaming .................................. 1
Figure 2. Wirliyajarryi-karnta Warranyangu Jukurrpa .................. 23
Figure 3. Art response of a student telling her story ....................... 58
Figure 4. Yuendumu visit .................................................................. 79
Figure 5. Poster of paintings in the Yuendumu Church ................. 118
Figure 6. Peggy Nungarrayi Emu Dreaming ................................. 159
Figure 7. Yumurrpa Jurkurrpa (bush potato dreaming) ............. 181
ABSTRACT

This case study investigated Mount Evelyn Christian School’s (MECS) 28 year program of Indigenous studies based around friendship with the Yuendumu Community. Their compulsory, stand-alone program incorporated the teaching of Warlpiri language and a three-four day stay at Yuendumu. Given the context of the little that was happening in most schools in 1981 and its longevity, many initial research questions were raised and distilled through the research process to ask: What worldview lens did MECS use to shape and teach its program? Using participant observation, scrutinising documents and conducting semi-structured interviews with the developers, students and teachers, several themes surrounding the purpose of schooling, understandings of culture and teaching about other cultures emerged. A key finding was that MECS used a transformational purpose for schooling, an anthropological understanding of humans as being centrally religious and an understanding of culture as enacted worldview revealing religious directions. These findings challenge schools engaged in Indigenous studies to be aware of their own definitions and understanding of being religious implicit in their own culture; the importance of dealing with cultures at a worldview level; the role of direct experience and the importance of learning and engaging with Indigenous language.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Signed: ____________________________

Date:

The research reported in this thesis was granted approval by the Monash Standing Committee of Research in Education involving Humans, Monash University.

Project Number 2004/112
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu for welcoming me and my wife along with the Evelyn mob into their country and community to experience their wonderful generosity.

Many thanks to the staff, students, parents and board members of the Mt. Evelyn Christian school who participated in this research and gave freely of their time insights and permission to use the paintings and other documents.

Thanks to Georgina for getting me started and to my main supervisor Zane Ma Rhea who had the difficult job of picking me up half way through and yet was so good at helping me to crystallize what this program was about and who started me writing.

A special thanks to Colin who was so willing to share his lifetime of work. I hope this research honours and celebrates his contribution and faithfulness to ‘walking humbly and doing justice’.

My life mentors Prof. Stuart Fowler and Dr. Doug Blomberg who started me thinking and have shaped my ideas so much.

Thank you to Kathleen Austin, my wife, for her patience help and support.

Finally, I acknowledge the Holy Spirit for strength, conviction, the perseverance to endure and insights.
Figure 1. Mala (Rufus hare wallaby) Dreaming

Painted by Andrew Japaljarri Spencer and Bertha Nakamarra Spencer, 1988.

The ancestral Mala travel north and south from the centre. They spread throughout the country. The five sites are Jila well, Mala wiri, Marawurrungu, Prinupu and Uluru.
Chapter One

Initial impressions and the Context of Indigenous Studies Programs

1.0 The Meeting

The bus drove slowly up the dirt road to the settlement. Voices everywhere, high pitched, full of excitement and anxiety. The visitors, glued to the windows of their temporary home away from home, staring out at the red dust sprinkled with grasses and shrubs. Colin’s voice crackled over the speaker pointing out the Yuendumu hill and the honey ant dreaming and some of the settlement’s features. New sights surrounded the visitors: houses with verandas overflowing, yards with old cars, couches and other furniture, lots of scrawny dogs and litter. Old people in bright clothes raised their hand in greeting. As the bus slowed in the centre of town, a big bunch of local kids appeared running, laughing, waving and welcoming. The air was full of a different language, sounding strange with “here” and “there” a word familiar to the ear. As the visitors emerged from the bus, they were surrounded by a mob of local, excited, happy kids hanging on to them, wanting to play. There were sights of movement, red dust and bright clothing. There was excitement, nervousness, clinging, hands white in black. I saw welcoming, connecting, trying out words and playing. As the students were led off surrounded by clinging, jumping, smiling kids, several women and a man emerge. Colin greets them in Warlpiri; they smile, laugh and shake hands. “Good to see you again Japaljarri”.

(extract from personal journal)

1.1 Initial Impressions of the Program

This is a jigsaw of my recollections of the first ten minutes as the students from Mt. Evelyn Christian School (MECS) end their long journey of having a community of Indigenous people, the mob from Yuendumu represented to them through their teacher, peers, films, guest speakers, articles and language study, to finally meeting the people themselves. This is a meeting between two mobs, which has a 28-year history. As a first hand witness to this event, I believe, that in the language of Deleuze, this experience was an external provocation, something in the world that forces us to think. This
something is not an object of recognition 'but of a fundamental encounter that may be grasped in a range of affect tones, wonder, love, hatred or suffering' (Delueze, 1994, p. 251).

It only takes a cursory glance at the school’s art work, its newsletter, the Year 9 and 10 Warlpiri language program and the Year 10 Koori Studies program of the school to realise that the present and past lives, stories, language and art of the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu community in the Northern Territory are a dominant part of the way MECS constructs Australian Indigeneity to its community and to its students.

In the 12 published case studies of the Koori Resource Index describing the ways Victorian schools are constructing Aboriginal Studies, MECS stands out (Roberts, 1994). Not only is its course compulsory and 12 months long but where each of the other schools lists books, films and lesson activities, the MECS contribution is a story by its teacher Colin Japaljarri of the Warlpiri language course and the school’s relationship with the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu and the complexity of Aboriginal life (see Appendix 1). It describes the relationship with the Warlpiri as ‘having a humble and touching depth to it’ (p.140). The description of the MECS course also has a contribution by the Year 10 teacher, which again is not a list of activities or lessons, but a story of his friendship and relationship to an elder, Darby Jampinjinpa Ross. Compared to the other contributions it stands out. There is something quite different about the MECS approach and understanding of doing Indigenous studies.

Anecdotally, it is often the first thing many of the approximately 600 graduates since 1981 talk about when asked about their experience of MECS. Often they recall the life changing effect the program has had on their understanding and support for Indigenous people. One past student thus impacted is Liam Campbell who has spent most of his adult life living and working in the Yuendumu community. The school trip was his introduction to this place. He has recently published a book, a biography of one of the oldest men of Yuendumu (Campbell, 2006), and was nominated for
Northern Territory Young Australian of the year for his work in helping the community eradicate petrol sniffing.

When talking to younger students about the program, most look forward to it. The program features prominently on the school’s website and the principal indicated that some parents have specifically mentioned it as the reason for enrolling students in the school. There is no doubt that anyone becoming familiar with the school soon realises that this program is not only a core component of the curriculum, but an important identifying badge for the school that people refer to in order to mark the school’s distinctiveness.

The prominence of the program within the school’s curriculum, its unique language program and its strong relationship with the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu takes on more significance and intrigue when one considers the history of Indigenous studies programs in schools in the early 1980’s. The first part of this chapter outlines the background for this research and the significance of the MECS program by describing in a thumb sketch way the history of various calls to include Indigenous studies in schools and the ways schools could take up this call.

**1.2 Early Understandings**

Australia, along with many other colonised countries, is a land that is inhabited by both Indigenous people and those who have arrived later. The story surrounding the invasions, contact and interaction between the Indigenous people and others is not a just or harmonious one. Formal studies of Australian Indigenous peoples prior to the 1960s was mainly the domain of selected academics in universities and has been characterised by post-colonial writers as an artefact of the colonial encounter. This scholarly interest in Indigenous people has contributed both negatively and positively to their lives. One of the prized intellectual exports of the early colonisers were their observations of the life of Australian Aborigines, valued at the

---

1 Throughout this research I have used the term “Indigenous” with a capital to identify the Australian Aboriginal people and the Torres Strait Island people.
time because they gave empirical support to the great theories of social evolution and the loss of innocence and wisdom in the modern civilized world, (Langton, 1999). The scholars were fascinated by the structural details of the social life of the ‘other’ yet ignored the deadly impact of invasion, contact and colonisation. The works of later anthropologists such as Stanner, Thompson and Strehlow, were more compassionate of the plight of Indigenous people. Their record has been of help to Indigenous people in establishing land rights and reconnecting families. Stanner’s regular radiobroadcasts of After the Dreaming helped transport understanding of Indigenous worldview from academia to the public life (Stanner, 1968).

1.2.1 The 1960s and early 1970s
During the 1960s and early ‘70s most Australian primary students encountered as part of their social studies program a study of “Aborigines”. What was happening in schools in this period has been gleaned from examining school texts and curriculum documents. Bin-Sallik, Blomeley Flowers & Hughes (1994) in their decisive review of Indigenous Education noted that ‘much of the literature we reviewed was descriptive’ (p. 36); and in general ‘there is almost no empirical research’ (p. 7) and ‘a noticeable absence in the current literature, of analysis of how to get things done’ (p. 19). The authors also only found a very small number of references to the schooling sector.

Targowska (2001), reviewing literature in the early childhood field, found no empirical research on which to base its pedagogies of how to approach teaching Anglo-Australians about Indigenous Australians.

Speaking about the this decade, Lippman (1995) concluded from her studies of primary textbooks that while the topic “Australian Aboriginal People” is one that has cropped up in social studies curricula of the past, most texts continued to be quite silent of contemporary Aboriginal issues and promoted a narrow and stereotypical understanding of traditional Aboriginal cultures.
Quinn (1992), studying primary school images of Aboriginal people from 1930 -1980, concluded that not much had changed since the 1930s and most of the images were ‘constructions reaching back into the 19th century and that they served the economic and social needs of the white population’ (p. 3). Some of these texts have been summarized and critiqued by more recent curriculum writers (Beckett & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies., 1988; Craven & Rigney, 1999; Groome, 1994).

Brian Attwood (1992a), drawing on the work of Foucault and Said, summarised this period as ‘a history which considered how European power and knowledge have constructed Aborigines (and Aboriginality) into a discursive practice known as “Aboriginalism” (p.3).

If one was to sketch a classroom scenario of this era, it may look like this:

“I hope I get to do the project about hunting,” whispered Jack to his mate as the teacher put out various resources from the library with pictures of Aborigines on the cover. The students in Year 6 of Mr. Wesley’s class had been studying the Australian Aboriginal people as part of the Social Studies program. They had covered headings such as traditional family life, food and religion. Yesterday Mr Wesley had read an interesting story about the Rainbow Serpent and how the Aboriginal people believed it created their land. Today they were starting their projects. Jack liked projects. He had received an “A” for his project on the Egyptians.

1.2.2 Winds of change and a new paradigm - The Eighties

From the late 1970s, things began to change. There emerged more audible voices in the struggle for equity and justice. By far the primary drivers of this have been the Indigenous advisory and consultative committees to Government education departments. Some have called for all schools to be more active in giving Indigenous culture, ideas and history a greater part in the school curriculum. Many Indigenous organisations called on the Government and schools to redress the silences in history and Indigenous perspectives. Craven (1996) cites that as early as 1975 the Aboriginal Consultative Group Report to the Commonwealth called for the reform of teacher training curricula to include core units on Aboriginal Studies.
Chapter 17 of Watts’s Report noted that eight of the national reports called for education of non-Aborigines about Aborigines. Watts (1982) goes on to state that underlying this call is ‘a concern for the reduction of prejudice and racism; a desire for the acceptance of Aboriginals as an integral and valuable part of the Australian past and present and recognition of the need to prepare all Australian children for their participation in a multi-cultural society’ (p. 1194).

Ministerial statements made in 1986 stated that ‘all children should develop knowledge and critical awareness of the unique and diverse cultural heritage of the original Australians and the impact of white settlement on the complex traditional Aboriginal society’ (Ministry of Education, 1986, p. 6).

During the eighties, the Aboriginal Studies Association was formed and its conferences and publications began to charter a new understanding of working with Indigenous people to produce strategies and material that was more suitable for schools.

This understanding was central to statements coming out of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Taskforce advising the Ministerial Council for Education. It stated:

The time has come for all Australian students to be taught a shared history that includes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives. Not only have Aboriginal people been consequently disadvantaged, but Australian society generally has not come to understand and appreciate the significance of Aboriginal culture.


1.2.3 Recent Developments

In the 1990s, a few schools began to incorporate stand alone Indigenous Studies programs. Curriculum framework documents began to include some Indigenous perspectives of history. The Victorian Curriculum Standards Framework II in this period set out to give more value to Aboriginal perspectives of history with statements such as:
At this Level (6), students develop knowledge about Australia and the struggles and successes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to gain political and social rights, gain full citizenship and their campaign for land rights and self-determination. It examines the impact of European occupation of Australia including the perspective of that occupation as invasion.

Students also learn about:

The movement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities towards self-determination, including the recognition of native title.

The successes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in gaining political and social rights, as well as the recognition of native title rights in the twentieth century.

Students ought to be able describe the roles of important individuals involved in significant events, such as William Barak, Raffaelo Carboni, Caroline Chisholm, Alfred Deakin, Vida Goldstein, Peter Lalor, Mary McKillop, John Monash, Henry Parkes and Truganini.

(V.C.A.A., 2000).

Subsequently, there was a great deal of goal setting and encouragement to schools to do more. In 1995, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Policy issued seven priorities for education. Priority six required educators:

To promote, maintain and support the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander studies, cultures and languages to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective and reconciliation strategies permeate the curriculum”.

(Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 1995)

The Ministerial Council for Education and Training in goal 21 of its report also stated:

To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for national Aboriginal and Torres Strait contemporary and traditional culture.


The same council a little later in the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century articulated that:
All students [should] understand and acknowledge the value of Aboriginal society and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.


The National Council for Reconciliation also promoted the cause for inclusion of Aboriginal Studies to be taught to all students in all schools. In the lead-up to the 1997 National Reconciliation Convention, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation widely distributed a questionnaire to gather people’s views on reconciliation. More than 3,000 people responded to the questionnaire. The need for better, more inclusive education was mentioned more frequently than any other issue. The many regional consultations that took place in this process also supported this view. While the emphasis was on starting the education early, many respondents agreed that people of all ages needed to have some understanding of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous peoples.

The following two comments taken from the analysis of the questionnaire summarises the general feeling of the respondents

All school children should be taught about Koori heritage and culture from a very early age, before they become biased by other people’s prejudices.

Educate Australians (all Australians) about Aboriginal history, particularly the parts that get covered up (genocide, dispossession, and forced removal of children).

(Australian Reconciliation Convention, 1997)

Many reiterated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies had to be part of the normal school curriculum. There was also strong support for the need for these teachings to be taught by Indigenous teachers or Indigenous people invited into the school. The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Policy (1996) explicitly acknowledged the need for Aboriginal participation via the involvement of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (L.A.E.C.G). The Koori Studies Resource Index (Roberts, 1994) identified 25 such groups in Victoria. Protocols and procedures were put in place through
the “School Speakers Program” an initiative of the Department of School and Education and Victorian Aboriginal Educational Association Incorporated to provide schools with the opportunity for the dissemination of positive information about contemporary and traditional Koori lifestyles through the employment of Koori elders as speakers.

The independent schools sector, often portrayed as serving only the elite of our society, was also stirred to action by these calls. In response to the ‘Dare to Lead’ initiative the heads of independent schools put out the following statements.

As leaders of school communities, we recognise that we have unique responsibilities and opportunities to further the cause of reconciliation between the parents, staff and students of our schools. To this end, we encourage members of our association to:

- Ensure that their school communities are involved in sharing the richness of Indigenous culture and heritage; provide opportunities for the staffs of our schools to grow in knowledge and understanding of the process of reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and the wider community;
- Provide a teaching of history that enables students to gain a clear perspective and understanding of the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples and the richness that remains.
- Learn from best practice in providing for the unique needs of Indigenous students and their families in our school communities; and
- Be sensitive to Indigenous peoples’ traditions and beliefs when developing the physical environment of our schools.

(Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, 2001)

Since the early 1990s, matching the call for schools to do more, some teacher training institutes introduced Indigenous studies and awareness programs in teacher training courses (Craven, Marsh, & Wilson-Miller, 2003).

### 1.2.4 Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, when reviewing the literature on what is being called for regarding Indigenous studies from many sources over time, it not hard to concur with Wray, Craven and Munn’s (2004) review of the situation which
states 'In Australia today there is major support for the compulsory inclusion of Aboriginal Studies in the school curriculum' (p.2).

The Victorian situation, in which this study is set, reflected this national change in both the amount and direction of Indigenous studies programs in the school sector. A prime example of this change can be seen in the government's response to the “Bringing Them Home” report. Addressing the multifaceted recommendations of the report included goals for Indigenous education led to “YALCA”, an education policy statement about Koori Education, developed collaboratively between the Department of Education and Training; the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc and Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (VAEAI/DEET, 2001). Also “Wurreker” was a policy developed between the tertiary and the Koori community (VAEAI/DEET, 2000). These consultations resulted in Indigenous studies materials and perspectives being incorporated in the various levels of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, which all schools ought to be implementing.

1.3 Implications for Implementing Indigenous Studies

A school responding to the calls and ideas suggested in recent times would adopt a partnership with the local Indigenous community. A classroom scenario for its delivery drawn from descriptions of various Indigenous speakers at the Association of Aboriginal Studies Conferences might look this:

The Year 9 class had set out for a look at their own local history. One of the adults who accompanied the group was Aunty Beth (as she preferred to be known) a representative and elder of the Wurrundjeri people who are the original inhabitants of the area. As they came to different sites Aunty Berth told the group the name of the place in her language, why it was named that way and the significance of the place to her people. At one of the places, she asked the group to close their eyes and imagine this place as it had been. She began to describe it. They opened their eyes only to see that the quarry had destroyed the cave and other aspects of the site. After the excursion, the students were encouraged to reflect on the experience and prepare a set of questions that they wanted to ask
Aunt Beth when she returned with some other members of her family. The students were given a sheet of questions that Aunt Beth wanted to ask them. A few days later, Aunt Beth and some members of her family returned. After each person in the group had been formally introduced, a discussion began. The questions ranged from finding out information about where they lived and what they do each day to issues of how they feel about the past and current situation. After a period of time Aunt Beth would stop and ask one of the group to respond to her questions such as: “Do they know where the ‘title’ of the land that their families are now living on came about? What did you expect when your teacher said an aboriginal person was coming to join your class?”

1.3.1 A focus on perspectives

A second closely related approach advocated by the Aboriginal Studies Association is not to study one particular group or to have a discrete stand alone subject but instead to incorporate specific Indigenous perspectives into all areas of the curriculum. For example, when reflecting on relationships the dependence on skin names with many Indigenous communities can be given as alternative ways of viewing relationships. The way culture names things points to a particular perspective of the world (Crozet, 2000). When teaching history, weather, seasons, health, the body, local geography, art, music, ownership, or mathematical systems, Indigenous people and their texts can be used to make contributions about another way for naming and understanding various dimensions of life to the students. The various positions and understanding of religion can also be explored in this way. The aim of this approach is for students to engage (with support) other people and other views, in order to reconstruct their understanding of themselves and their world.

1.3.2 Renewed focus on language

Culture is not static but the constantly changing product of contemporary relationships with surrounding peoples in a specific region. It is not only socially constructed but also historically conditioned and culturally mediated.

(Crozet, 2000, p. 1)
Pressure to change the approach to teaching about cultures came not just from Indigenous groups but also from the renewed focus on multiple changing cultural identities suggested by many post modern thinkers. (Beckett & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies., 1988; Foley, 2000; S. Hall, 1996).

These approaches emphasize the interpretive or performance nature of culture and highlight how people express their culture in words and symbols.

The contribution of this approach showed more clearly how perception, culture and language dimensions are interdependent human functions, each affecting the other. Some would even go as far as to say, ‘language pervades all activities of human life and, language is culture’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999, p. 11). These three dimensions have been developed into a complex theory of interpersonal communications.

A scenario about teaching culture based on this influence is a rewrite of an example cited in the text “Teaching Culture Strategies for Foreign Language Teachers” (Seelye, 1978), which reflects the genre of writings around the theme of intercultural competence and communication that were common in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Miss Grant, the German language and culture teacher showed the small segment of the film with the street scene of the two German boys greeting each other with a handshake as well as a sheet with the transcript of the dialogue. She asks two volunteers to act out the scene using the German language. She stops and points out to them the distance that the boys stand and how there is only one firm shake and a slight bow. Students in pairs practice this dialogue and action several times. In the second dialogue, she shows a clip of the way a boy greets a girl that is fairly well known and one that is stranger. Again, she points out the tone and choice of words. The students practice this in role-plays. Later in the week, Miss Grant asks the student to reflect on their ‘normal’ way of greeting each other and some of the differences between their culture and the German culture and to explore the values that might lie behind these differences.
Even though this example uses the teaching of a European language if a school were to adopt the teaching of an Indigenous language a similar approach could be an option.

1.4 How have Schools Responded to these Calls?

The above section, in a thumb sketch way, described the calls for Indigenous Education in schools from various organisations and outlined, using broad trends, various possible approaches to teaching Indigenous studies. A key question following this is to ask: How have schools responded to these calls? This section looks at some of the research that describes what schools have done in the past and what is currently happening in schools.

There has been very little research about what is actually happening in school programs and their effectiveness. It is difficult to collect figures of what is currently happening in Victorian schools in response to these calls.

Moriarty (1995), reviewing the Catholic schools in his region acknowledged patchy and inappropriate teaching of Indigenous studies.

The NSW Education Department with the assistance of the Aboriginal Education Unit pulled together an Aboriginal Studies Curriculum Project team consisting of representatives from the department, parents, teachers and Aboriginal communities to assist schools to evaluate their response to the guidelines for teaching Aboriginal Studies released in March 1982 (Division of Management Information Services, 1984). The project was designed to assist schools in developing, carrying out and reporting on an evaluation of their school’s effort to introduce Aboriginal Perspectives or Core Aboriginal Studies Units. Six schools were involved in the project. Using short surveys, several schools found that students had a stereotyped view of Aboriginals, associating the identity of Aboriginals only to traditional lifestyle, events and objects.

A closer look at the evaluation tools used by the schools in this study showed that the closed nature of the questions would lead to this conclusion. For example, one survey asked students to associate words with images of Aboriginal people or events where the majority of events and
images were traditional. The focus of the study, I believe, was more about the techniques of evaluation i.e. training staff in how to carry out a formal evaluation and the benefits in doing this, rather than eliciting reliable data about what was being learnt by the students. The questions failed to examine positions or frameworks which subtly maintain oppression of Indigenous people.

Despite some criticism of this finding, various researchers anecdotally suspected that many schools are still stuck in the early paradigms described earlier associated with the 1960s or are ignoring the issue and not teaching anything.

In Victoria, few non-Indigenous teachers report that they have knowingly had the chance to listen to Indigenous perspectives or ‘voice’. Indeed, it is estimated that 80% of the state’s teachers report that they have never met an Indigenous person (Irvine, 2003). This is significant in that 50% of the Indigenous population of Victoria is under 18 years and are therefore represented in many classrooms. Obviously, there is a problem of perception and many teachers are failing to see the reality of Indigenous culture as a living, vibrant and evolving force and Indigenous people as individuals.

Cultural awareness training now forms part of many industrial professional development programs yet in Victoria, Indigenous studies is not a core requirement for pre-service training, in spite of its recognised importance in the teacher education curriculum (Craven, 1996).

A brief perusal of government school websites showed very few secondary schools in Victoria offering a standalone Indigenous studies unit in its curriculum beyond the three units in the Curriculum Standards Framework at ‘level 4 and 6’ of the civics and history strands of the essential learning. How schools are teaching these units or implementing the suggested perspectives remains unknown. No literature could be found on any empirical studies at the school level.
The Koori Studies Resource Index described the responses of 12 schools in its case studies section as examples of how schools were responding to the challenge of “Aboriginal Studies” (Roberts, 1994). Only two schools had adopted the perspectives approach. Most schools had limited the compulsory studies comprising a six to ten week study as part of History or Social Studies program. The majority of the programs focused on generic and traditional descriptions of Aboriginal people and their culture. Only three programs focused on local groups. No other non-Indigenous schools in Victoria are offering an Aboriginal language as part of their curriculum at the time of this study. Anecdotally it seems though there have been some good examples of schools heeding the calls but many are still not responding or responding poorly. Yet, the need for these studies has not diminished. Indigenous leaders continue to recognise the link between education, justice and reconciliation. Today the situation of poverty, ill health, hopelessness and despair graphically portrays the lives of Indigenous people. Recent examples of such stories are:

‘INDIGENOUS people are nine times more likely to develop type two diabetes than other Australians.
(Newcastle Herald, 25/03/2005).
‘VICTORIAN Indigenous students have the lowest retention rate of any state in Australia.
(The Melbourne Age, 28/01/2005).

Hardly a week goes by when some news of poverty, ill health or trouble involving Indigenous people is not reported. This situation is not just a news beat up. Indigenous leader Lois O'Donoghue has stated publicly a decade ago:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most disadvantaged group in the country whatever social indicator you use, health status, education, employment, contact with the law - we are at the bottom of the heap.

(O'Donoghue, 1995, p. 6).
Sadly the statistics and the news headlines indicate continued lack of progress in putting things right for Indigenous people. Education is part of the problem and the solution.

There can be no denying that in a land of abundance there is a higher incidence of poor physical and mental health, education, housing and lack of work opportunities amongst Indigenous people than any other sector of the Australian Community. Even as this report is being written in the midst of the historic sorry by our the Parliament and the Prime Minister, the Indigenous elder in my local area called on the Prime Minister to do more about teaching the “the painful reality of Indigenous history”.

A reasonable conclusion from the literature is that in the early 1980s, only a few schools were responding effectively to the many calls for compulsory Indigenous studies programs that involved partnerships with Indigenous people. Placing the MECS program and story in this context raises important and interesting questions.

1.5 The Mt Evelyn Christian School’s Response: What is it really a case of?

The initial examination of the MECS's Indigenous studies program in the context of 1982 and what was happening (or more aptly what was not happening) in non-Indigenous schools in suburban Melbourne raised a number of initial questions. Why did MECS start this program? Why was it developed around Warlpiri and the Yuendumu community? How was the school able to position it to become central and compulsory to the curriculum and identity of the school? And how it has sustained it for so long? These questions take on more force and interest when reflecting on the context.

These questions about the rationale, motivation and perspectives in the context of the history and paradigms of teaching Indigenous studies programs to non Indigenous audiences immediately presents unresolved tensions. Is the attraction to Yuendumu because it has retained more of the “traditional” aspects of culture and therefore appeals to modernist, essentialist and oppositional views linked to colonialism? Yet the close links
with community, and the focus on teaching the language points to other issues at work.

Yin (2003) identifies a case study approach as being of particular value when how or why questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control.

The brief history of Indigenous studies described in this section, together with the arguments developed in Chapter 2 about the importance of perspectives adopted by schools surrounding culture, purpose of schooling, and curriculum, assists in explaining why a school would or would not place importance on including Australian Indigenous studies in its curriculum and it also helps to explain why schools develop different kinds of programs. A study of MECS will need to include investigation of these paradigms. Significantly, also in MECS's case is the question the question of how, in an age when innovations can easily become fads and disappear, has the school been able to sustain its program and its relationship with Yuendumu for so long (25+years)? It is one thing to establish in policy that schools ought to establish partnerships but not a lot has been written about how to sustain them.

Taking historical and curriculum development issues into account, MECS's response to the call for schools to include Indigenous studies in the curriculum lead to the initial research question of: **What perspectives about culture and schooling operated within MECS for it to begin and shape its particular practice of Indigenous Studies?**

Schrank (2006) in his review of case studies, highlights that the strength of examining a case is that it can uncover new concepts. In an analogy with this situation, he points to the classic study “Japan’s Miraculous Economic Growth” (Johnson, 1982). Japan had defied the common experiences of countries coming out of war. It did not fit the Western or socialist models of economic planning. He sensed that it was a special case and he asked what was it a case of. In the same way, looking at the history of what was going on in schools and the MECS response, I was led to ask the same question. What
is the MECS response a case of? It did not fit easily the range of colonial or postcolonial responses to teaching and learning about other cultures.

1.6 The Journey of this Research and an Outline of the Chapters

The descriptions outlined so far in this introduction reflect the interaction of my early anecdotal knowledge of the MECS program within the contexts of practices surrounding Indigenous Studies programs, which led to some important initial how and why questions asked about the program.

And so the journey began.

To answer these initial questions required further work. The early developers of the program, the past and present teachers and students, as well as the whole practice were identified as the main sources of data to answer the initial questions. The first task was to gather qualitative data about what was actually happening in the program. What concepts and experiences were the students exposed to?

The issues surrounding how the data were collected and analyzed are described in the Chapter 3. This chapter describes how the study positions itself in the hermeneutics and interpretive theories of knowledge, and explains how ethnographic practices were used to collect and construct descriptions of the program. These descriptions are outlined in Chapter 4. However, descriptions are only one aspect any story; interpretations are the other important part. How were the students guided to make sense/meaning of this information and experience about Indigenous people, their living situation and their relationship to non-Indigenous people? The analysis of these “how” questions would lead to some answers to the initial main research question about which perspectives were MECS using in understanding and teaching about culture.

And so the journey continued.

Along the journey of this study are the insights and voices of many researchers that have helped to sharpen and clarify both the process and reflections on the data and experiences. Initially important was the literature reviewed in this chapter showing the history and various ways of
categorizing what schools were doing in the area. This provided a background to the discussions. Also of importance were the ways that key concepts of this study—culture, curriculum, worldview, religion, spirituality, and language are understood and used in other settings, research, and various philosophical positions. The discussion of these concepts are introduced in Chapter 2, drawn on and referred to in the later analysis and discussion chapters to assist in distinguishing the MECS perspective and practice from others.

Chapter 5 draws on ethnographic methodology of being a participant observer, filtering what I saw and heard with the explanations of the participants and insight from the literature in order to analyse the data and articulate five key themes and some silences in answer to the initial key question about the program MECS used to shape its descriptions and understanding of Indigenous people and their culture.

The work in the initial review and analysis of the way MECS understands the purpose and meaning of doing Indigenous Studies study extracted the importance of worldview and its relationship to culture and the use of integral curriculum in the methods for gaining understanding of other worldviews and cultures. The concept of worldview and integrality are complex ones and to understand the nuances some of the various dimensions and features of the concepts needed to be drawn out.

As well as drawing out the various dimensions of these concepts from the literature in Chapter 2, it is important, as Smith (1999a) reminded those researching and writing social practice, to place them in the contextual story of the organisation. Therefore at a deeper level, worldview and integrality may be connected closely to the school’s philosophy. With this in mind, a study was done on the philosophical movement that gave rise to the development of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in the 1960s and 1970s. This helped to link the particular way MECS uses these key terms. This historical study was based on interviews with the principal and some of the founding board members as well as data from the schools publications. The short digression into the history of the Netherlands and into the
philosophical roots of the Christian parent or community-controlled schools is reported in Chapter 4 and is necessary to explain the character and workings of the Mt. Evelyn Christian School. Terms like ‘All of life is religious’, a ‘Biblical perspective of’, and ‘worldview’ are current and common language in many of the school’s documents and in talk among the staff as well as being foundational to the practice uncovered in the way the school has gone about constructing its Indigenous Studies program. The connection to these religious roots comes from the pioneers of the school, the Dutch migrants to the Mt Evelyn area.

This history helped to answer a new question, which was posed at the end of chapter five. The MECS approach to Indigenous culture to led to the possibility of thinking about MECS itself as a “culture” and therefore, the approach it took towards other communities such as Yuendumu could be turned in on itself and the key questions originally asked could be rephrased as: What worldview lens did MECS use to shape and teach its program? This reshaping of the research question is common with studies using a grounded theoretical approach.

Chapter 6, drawing on the philosophy of the school and literature, answers this new question in terms of “transformational education” and a “religio-critical” approach to human life and culture. This framework provided a basis for making connections between the various themes of MECS’s practice. It particularly blurs the boundaries between being religious, worldview and language. Both “being religious” and worldview are seen as foundational ontological characteristics of being human and epistemological as a basis for developing knowledge. This lens provided deeper understanding and meaning to the practice of MECS’s Indigenous studies program.

A case approach gains more validity if it can speak to the wider context (Burns, 1997). Although no two schools are the same, it is important as a result of reading this report that some schools may decide that “yes, we could try that”. In other words, this case study may provide some practical suggestions that will help schools find ways to improve their understanding,
practice and delivery of Indigenous studies or perspectives. Therefore, in this section seven challenges flowing from a school community’s understanding of their own spiritual status and on the way they understand and relate to Indigenous people and their culture were discussed.

In Chapter 7, the story of this study, the initial questions, the collecting of the data and the story it revealed about the MECS program is summarised. The chapter concludes with discussing some limitations of the study and suggesting possible future directions for research in this area.
This painting is Ngatijirri (budgerigar) dreaming. There are tree wirrakali trees in the centre Napaljarri climbs the tree to catch the birds for food Nungarrayi waits below Their katngu lie on the ground. Two rdajalpa warna (snakes) come along, also after the budgies. The women kill and eat them too.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Key Ideas

There are many explanations given for the diversity of approaches and silences surrounding the construction and delivery of Indigenous studies programs in schools. The approach adopted in this study, to make sense of the practice, is to work back and examine the forces at work in shaping the curriculum decisions. Print (1993) reminds his readers that school based curriculum development is a response to three overlapping forces. The first is the unique situation of the school, its location, community demographics or “situation”. The second is the values, philosophy and history of the community. The third is external pressures, such as Government policies like those dealt with in the introductory chapter of this research. Chapter 4 in its description of the school covers the aspect of “situation” and in general terms describes the school’s history and philosophy. In this chapter however, credence is given to two specific aspects of educational values, namely the understanding of what is meant by culture and the purpose of schooling.

One feasible explanation put forward is that diversity of practices is a result of the interaction and contestation of various overlapping ideas or paradigms that schools hold on the definition and understanding of what constitutes culture. Groome (1994) concludes his analysis of various Indigenous Studies programs by noting the difference it made when schools moved from a view of culture that links it with fixed traditions to a view that links it with dynamic, subjective knowledge. To explain the meaning of MECS’s practice it will be important to review various positions held on culture and locate MECS’s position.

Schools and teaching are complex and explanations of the meaning and purpose about practice also flow out of understanding the purpose of schooling, views of knowledge and curriculum.
The various theoretical views on these issues are important background to discussing MECS’s practice and are taken up in this chapter together with three of the key ideas to emerge from the study: worldview, religion and language.

2.1 Views on Culture

In trying to explain why some people in different places act in ways that are different or do not make immediate sense to other groups, anthropologists often resort to the concept of culture. This concept in the literature is not an easy one to define. Understanding and definitions of culture have diversified over time. Kroeber and Klockhohn (1952) examined 156 definitions of culture. The original meaning of humans cultivating the ground to produce food has been extended over time to include the human shaping of physical elements to produce art and music now known as “high” culture through to the more recent anthropological view of culture as being the whole way of life of a people, though this does not subscribe to the view of culture as a totality of a society.

In the introduction, four different approaches to teaching Indigenous Studies were identified based on the literature and advice to schools. These four approaches could be broadly summarised as generalized information and concepts regarding some aspects of traditional life that is, Culture as Object. Secondly, as contrasting cultural perspective across the curriculum; Culture as Perspective. Thirdly, culture as expressed through language could be expressed as Culture as Language. The culture as perspective and culture as language raises the issue of who is qualified to teach. The call by local Aboriginal Education Groups to form partnerships with local Indigenous people, focusing on local history and issues presents a fourth perspective; Teaching Culture as Partnership.

These four approaches are discussed more fully and are important in establishing a frame of reference to analyse and discuss MECS’s particular response to teaching Indigenous Studies to non-Indigenous students.
2.1.1 Culture as object

In the generalized information paradigm, culture is commonly named and framed as a set of common patterns of behaviours shared among a group (J. Spradley, 1972). Liddicoat (2001) has distinguished this view of culture as static. Many academic disciplines before the 1980s reflected a strong theme of behaviourism and functionalism; the studying of cultures was no exception.

Activities for schools and teachers adopting this approach usually focus on observable incidents and normative patterns of incidents. Examples were chosen as “good” examples of typical behaviour. Patterns studied were those which emphasized difference from those studying the culture, and provided a fascination and interest factor. Nemetz Robinson (1985) highlighted this point on a trip to India when reflecting on why he was taking pictures of the man wearing the exotic clothing among the many who were wearing jeans.

Languages in this paradigm were something separated from culture and taught as a set of skills focusing on grammar and vocabulary. For students knowing about a culture did not need any specific language study.

The effects of these contexts of influence could readily be seen in school programs. Nemetz Robinson (1985), surveying 350 foreign language teachers, found that the study of holidays, celebrations, customs and foods were very common. Similarly, Groome (1994), when summarising what was bad about teaching Indigenous culture, found that many programs overly focused on traditional family events of food, hunting and gathering and ceremonies reflecting the position of Aborigines as inert objects not subject to historical change.

Teaching about culture in this framework creates many silences. One of the silences is the existing beliefs, values and norms of the students and the teacher. There is little recognition of their present understandings of their own identity, culture and worldview that are influencing the learning outcomes. An example of this lack of understanding is the place and definition of Dreaming as being the “dream time” only relating to a time long
ago, or as the origin of the creation, rather than the more pervasive and
dynamic place that Dreaming has in Indigenous culture. This perspective
comes about because the viewers have not critically examined their own
perspectives on time and the place (Teasdale & Ma Rhea, 2000). For this
reason Campbell (2006) prefers to use the Warlpiri word Jurkuppa which
encompasses Dreaming (past and present), Law and Story, when describing
the biography of Darby Ross.

There is also usually in the Culture as Object paradigm no detail of actual
people from the culture being studied. Gadamer (1986) postulated three
basic forms of cultural relations between self and other. Other can be
represented as impersonal (object), as a person but interpreted and defined
by self or thirdly as a person equal to self, capable of representing
themselves and capable of entering into open-ended dialogue. The Culture
as Object paradigm reflects Gadamer’s impersonal stance, as people usually
appear without names.

Keeffe (1988), analysing the construction of Aboriginality used in programs
such as “Culture Awareness Camps” run for suburban Indigenous teenagers,
also provides a critique of traditional ways of thinking about culture. He
identifies the overlapping and contradictory themes of Aboriginality as
persistence and Aboriginality as resistance. The first construction draws on
the ethnic ideology of inheritance and an enduring uni-linear Aboriginal
culture constantly reproduced, despite white intervention. It uses the
elements of blood, speech and custom as the essential spiritual and
enduring primordial ties with the past. The second ideology construes
Aboriginality as resistance that uses the forms of modern society to express
identity. He advocates an Aboriginal culture that is diverse and complex,
drawing not only on selected elements of the past to produce identity but
also on recent elements of the dominant culture such as flags, anthems and
organisations. He advocates the inverting of their meanings and values to
transform them as part of producing an Indigenous identity.

Many of today’s Aboriginal communities and groups are offended and
annoyed at the construction of their identity by white middle class people.
Indigenous studies programs framed in this essentialist, non-personal manner alienate the many they fail to describe: “I don’t know how to throw a boomerang,” said Ed an elder, “maybe I am not really an Aborigine” (West, 2000, p. 3). The Culture as object approach in its attempt to fix culture in the past, fails to celebrate the diversity and differences between Indigenous people.

The “who” in terms of greatest spheres of influence in this paradigm is the expert from one’s own culture - the anthropologist and his/her detailed descriptions and pictures of daily life. The “who” in terms of competence to teach in this paradigm is the person who has insight into organising a range of facts and concepts in interesting ways for students and has good skills in explaining concepts. Experience of the culture or language is not a priority.

2.1.2 Culture as a perspective

An alternative view of teaching culture is that Indigenous perspectives and people should occur naturally across the whole curriculum (Tatz, 1980). West (2000), also advocating this position, points to science as an example and asks how many schools, when introducing the work of Australian scientists, include the work of David Unaipon, a great Ngarrindjeri man from South Australia who succeeded in turning circular motion into straight motion and applying it to the working of shears. The bringing of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, for example, to the study of science, art, family relationships and history to contrast and compare with other cultural perspectives, adopts a view of culture that moves from viewing cultures as a description of behaviours, objects and events (objective culture) to including what Harris (1999) has described as the subjective culture of a society or group. This approach focuses on the values, attitudes, beliefs, orientations and underlying assumptions prevalent among people in a society. Others have referred to this as the shared, collective subjectivity that is the way of life or outlook adopted by a community or social class (Alasuutari, 1995; Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Tiandis, 1994).
Similarly, Hans Gullestrup defines culture as,

...the world conception, the values, moral norms, actual behaviour and the material and immaterial results which people take over from preceding generations, which they, in a modified form, seek to pass on to the next generation and which in one way or another make them differ from people belonging to other cultures.

(Gullestrup, 2006, p. 7)

Using an etic analysis, he then goes on to identify the way cultures commonly deal with seven process of being human: processing; distribution; management; decision making; conveyance; integration identity and security. His model for culture stratifies culture vertically where below the surface of the readily observable elements are the difficult to perceive culture layers such as kinship and economic structures (often the target of ethnographers in the Levi-Strauss tradition). Below this layer are formalised norms and rules of a society. Further below are what he calls the core culture layers which are invisible and need deduction to determine their presence, they are the symbolised culture layer similar to Hall’s silent language or Bourdieu’s “habitus” or tacit knowledge. Below this is the layer of values and below, at the foundation layer, is the fundamental world conception. This foundational layer posits a common set of universal questions about how the world got here, our place in it and life after death. Each culture answers these questions differently. What is of particular importance in Gullestrup’s work is how this worldview foundation is responsible for the shaping of all the layers above it and as such is the key to understanding why cultures differ. Understanding the peculiarities of a dance, for example, as ‘a manifestation of a particular fundamental world conception will give a deeper understanding than trying interpreting the dance on its own level’ (Gullestrup 2006 p. 100).

The understanding of culture put forward by Harris (1999) and Gullestrup (2006) of focussing on the common set of beliefs and perceptions shared by a culture that leads to behaviour, rather than the surface daily elements making up a culture, leads to different emphasis when teaching about one’s own or another’s culture. The book “Whitefella Culture” states that:
This is a book about culture, about Whitefella culture and about Aboriginal culture. Culture is more than songs, paintings and ceremonies. It is more than houses, clothes and tools. Culture is the way we think, the way we act, the way we feel about things (ATSIC, 1998, p. 3)

This more recent understanding of ‘culture as perspective’ moves the focus of studying cultures beyond the surface daily elements making up a culture, to the underlying beliefs and perceptions shared by a culture that lead to the behaviour. *Worldview* is another related term for perspective and is an important idea for exploring culture and for understanding differences in cultures. *Culture as enacted worldview* emerged as a key point in understanding MECS’s approach to teaching Indigenous studies and therefore is a concept expanded more fully in a latter section of this chapter.

Some of the criticisms of over generalization and depersonalisation raised in the first scenario can also be applied to this understanding of teaching culture. This approach to seeing culture as primarily originating from ideals or mental constructs held unconsciously is also criticized by those working from a historical materialist tradition who argue that the material environment and history shape mental constructs, not the other way around (Kearney, 1984).

### 2.1.3 Culture as language

The naming and framing of culture as a more cognitive and symbolic entity (Nelson, Treichler, & Grosberg, 1992) led to culture and cultural identities being regarded as not fixed, or pure and takes into account internal mechanisms of cognition, i.e. culture is constructed in the mind and not in a set of behaviours (S. Hall & duGay, 1996). Culture is viewed in this framework as a constantly changing product of contemporary relationships with surrounding peoples in a specific region. It is ‘not only socially constructed but also historically conditioned and culturally mediated’ (Crozet, 2000, p. 1).

This approach emphasizes the interpretive or performance nature of culture and highlights how people express their culture in words and
symbols. Language becomes more central. This position more closely represents the naming of communication as a discourse with a set of contested meanings (S. Hall, 1980; M. J. Smith, 2000).

Rubern Alves, a Brazilian liberation theologian, expresses this in the following manner:

We do not contemplate reality face to face. From the moment we are born, things do not come before us in all their nakedness; they come dressed in the name that some community has given them. The community has already defined how the world is, and hence it knows what the world is. This knowledge of the world is crystallised in language.

(Alves, 1985, p. 25).

According to Carbaugh (1988), culture refers to patterns of symbolic actions and meanings that are deeply felt, commonly understood and widely accessible. The “who” of significance in this paradigm is extended beyond the anthropologist to the social psychologist and the communication-linguist expert.

The linguist contribution to studies of culture showed more clearly how the perception, culture and language dimensions are interdependent human functions, each affecting the other. Some have even gone as far as to say ‘language pervades all activities and of human life and language is culture’ (Lo Bianco, et al., 1999, p. 5) and ‘language is culture expressing itself in sound’ (Ovando, 1990, p. 8).

The perception, culture and language dimensions have been developed into a complex theory of interpersonal communications. Interpersonal communications patterns have been theorised to be both a cause and result of cultural differences. Languages give each culture a common set of categories and distinctions with which to organise perceptions. These categories are used to sort objects and ideas and give meaning to shared ideas. Non-verbal communication systems provide information about the meanings associated with space-time, touch and gestures. The inter-communication patterns of a culture constantly reinforce the preferred way of thinking, feeling, perceiving and acting in relation to stimuli being
received by the senses. The people most accredited for this theory of linguistic relativity were Sapir and Whorf\(^2\) who researched whether a culture's amount of words for concepts (e.g. in Arabic there are nearly a hundred words for camel) affected the perception of one's surroundings.

The important contribution of this approach is that it unlocks the previously silenced psychological, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of the "who"-the participants. The process of cross-cultural understanding is not just an intellectual exercise of accumulating facts and concepts. It is a more holistic exercise involving the affective and psychological dimensions. Nemetz Robinson defines cross-cultural understanding as 'positively relating to, responding to and interacting with members of different cultures' (Nemetz Robinson, 1985, p. 1) According to Carbaugh (1988), culture refers to patterns of symbolic actions and meanings that are deeply felt, commonly understood and widely accessible.

The “what”, in terms of learning activities in this framework are practice and analysis of social episodes involving communication in a new language.

This particular emphasis and understanding of language shaping culture poses problems for the majority of mainstream schools with regard to teaching Indigenous Studies. Where are the bilingual teachers? Which Aboriginal language should be studied? For these reasons it is rare to find a school adopting this approach to Indigenous studies.

This intercultural communication approach addresses previously silenced dimensions regarding the process of acquiring one's own cultural patterns such as beliefs, values and norms, and therefore lays open to the astute teacher opportunities to encourage critical reflection on one's own worldview. Taking up these opportunities however depends on the broader framework that this approach is implemented within.

Many of those participating in the intercultural competency contexts have been captured by globalisation and free market economics paradigms, and

\(^2\) A detailed discussion of this theory and research can be found in Gumprez & Levison, (1996).
therefore tend to narrow the notion of self-reflection to opportunities or barriers to participation in the economy. Critical sociologists are rightly concerned that, in this context, hegemony of one culture over another will not be necessarily perceived as negative (Giroux, 2000).

A second critique of this approach is its propensity to look for patterns of culture and to develop knowledge in the form of typologies and taxonomies e.g. power-distance uncertainty, self and time dimensions (Hofstede, 1991) and high and low context cultures (E. T. Hall, 1977). These can contribute to stereotyping by emphasizing the homogeneity of a culture and neglecting its diversity.

The above discussion is only a brief overview of some of various positions surrounding culture and is useful in explaining why schools differ in their approach to teaching about their own and other cultures and is applied in the analysis of MECS’s approach to teaching Indigenous studies.

2.2 Who should Teach?

The shift to viewing culture as dynamic and being shaped by social forces and language also led to shifts in understanding knowledge as culturally bound. This in turn leads to arguments about whose perspective of events should be presented and who has authority to speak for others in cultural studies. These arguments about voice take Gadamer’s three positions and argue that the second position of describing “other” culture using the theoretical frameworks developed from one’s own culture suggests, no matter what view of culture or theoretical framework adopted, one can never fully describe or capture the reality of that culture. Many postmodern writers have argued that a description of anyone or thing will always be biased with reference points from one’s own culture. Inevitably, some things will be highlighted while other things will be unnoticed. Philosopher Richard Rorty reminds his readers that they never encounter reality except under a chosen description (particular situation) and that we are denied the luxury or pretence of claiming a naïve, immediate access to reality (Rorty,
All texts, as Mueke (1992b) states, are always culturally ethnocentric, constructing their own notions of cultural value.

In most cases, it is white Australians with very little or no cultural experience of Aboriginality teaching courses on Aboriginals. Corrie & Maloney (in ATSIC, 1998) argue that this situation leads to distinct dangers. Teachers either will unwittingly or deliberately continue to privilege non-Indigenous constructions of Aboriginality and ways of knowing (Attwood, 1992a).

Groome also expresses this concern when he reviewed Aboriginal Studies programs and suggest that, ‘there is danger, therefore that positive developments such as Aboriginal Studies actually constitute European studies of Aborigines’ (Groome, 1995, p. 111).

Foucault (1980) puts forward the notion that domination occurs not through the restriction of access to knowledge, but through the control of the production of knowledge itself and through the establishment of a hierarchy which denies the legitimacy of some groups to speak for themselves except through some mediated form. Who gets to speak is a key political question, because, as some have argued, what is the point of self-determination if there is no self-representation? (M. Dodson, 1994).

Aunty Beth in the Chapter 1 scenario represents a shift in relation to the question of who is qualified to speak into the situation. In this scenario, not only is there a continuation of the understanding of culture as a subjective and dynamic construction concerning the everyday lives of people but it is also a reminder that representing fully an “other” is allusive to outsiders.

The Aunty Beth scenario approach warms to Gadamer’s third position where two people on equal basis present to each other their cultural insights. The critique of modernity found in post modern writings has led to closer examination of the power of various voices clamouring to tell their version of events and has opened the door for more direct Indigenous presence in the schools. This is particularly true when examining the story of the local area and history. Both of these have usually been told using a
Western paradigm or story. Many of these accounts barely mentioned the Indigenous people of the region that was being explored or settled, or if they did, drew on the common discourses of the day which positioned the “other” as a nomadic, purposeless, peaceful and timeless savage or as a troublesome aggressive people with no respect for the law (Kenworthy & Kenworthy, 1997).

To live in a place and give it a name is to know it and to claim it as one’s own. The colonisers tended to rename the original names of the country. Some names were retained such as the famous Gundagai but most were ignored, perpetuating the Terra Nullius myth and silencing the idea that Indigenous people very densely named this country. Mueke (1992a) reminds his readers that the number of Aboriginal names still exceeds the names bestowed by the colonisers. Parts of Australia that colonisers called just one name such as the “Sandy Desert” are in fact densely named places for the local Indigenous people. How ought one to refer to places in the local area? This is a complicated matter.

One of the benefits of hearing a number of people's stories is that it counters the notions of homogeneity in a culture. Working cooperatively with a particular Indigenous community can also give voice to the richness of the diversity within a group.

Schwartz (1978) also advocates for a view of culture that does more justice to a rapidly changing culture. He argues for a distributive model of culture based on the distribution of knowledge of beliefs, art, law and customs. This then allows for a considerable variation in cultural knowledge depending on individual experience.

Encouraging and supporting Indigenous voice in the classroom is not straightforward. Giroux (1990) is critical of some post-modern analysis for simply advocating equal voice in the construction of identity without analysis of the causes for barriers that cause unequal participation to occur. He argues that there is no level playing field and the step from silence to active voice will need critical, political analytical work to be done before
there can be just, intercultural communication. Similar sentiments have also been voiced by others working from a critical view of racial identity.

It is never a matter of replacing one set of authorities with another nor of substituting one centre for another. It was always a matter of opening and participating in a central strand of intellectual and cultural effort. (Said, 1985, p. 13).

Recognising that some people have been marginalised and oppressed over a long period is important in understanding present patterns. These views of centrality and marginality found in postcolonial theorists influence the framing of curriculum discourses (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Another recent criticism of this approach is the assumption that another’s view of what happened is the full truth when it is true that each culture has its own silences and gaps in its memory of the past. Eric Michaels (1986), who has worked extensively with Aboriginal media productions, argues that taking a view from the margins and making it central fails to recognise that Aboriginal self representation is not, in itself, the “truth” about an event and suggests that they too have through their oral traditions and may have institutionalised some of their forgetting. In the same way, Kathy Butler is concerned that, ‘in an attempt to redress European mindset, non-Aboriginal teaching professionals will invert Terra Nullius discourses, unwittingly applying other forms of disempowerment to Aboriginal people’ (Butler, 2000, p. 95).

Criticism has been made of this approach on pragmatic grounds. Often schools and teachers do not have the resources and training to do extensive school based curriculum work. Nor are there always Aboriginal communities easily identifiable and accessible to work with in many of the large suburban areas of our cities.

The debate about who can speak has led some to go as far as to argue that it is only appropriate that Indigenous people teach Aboriginal studies programs (Langford, 1983; Rowse, 1990). Apart from being very impractical (there are just too many schools), some have argued that creating non-Aboriginal silences will not achieve better political outcomes. Attwood
(1992a) notes that there is an important distinction between speaking for and speaking about. Said (1985) also makes the point about the loss of insight this position would cause because others know you in different ways then you know yourself and these ways might be valuable.

ATSIC has also not supported such a radical stand but instead have supported moves such as the Dare to Lead program (APAPDC, 2003) for school principals where the view of the Committee endorsed the views expressed by Craven and Rigney that,

> every competent and sensitive teacher can teach Indigenous studies effectively by using the best available resources to design relevant activities and meaningful outcomes according to the need of students and the experiences of Indigenous communities. (Craven & Rigney, 1999, p. 62)

Wolfe (1992) suggests a compromise to the above positions with his notion of “speak when you have been spoken to”. In practical terms, this has led to greater development of protocols and partnerships with local Indigenous people when researching and speaking on Indigenous culture. In summarising this issue it seems not only important to have protocols in place and various voices, but to do justice to the various perspectives a broader framework for analysing the different values and beliefs that different perspectives bring needs to be in place (Shi-xu, 2001).

### 2.3 Ideas about Curriculum and Knowledge

In the above segments, various positions regarding culture were outlined. Each of these would lead to differences in practices of teaching Indigenous Studies programs. Variations in practice can also be influenced by various positions or paradigms surrounding the concepts of teacher and teaching. The different positions that a school adopts generally flow out of interaction between the purpose of schooling, theories of knowledge and ideas about how students learn, and are sometimes referred to as particular curriculum ideologies.

Schiro (2008) unwraps four contested curriculum ideologies that American schools (and to a large extent the Western English speaking world)
historically have taken to describe as he puts it their vision and enduring concerns. These curriculum ideologies are the

- **Scholar Academic Ideology** which has as its purpose, helping children learn the accumulated knowledge of their culture as reflected in the disciplines.
- **The Social Efficiency Ideology** provides students the skills and procedures that a society needs to live productive lives.
- **Learner Centred Ideology** seeks to develop and grow the needs and concerns of the individual.
- **Social Reconstruction Ideology** provides students insight into the injustices that exist and facilitates renewal of society.

Similarly, various ideas about knowledge are used by schools that contribute to different practices (Stikkers, 1980). Teasdale & Ma Rhea (2000) distinguish local knowledge and wisdom of Indigenous people from Western ways of knowing and they confirm there are multiple knowledge and wisdom systems. This raises the important question of the legitimisation of these various ways of knowing as cultures intersect. In the next section, several theoretical ways of viewing curriculum and knowledge are discussed, which form a background for analysing and explaining MECS’s practice.

### 2.3.1 Curriculum as subject: Knowledge as facts

The curriculum in the first scenario of culture as object complements the scholar academic ideology. The political and social context for research and schooling in this paradigm could be described as “naïve”. That is, there exist naïve beliefs that the study of cultures, and more specifically knowledge about culture, could be developed “objectively” using scientific approaches and not influenced by the political and social positions of educators, researchers or learners. These tenets of modernity totally ignore both the social process in which the information to be studied was put together, such
as which knowledge is more valuable, but also the worldview of the learners, that is, how they filter the information in order to reinforce established views of the world. The works of Said (1979) and other postcolonial authors have demonstrated that the perceptions and descriptions of cultures, for example, the Orient, are not objective. Similar arguments have been made about the construction of Indigeneity (Attwood, 1992a; McConaghy, 2000).

Learning, in this paradigm, was often framed by what Freire (1970) calls the “banking” method, where deposits of facts and information were made to students. Students like Jack in the first scenario in Chapter 1 focused on the information and how they might present it rather than on relating to and understanding “others”. The organisation of learning across the curriculum was fragmented into tight separate subject divisions.

Blomberg (1997) describes the distinct subject based schemes of knowledge as knowledge arising out of rational views of the world, where facts built together to form concepts, concepts together in an hierarchal way then forms topics and a set of theories. Indigenous studies in this paradigm falls under Studies of Society or the old Social Studies. In this setting, the focus is on the subject with its distinct set of generalised concepts and skills that can be applied to any culture. The role of the teacher is that of the pedagogical expert in organising the material in easily digestible amounts. The purpose for schooling in this paradigm is often captured by liberal ideals of broadening the mind and the idea that knowing about the diversity of cultures is important in being educated. It was often paired with liberal ideals of tolerance and multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 1995). This in turn sat within the broader Western paradigm of gaining mastery of the existing bodies of knowledge filtered and formed by the various academic disciplines. These goals were often seen as being disconnected from culture and above any one culture. There were usually no goals associated with developing empathy, nor of critiquing of one’s own culture or the social and political position of the key participants. Direct experience of the Indigenous
people or personal relationship to the people or topic was seen in this paradigm as unimportant.

Several authors, as well as some Indigenous leaders argue that continued use of an uncritical modern framework to teaching Indigenous studies does nothing to challenge the prejudice and misconceptions of many non-Indigenous people towards Indigenous people and bring about the reconciliation and healing of Indigenous people (M. Dodson, 1994; Lustig & Koester, 1999).

2.3.2 Curriculum as process and skills: Knowledge as ability

The intercultural communication competency scenario described in Chapter 1 with its focus on language skills often falls into the pattern of seeing curriculum as a context for acquiring skills and processes. The teacher, as the language and cultural expert, leads the students into developing the skills through selection of examples, exercises and explanations. The purpose of this approach is ‘to find ways to communicate effectively and appropriately when communicating between cultures’ (Lustig & Koester, 1999, p. 54). A critique of this approach was the neglect of specific detailed information of an Indigenous group of people and their history. The teacher is tempted to select accounts of history or information through the filter of what would be the best pedagogical examples to develop the required set of critical or linguistic skills. This process and skill aim of schooling can be subsumed by various other purposes because it may not challenge existing knowledge and attitudes of students. Knowledge in this paradigm is thought of as technical “know how”, refined by practice and guided by an expert, that can be applied to solve various problems. The previous experiences and understandings of the students may or may not be important in this approach.

2.3.3 Curriculum as Social Critic: Knowledge as socially constructed

A different purpose for schooling than immersing students in the accumulated knowledge of subjects or processes or skills is linked to the social reconstruction idea of curriculum, which has as its goal the gaining

Using constructivist notions of knowledge, this approach assumes that students come to the classroom with constructed views and understandings of the world that need to be exposed and challenged. Presenting other views enables their constructions to be tested and modified to better suit new situations and problems. It also assumes that accepted versions of history, events and words have been constructed from a particular standpoint to reinforce and support existing power relationships (Foucault, 1980). Teachers holding this purpose of schooling would presumably encourage diverse Indigenous voices directly into the curriculum as a way of exposing and challenging biases and silences that the student and accepted versions hold.

The key motive in this approach is to expose the history and beliefs of one’s own culture. Purpel (1989) argues that teachers who want to bring about critical transformation and justice in society must start by examining their own position and be prophetic. A prophet in Biblical terms never points the finger at others but at him or herself and their own community in owning the “sins” of the past. This view argues that the person, who is best able to teach in this situation, is the critically honest and repentant person in partnership with an Indigenous community. The purpose of schooling in this context is shifted to preparing students to participating justly in a society by forming an identity of self that critically examines their own culture and that of others.

### 2.3.4 The Integral curriculum: Knowledge as wisdom

Closely related to seeing culture as perspective is the view that knowledge and values as not confined to set subject areas but relevant across the curriculum. A model for curriculum development in this case is often portrayed as the integrated curriculum. It is usually driven through examining large problems cooperatively from different subject perspectives (Print, 1993). Knowledge is seen as being broader than contained by any
one discipline but is still founded and limited by the combining of disciplines. The integrated curriculum in this sense is still subject to the “knowledge as subjects” or “knowledge as skills” paradigms.

However, a different understanding of “across the curriculum” emerges if one adopts a view of knowledge as wisdom. This approach has been termed in Christian philosophy as the integral curriculum (Blomberg, 1997). One of the features of an integral curriculum is that the world and our knowledge of it initially exist in a concrete integral form, which is multidimensional. One subject alone cannot capture or develop this concrete experience of the world. Fowler (1991) argues that as we pursue knowledge in specialisations or disciplines, we expand and refine our knowledge, but this expansion tends to be at the expense of a disintegration of the experienced world as its unity is broken up into discrete fields of specialised knowledge. He articulates it as:

We can secure the integrity of knowledge and avoid the disintegrating tendencies of specialisation, only within a framework of beliefs that integrates the diversity of our knowledge in some integrating centre of meaning. For our knowledge to have integrity, all the diverse meanings of the specialised branches of knowledge must converge in a coherence of meaning.

(S Fowler, 1991, p. 38).

The history of this terminology, associated with integral curriculum and used by MECS, comes from the writings of Doug Blomberg whose thesis explores a Biblically informed perspective on wisdom as an alternative to the theory-into-practice paradigm. He describes this idea as follows:

The integral curriculum, however, seeks to start life as a whole. In this respect it may also be described as ‘holistic’. The notion of an integral curriculum seeks to embody a view of life as already fecund with meaning before it is divided into subject areas, which are one step removed from the integrality or wholeness of ordinary experience

(Blomberg, 2007, p. 16).

Knowledge as wisdom is closely related to this view of curriculum. Not only does the ontology consisting of integral complex whole, but the epistemology consists of “understanding in action” and speaks to the
interrelatedness of all things in the experience of that entity. Wisdom as knowledge is not a body of knowledge but a way of being, a response that covers more than a “what” response, but also includes “when” to respond. Wisdom is always situation specific and each situation exceeds by far in its complexity to whatever can be captured in propositions (Blomberg, 2007, p. 170).

Central to the idea of integral curriculum is the valuing of direct experience. Direct experience was one of several recurring themes that emerged from data collected from the program. The phrase used when explaining the origins of the program was “Year 10 was the only group without an extended excursion” is an interesting one. The school’s philosophy (see Chapter 4) values direct experience of everyday life as the basis for all learning. Blomberg describes the uniqueness of the integral curriculum in contrast to the subject based or integrated approach curriculum in the following way.

> An integral curriculum begins with a ‘giveness’ or wholeness of experience prior to analysis. The Christian school has a pre-modern assumption that all things hold together in Christ (Colossians 1; 17)
> There is a conviction that all of reality has a coherent and intrinsically referential characteristic. The wholeness of experience has many sides, not just the rational, and has not as its goal rational understanding but wisdom: concrete acting that does justice to this richness of reality.

(Blomberg, 2007, pp. 21-22)

The integral curriculum according to Blomberg leads to a rhythm of learning as immersions, distancing and re-immersion and a curriculum approach of playing, problem posing and purposeful responding. These ideas of integrality and wisdom sit as disruptive and alternative to both the modern and postmodern ideas of knowledge and curriculum.

### 2.4 Worldview

A key concept that emerged from the data is the concept of worldview. Various disciplines have made use of this concept. Worldview in this thesis became a key organising principle or framework for understanding the
actions of others. It is important therefore in this review section of the project to outline some features of this concept. This section also examines the interaction between worldview and the other prominent themes of the data-culture, language and religion.

2.4.1 The nature of worldviews

The earliest views about worldview come from philosophy. Naugle (2002) gives his reader a history of the idea from Kant to Kuhn and Polanyi, touching on about 20 philosophers along the way. Naugle also refers to the entry of worldview into European anthropology and into Christian thinking at the turn of the 20th Century and the way it was taken up by theologians such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, historical figures foundational in establishing the unique philosophy of MECS (Chapter 4).

The most common use of worldview over the recent past has been in its relationship to explaining culture, particularly why cultures differ. British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski wrote that,

> What interests me really in the study of native cultures is his outlook on things, his Weltanschauung, the breath of life and reality, which he breathes, and by which he lives. Every human culture gives it members a definite vision of the world, a definite zest of life. In the roaming over human history and over the surface of the earth, there is the possibility of seeing life and the world from various angles peculiar to each culture. That has charmed me the most and inspired me with the real desire to penetrate other cultures to understand other types of life.

(Malinowski, 1922, p. 517)

According to Hiebert (2008), worldview is the fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives.
Wash and Middleton explain the fundamental role it plays in values and vision.

A worldview is never merely a vision of life. It is always a vision for life as well. Indeed, a vision of life or worldview that does not actually lead a person or a people into a particular way of life is no worldview at all. Our worldview determines our values. It helps us to interpret the world around us it sorts out what is important from what is not. A worldview provides a model of the world which guides its adherents in the world.

(Walsh & Middelton, 1984, pp. 31-32).

‘Worldview is the picture one has of the way things are in actuality, the most comprehensive idea of order’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 126).

As well as overlapping definitions of worldview, most theoretical discussions agree on three issues. They involve basic or primary concepts, beliefs or assumptions not just any belief or concept. Typically, they provide answers to the big questions of life and death and origins, the ultimate shape of substance or reality. Secondly, worldviews operate at an unconscious level so that we are not aware that other ways of seeing the world are either possible or legitimate. They are like the air we breathe. Worldviews are part of who we are but not a part we usually think much about. A common analogy used to explain this aspect of worldviews is the analogy of the fish being the last to discover water and only discovers it by being thrown out onto the shore. Thirdly, most theories acknowledge the omni-presentation of worldviews in the everyday events and actions of life. The latter occurs because one’s worldview provides the meaningful interpretation and organisation of the sense signals being constantly received and provides a framework for valuing what is interpreted. This framework, a vision for life, cannot be switched on for interpreting some things and not others but is always present, guiding action. Fowler (2010) captures well the distinctiveness of worldview from articulated beliefs by holding to the simple definition that worldviews are the patterns for living.

2.4.2 Elements and features of a worldview

Theories of worldview differ in their discussion of the basic elements that make up a worldview. Gombrich (1969) has argued that it matters relatively
little what the categories are because they to some degree are constructed arbitrarily. Yet it makes sense that the basic views of self, other and universe usually determine the other domains and the attributes of these domains.

Based on German 19th Century philosophers who introduced the worldview idea through the term *Weltanschauung*, Spengler (1971) reduced the patterns within a culture to one primary position which dominated all other. Robert Redfield (1953) argues for five universals, Self, Other, God, Space and Time. Kearney (1984) argues from a materialist, historical point of view for three universal elements self, other and universe, each with various domains. Gullestrup (2006) uses the term *basic world conceptions* and argues that all cultures ask and provide answers to five basic questions. What the world looks like? How was it created? Who controls it? How and when will it cease to exist? What happens after death?

Yang (1998) also uses the notion of worldview to understand cultural difference. She claims worldview to be five value orientations that are universal to human existential issues to which humans propose solutions.

Walsh and Middleton (1984) use the same approach and argue that worldviews usually answer and ask four basic questions of life.

- Where are we? (The nature of the world – ontology)
- Who are we? (Our human and cultural identity)
- What is the problem with the world?
- What is the solution?

Van Leeuwen (1990) describes worldview as five sets of non-negotiable beliefs being:

1. Origin, nature and destiny of the universe
2. Basic nature of human beings.
3. Explanations of the discrepancy between actual and ideal.
4. How these discrepancies may be overcome.
5. The methods best suited to developing the implications of the first four assumptions into knowledge.

Models and theories also differ about the rigidity of the basic elements making up a worldview. Redfeeld’s model is fairly fixed while Fowler (2006a) argues for greater fluidity in the relationships between the elements. Disagreement also exists about whether the elements are concepts (propositions) or beliefs or presuppositions. Ketner (1972), following Collingwood’s work on presuppositions, uses the term principalia to highlight that what we are dealing with are not simply presuppositions in the usual sense of the word. Principalia are not able to be tested as true or false for they are the tools that we use to determine true or false- they are given, or as Fowler (2006b) argues, they are the basic beliefs we use to determine truth or falseness.

Ketner and Fowler’s understandings of “beliefs” stand apart from those using a linguistic (Carrol, 1956) or cognitive framework (J. Spradley, 1972) and see the basic elements of a worldview as concepts.

Recently, through the influence of postmodernism, some are describing the basic beliefs about life not as sets of conceptual answers or an implicit set of beliefs or answers to basic questions about identity and life, but as metaphors or narratives, aligning a worldview to an overriding story of life expressed culturally (Fernhout, 1997; Lyotard, 1984).

The idea of narrative points to another feature of worldview in that it tends towards internal consistency. Internal consistency is argued by Wallace (1966), Fowler (2006) and Kearney (1984) as the basis for deciding on the “rationality” of a proposition. Fowler uses the Bororo as an example of this:

Levy Bruhl the anthropologist who worked with the Bororo people of northern Brazil detailed how they believed (irrationally) they are red parakeets. However, I contend that, if the Bororo had sent an anthropologist out to the West they would have reported that most people believe coal and diamonds are the same substance! Each culture finds the claims of the other absurd when viewed from the outside. However viewed from within each culture’s worldview the claim is quite logical and sensible. In the Bororo’s worldview, the
fundamental character of substance is spiritual; because parakeets and humans have the same spirit, they are the same substance. Similarly in the Western worldview, coal and diamond are the same (chemically) and therefore the same substance. Bororo reasoning is not illogical. What they claim for spirituality we claim for chemistry!

(S Fowler, 2006b, p. 6)

Kearney (1984) gives a similar example of the Wintu tribe of North America and their relationship to the natural world as being consistent with their view of themselves and others. These examples point to the consistency of a worldview and the rationality or logical structure of worldview systems.

This last point is important to this study because sometimes when one works from an uncritical scientific worldview as the starting point there are implications that non-scientific worldviews hold irrational beliefs, laying down a false basis for valuing Western culture as superior.

2.5 Worldview and Language

The dynamic subjective understanding of culture and worldview also brings into play the importance of language. Freire (1970) claims that people are silent because they lack the language and expressions to describe the way the world around them keeps them in poverty. He understood that language restricts the thinking process and realm of possibilities. The work of Whorf and Sapir (cited in Carrol, 1956) led to the thesis that human beings do not live in the objective world alone or alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. The real world is unconsciously built upon language habits of the group. No two languages represent the same social reality. Each culture lives in distinct worlds, ‘not merely the same world with different labels attached’ (B. Hall, 2005, p. 174). The Sapir-Whorf thesis goes as far as to say language confines the possibilities for describing and defining what we perceive. The value of his thesis is not that language tyrannizes speakers by forcing them to think in certain ways, but rather their work emphasized the close alliance between language and the total culture of a community.
The introduction of another culture’s language is critical in opening up the possibility of seeing the world differently. It allows the possibility of attaching a label to experiences, feelings, or relationships that do not exist in one’s own world. This is why words cannot always be translated. They must be interpreted. Conde-Frazier (2007) in discussing the search for a word puts it this way:

The fullness of a particular concept cannot be communicated in English all the time so we use the word in our class discussions in the original language after the speakers of that language have had an insider conversation about the concept it communicates. The rest of us have listened as outsiders, asking questions of clarification and then we search for a parallel word in English or even several other languages. When such a word cannot be found, we agree to use the word in the original language (p. 111).

Meaning is more important than words. When the elders say “keep the language”, what they mean is keep the thought. English is noun based but our languages, says one Native American elder, are action based, defined by relationship to things (Hermes, 2005, p. 51).

Culture is more than just beliefs and behaviours. It is also epistemology, the unique understanding of which can only be expressed through language specific to a worldview (Deyhele, Swisher, Stevens, & Trinidad-Galvan, 2008). McCoy (2004) also demonstrated this with the complexity of the Western Desert Puntu term Kanyirninpa in relation to health and wellbeing. This close link between language and worldview is an important part of understanding how best to identify and challenge one’s own, or someone else’s, worldview.

It is also important to acknowledge that to penetrate below the surface of another culture, knowledge of that culture’s language is critical. The learning of another culture’s language is also important in establishing healthy relationships between groups. Numerous misunderstandings between Indigenous people and the west continue to occur. Trudgen (2000) graphically shows how the intertwining of worldview and language have led to massive miscommunication and misconceptions about illness and health.
for the Yolngu community of the Gulf country. In many cases, this is the clash of different knowledge systems based on different worldviews.

Unwillingness to learn and communicate in another group’s language has massive implications for the equality of relationships. Rightly, some Indigenous groups ask why exchanges always have to be made in English. Effort from both parties to learn some of the other’s language shows a higher level of respect and can lead to more equal and healthy relationships between groups.

Language is also critical for those engaged in studying and reporting on others’ cultures. Any outsider’s lack of attentiveness to his own unconscious cultural composition and his or her dependence on their own language and culture in the task will lead to continued misunderstanding. For how can one observe something that one does not even know the existence of and does not have the words for? Edward Hall’s (1973) work on nonverbal communication, “The Silent Language”, showed that focusing on words alone does not communicate the message. Very often at the perception level what the eye focuses on and discriminates are effected by cultural training. Some stimuli will be ignored because we lack the code for decoding them.

2.6 Worldview and Being Religious

Traditional views of religion parallel static objective views of culture and relegate the religion of a society to sacred rituals and beliefs about the non-material world. Some take these sets of beliefs as signs of immaturity in a culture or person, where ‘the immature mind has strong tendencies to attribute contents and characteristics of the self upon others’ (Kearney, 1984, p. 89).

However, it is also possible to take a broader, more dynamic view of religion if one steps outside a materialist or rationalist framework. It is a perspective that recognises that beliefs are not just an epistemological outworking in terms of religious practices and doctrines but are also held ontologically, central to being human.
In Western culture today, since the rise of Greek civilization, there has been a tradition of accepting a dualistic understanding of reality. This has evolved to a secular /sacred division of life. Nancy Pearcey (2005) traces this dualism through the history of Greek thinking, beginning with Plato and his division of form and structure through to the Middle Ages with Aquinas and the nature /super-nature division, and then on through the secularisation of these divisions by Descartes to becoming mind and matter. With Kant the separation was reframed as the freedom and nature divide. From there, it became more commonly known in modernity as the values and facts division, easily linked to the private/public division of life. Values in this framework are seen as socially constructed meanings and truth appropriate for the private domains of life, while facts become scientifically verifiable truths more suitable for directing the public domain. Some branches of Christianity have assimilated this sacred and secular division into their faith. Pearcey, however, outlines how “Reformational” Christianity\(^3\) questions the assumptions that make this division of life normal to most people today. It is an attack on modernity but from a different basis than most postmodern positions.

Today it would be quite acceptable for people to answer survey forms to tick a box saying they are non-religious or non-spiritual. This modern secular view of religion has sometimes been applied to dealing with other cultures, relegating religion to a set of beliefs to explain the mysterious or unknown and treated as a topic similar to family life rather than placing religion as foundational to all everyday events. The churches have not been immune to adopting this secularised understanding of religion and spirituality. Patrick Dodson, in an interview about his experiences with the Catholic church noted that, ‘there was a lot of emphasis on kindness and forgiveness but not on challenging the cause of injustice in terms of lands rights and access to the nation’s resources’ (P. L. Dodson, Elston, & McCoy, 2006, p. 255).

\(^3\) Reformational is the term used to describe the “all of life” philosophy of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd who were foundational in developing Christian theory.
In an important work, discussing the relationship of Christianity to culture, Niehbur (1956), posits five positions that religions can have towards culture. His fifth and preferred position is not the common Christ against culture but Christ transforming culture, reflecting the ontological position of religion in human life.

Herman Dooyeweerd (1979), a philosopher in the early part of the 20th century and linked strongly to the philosophical roots of MECS’s beginning (see chapter 4) opposed this modernist trend of secularisation and refocussed the centrality of religion. He radically viewed humans as religiously qualified cultural builders; building culture from the allegiances they held in their hearts. His work critiqued extensively modernist theory and its emphasis on the mind. He chose the Old Testament imagery of the heart as being the centre of human beings. Out of the heart (faith commitments) of people flows all of their life. In a similar vein Jeremy Beckett, commented that ‘the Aboriginal claimant for land is cast in the role of homo-religious rather than homo-economics’ (Beckett & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies., 1988, p. 207).

Geertz (1973) working from an interpretive framework, also argues for the foundational role for religion in any culture, defining religion as the symbolic representations that provides meaning and affirmations for the way the world is. Non-religious symbols do not provide affirmations. As well as providing affirmation, religious beliefs, to be religious, require commitment. The commitment to an idea was central in Wittgenstein’s exploration of belief systems. He postulated that ‘belief becomes something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference, a way of assessing life and reality’ (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 37).

Samovar (2007) sees religion as one of the five common features of culture referring to organised religion as providing meaning, and these meanings influence the entire fabric of society such as work (e.g. the puritan work ethic).

The resistance of cultural change to deep structures or core structures (see Challenging Worldviews) means that there can be a distinction between
organised religion and worldview. A culture’s historically developed and articulated confessions, picture or stories about its origins, nature of the world, human life and death, our connections to the earth and to each other can be described as organised religion. Worldview, however, in the manner defined by Fowler (1991) remains distinct from religion as the implicit, intuitive held beliefs about life and death. The historical, articulated worldview of a culture becomes its religion. There often is overlap and insights of organised or confessed religions with worldview but there are also often contradictions or gaps. To further refine this distinction Wentz (1987), makes an important distinction between religion and being religious. Religion he defines as most would understand the word, as an organised, clearly defined expression of religiousness. But he gives powerful arguments for recognising that many people who claim to have no religion are nevertheless deeply religious. That is, they find some kind of meaning in the secular world.

There have been many examples of cultures adapting an organised religion to their own worldview. The discussion later in this work on Aboriginal Christianity highlights this. Bennet (2004) in his study of cultures writes,

Do not be fooled by the people in Beijing dressing like people in New York or that the Japanese play baseball, most of what we call culture is below the surface similar to an iceberg. There are other things that are going on that show that this dress or sports have been adapted into the culture and there are different perspectives on what they mean. (p.103)

There are two responses to framing religion out of a sacred/secular divide in the treatment of Aboriginal Spirituality. One is the simplification, reduction and compartmentalising of it. The second is to romanticize it. Rolls (2001), in his analysis of James Cowan novels, points to the a new genre of literature which casts Aboriginal people as the spiritual saviours of the alienated Western self in the absence of any Western spirituality. Cowan adopts and absorbs Aboriginal spirituality claiming sacred places as his dreaming and absorbing the spiritual affiliation with those places. How
MECS understands and positions religion will be important in understanding its practice.

2.7 Learning about and Being Challenged by Worldviews

In the discussion so far, the focus is the nature of worldviews and how this concept relates to the other key concepts of culture, language and religion. However, from a teacher’s perspective it is also interesting to note what the literature says regarding how various worldviews can be identified and challenged.

It is important to note that most theories explaining the relationship between total environment and the worldview of an individual hold a dialectic view, in that the social behaviour described as a result of the worldview becomes embodied in social structures, customs and institutions. They become part of the total environment which then in turn modifies and shapes the worldview. Stuart Fowler (2006), refers to this as being embedded in the local, general wisdom of the group.

Worldviews are traditionally acknowledged as difficult to identify because they are internal, personal, implicit, non-rational beliefs (Fowler, 2006). It is easy to confuse the articulated, confessed beliefs about the world as being a worldview. Instead, to identify a worldview one must always look at the pattern of responses and actions and infer what the presuppositions or beliefs are. Gullestrup (2006) and Fowler (2006) rightly point out that because this involves deduction from patterns observed from one’s own standpoint, great care must be taken in pronouncing other cultures’ worldviews.

It is critically important to listen intently to others’ voices in hearing their own explanations for behavioural patterns and to place them in their own broad cultural contexts of myths, stories, histories, heroes and art. These discourses often remain silent. Only then, should one move forward with openness, humility and tentativeness in beginning to describe an “others’” worldview.
As well as being difficult to identify, worldviews are difficult to change. One of their roles is to provide securities about the way things are. They make up what seems normal. Disturbances in understanding the foundations rock the whole house. In contrast, changing the surface or manifest culture is simply like changing the furniture. Changing a worldview is a paradigm shift.

Kuhn’s (1970) description of paradigm shifts describes the factors involved in shifting from an Aristotelian worldview to a Galilean worldview in understanding humans’ relationship with the natural world. Apart from the ability of society to ‘evolve’ its worldview, there are noted additional or external sources of disequilibrium. Such intrusions are climate shifts; epidemics; invasion; and encounters with other worldviews. This last intrusion is important in the context of this case study as exposure to a radically different worldview is seen by the school as a key way to gain insight and challenge one’s own worldview and your own culture.

In such a system, any influence from outside the environment that intrudes into it may alter it. Piaget would refer to it as the equilibration or the coming into balance to achieve a dynamic equilibrium (Donavan, 2001).

Observing patterns to identify worldview from a distance will not challenge at a deeper level an observer’s worldview. Observing them by being immersed in difference, however, offers a more challenging experience.

A major way then to challenge one’s own worldview is to encounter and experience situations where the majority of people around you operate with a different worldview that perforates the comfort of the familiar, creates disequilibrium and opens up the possibility of challenge to one’s own worldview (Tin, C. 1999).

A close, direct and prolonged experience of another culture to gain insight into the nature of one’s own or others’ worldviews is effective because such an experience encompasses one’s whole being. Bennet reviews the tendency to reify culture as a mental construct as failing to include the body and feelings of humans in the construct and the importance of intuitiveness
and ‘feel’ with regard to appropriate behaviour. The apprehension of behaviour cannot occur only within the language it occurs also in the whole the body, the non-verbal part of communication. That is,

We give the feeling form, a particular thought or particular emotion but the indescribable sense of the whole is located in the gestalt of our physical ontogenetic condition. Body awareness is an important part of cultural awareness. We feel normal or right in familiar spaces and relationships.

(Bennett & Castiglinoni, 2004, p. 251)

Against this backdrop, the feeling of being strange is an important part in discovering and challenging one’s own worldview. It can never be just a rational exercise.

Also important in the direct experience is the role of guidance. Purpel (1989) has argued that idealistic, postmodern framing of teaching leads inevitably to a reluctance of teachers to take the lead in providing other contexts of influence than the prevailing one, which will fill the vacuum of influence over the students’ construction of meaning. Teachers, they argue, need to be conscious and active to guide interpretation of meaning. This means that teachers can more prudently develop strategies to counter negative attitudes rather than hoping that immersion or contact with others will and of itself fix the problem.

When students are confronted with a new, unfamiliar set of experiences two problems often arise. The first is what they actually perceive. When confronted with the unfamiliar, learners fail to perceive details and aspects of the object and event that familiar participants "see". The meaningful context of the familiar supplies cues and anticipation that assists perceiving. This has been well demonstrated in numerous psychological studies on the nature of perception (Freedman, Sears & Carlsmith, 1981; Lindsay & Norman, 1977). Secondly, unfamiliar stimuli are made sense of and interpreted in relation to one’s own previous experience. Students living in a middle class environment do not expect to see discarded paper, food, and chooks in living areas. Seeing this scene may cause them to interpret and
label this as a mess. Guidance and leadership by the teacher is needed in seeing other details, local voices and being exposed to other meanings.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review has explored some of the key concepts and ideas surrounding why schools differ in their response to the challenges reviewed in Chapter 1 of beginning and delivering Indigenous programs. Three common ways schools think and talk about culture were reviewed. This review provides a background to answering the first part of the main research question about the particular perspectives MECS’ employed about culture to shape its practice. The review also looked at four paradigms or ideologies associated with the purpose of schooling and their related ideas of curriculum and knowledge. Again this review was important in trying to explain the MECS’ practice.

The various findings of MECS’s views on culture and purposes of teaching revealed worldview and a particular way of understanding and positioning religion as key issues. Therefore this review also examined what constitutes a worldview, how does one analyse worldviews and how does one challenge one’s own worldview? This review also asked question about the position of religion within culture and the role of language.

It was interesting to note that there exists a reasonable amount of literature linking language with culture and a growing amount beginning to use worldview as a tool for explaining cultural practices. There are however not many studies explaining culture as a religious outworking or trying to explain culture in terms of all three concepts simultaneously.

Normally to get the answers to questions of meaning behind practice, probing the history, rationale, motivations and philosophy of a community become important. This steered the study to look for appropriate research tools to carry out these probes and collect data and is the focus of the next chapter.
Figure 3. Art response of a student telling her story
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The introductory chapters of this research demonstrated a strong link between perspectives of culture, goals and purposes of education and the way Indigenous people are related to and represented in schools. The challenge of this study is to uncover the meaning of discursive practices such as “culture” and “teaching and learning” in the social setting of the school at work. This process also involves dealing with events that offer no obvious point of comparison making it appropriate to approach it as a case study (Adams, Clemens, & Orloff, 2005; Schrank, 2006). Yin (2003) describes the case study approach as an empirical inquiry that ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used’ (p. 20).

A great deal of rich data can be gained from a single case (in this instance, a single school). This was what Stake (1995) has termed an ‘instrumental case study where the main aim is to provide insight into a theory or issue’ (p. 237). Establishing MECS as a worthwhile candidate for a case, however, is only one part of choosing and discussing methodological considerations. The main part of this chapter outlines the steps and process used to generate the key questions and describes the processes used to collect the data as well as the amount and type of data collected.

The use of qualitative methodology and in particular ethnographic research for this study provides for not only a description of the program, but uncovers various understandings or interpretations participants hold about their own culture and Indigenous people and their culture. This study is interested in both description and identifying the various dimensions and elements of the teachers’ and the community’s meaning and understanding undergirding practice. Merriam (1988) asserts that qualitative research is,
Concerned with processes rather than outcomes, that is, with the way things happen over time. Interested in meaning, that is, with the ways in which people make sense of and interpret their life world. Collecting data in order to build theory rather than test theory, and allowing the researcher to become intimately interwoven with the participants in their natural settings. (p.12)

An issue also included in this is the place and role the researcher takes in this process. Several of these issues are introduced and discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Working with ethnographical methods in schools and with student participants raises particular ethical considerations and these are also dealt with in this chapter.

3.1 Methodology Considerations

Much of the literature referring to exploratory studies of programs emphasised the use of qualitative data collection techniques (Brannen, 1992; Yin, 2003). The basis of these techniques is the recognition of the subjective experiential ‘life world’ of human beings (Burns, 1997, p. 11). As such, qualitative research is a source of well-grounded descriptions of processes that ‘preserve chronological flow, in order to see what events led to what consequences, and derive fruitful explanations’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

Whenever a researcher aims to concentrate on how aspects of the social world are constructed, there must be an attempt to get inside the process of social construction by building up descriptions of how human beings engage in meaningful action and create a shared world. Because such an approach demands in depth analysis of limited realms of experience in the contexts in which they occur, it often requires long-term involvement with an organisation and an adaptive research design (Hough, 2002).

Ethnographic research has been used extensively in the past to interpret social processes. These methods enable the representation of multiple realities, which characterise human behaviour and enable the researcher to strive for conformity, or agreement amongst a variety of information
sources (Guba, 1978). The study of social institutions and their cultural products such as curriculum programs contain complex meanings. Ethnographic research is concerned with how people, through their social interactions, make sense out of their lives (Geertz, 1973). Schwandt (1994) claims this process leads the inquirer towards an understanding of the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. He explains that

this is variously spoken of as an abiding concern for the life world, for the emic point of view, for understanding meaning, for grasping the actor’s definition of a situation, for Verstehen. particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving history, language and action (p.118).

The data collected with these methods usually consist of description of the everyday patterns of interactions and an analysis which leads to interpreting the underlying beliefs that make sense of the behaviours of the group and how the various parts constitute ‘shared meanings’ within the group.

The nature and methodology of this project suits a narrative style of writing (Beloo, 2003). The narrative style allows the emic (insider voice of the research participants) to take the centre stage and to weave their voices represented by direct quotes with my etic or outsider interpretation of the issues and events being experienced. The participants’ views are largely grounded in their experiences and narratives and my role as a researcher was to provide an additional interpretive layer to those voices by selectively grouping them.

The distinction between description and interpretation can be made but in practice, they happen continually. Geertz (1973) argues against the positivistic notion of objective description and instead claims ethnography is about “thick description” of situations. I experienced this as I observed classes and spoke with the teacher afterwards to check and test my observations with his, thus testing and refining my observations and interpretation.
Observation in a natural setting is the primary research method used by ethnographers. In the educational context, this can mean for example, observing students and teachers in a typical classroom setting. Alongside observation there has to be listening to the various participants’ narrative of events (Rosaldo, 1993). Metaphorically, such research is described as a window on practice (Vale, 2003). Within school settings it has been particularly useful to discern the way students and teachers construct meaning with regard to such things as gender (Davies, 2003); the investigation of the motivation and purpose of schooling (Davies, 1982); communication discrepancies (Allwright, 2003); teachers’ interpretation and understanding of student problems (Larth, Huebeck, & Mackowski, 2006); and of most relevance to this study, the way that concepts of culture are understood by teachers (Clarke, Keitel, & Shimizu, 2006). In this research the experience being focused on was my own, the teachers’ and the students’ experience and understanding of the Indigenous studies program and their relationship with the Yuendumu community.

Criticism that informants filter interpretations of events through their perceptions of contemporary, personal, social, political and economic relations are only relevant if one links truth or reliability with objectivity. Yes, personal narratives are subjective processes depending on many factors. In naturalistic inquiry, truth is not accrued from the breadth of the sample of respondents to the study; it is accrued from the rigorous interweaving of its methods. Rather than averaging out one hypothetical belief over a vast sample, this study sets out to triangulate a complex of beliefs evident in various participants and over a set period of time (Mertens, 1998). For example, discussing the Indigenous studies program and Yuendumu from various starting points over a period of time with Colin Japaljarri allowed the various stories told to find an overlap of consistency and inconsistency. What emerges is derived from the textual record from each respondent in the form of various themes significant in telling a combined story. In the case of this research it is these perceptions that are most revealing (Tonkin, 1992). They reveal the person’s meaning and understanding of events. The important reality to be described is what the
people under observation imagine it to be. What is revealed through the stories are “the participants’ explanations of events which are grounded in their worldview and culture laden paradigms’ (Neilson, 1990 p. 13). The actor’s own frame of reference shapes an understanding of his/her actions. It is these paradigms, worldviews or frame of references that the study wishes to expose.

A potential obstacle to using these research methods is access to suitable participants and their ability to understand themselves and their contexts. In MECS’s case, I was most fortunate, for the school has at the heart of their program, a teacher who has been responsible for the program from the beginning. This teacher, Colin Japaljarri, is a person who is seen by most as an historian. He has a keen interest in history, teaches it and is acutely aware of the broader social and political contexts that surround and give meaning to events. There were also several other teachers and board members who were available and willing to tell the story of this program and the history of the school. Given such a great resource it seemed that getting Colin’s and others’ story of the program would be a key source for understanding what case the MECS program presented.

The methodology in this study is also reliant on grounded research principles because as various understandings and interpretations emerge, questions and ways of dealing with the data also change (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach places theory as emerging and interacting with the data rather than driving the data collection and interpretation.

### 3.2 Ethical Considerations

The discussion in the last section focused on the ways this research dealt with issues of trustworthiness and integrity of the findings. Research using the naturalistic methods in schools also creates some ethical issues. Stevenson (1996) suggests six considerations that are applicable to this study: confidentiality; insider/outsider; impact of intervention; power and persona; ownership and dissemination. What follows is a brief description
of these ethical problems and some of the ways this research has sought to minimise these.

3.2.1 Confidentiality

All participants in this study gave written permission to be participants and were kept fully informed of the purpose their data would be used for.

An initial problem faced was one of confidentiality. It is often the practice in research to provide anonymity to the participants so their contributions are not identified and thereby kept in confidence. However, realising the uniqueness of the MECS program i.e. teaching Warlpiri, it was difficult to achieve this. The school could be easily identified through such things as the public register of languages taught at schools. It would be difficult to hide the identity of the school and therefore it was agreed by the school and through the Monash University Ethics approval process that the best way of dealing with this was to be up front with the participants and inform them that this case study would identify the school. The students were anonymous because the year of the study was not given, and they were dealt with as a class or in small groups and were reassured that no names would appear in the work. In addition, the study was conducted at a time when, by now, most of these students have left this school. These steps have meant that it is not possible to identify any particular student contribution.

Students come and go, but a unique feature of the school is the longevity of the staff. Several of the key staff involved in constructing and teaching the program has been at the school for 25 or more years. In identifying the school, they would also be identifiable. Again, the best way of dealing with this would be to be honest with them about the problems and ask their permission to use their names in the report. They readily agreed to this because there was a great deal of personal trust and they saw the importance of the research. I have used their first names and to separate out the ‘two Colins’ I have used the skin names given to them by the Yuendumu community. The process of recording, transcribing and publishing stories i.e. the final product of the research process may not be what a narrator anticipated and could be interpreted as being a breach of trust and
confidence (Thomson, Frisch, & Hamilton, 1994). To counter this it was agreed that those being named would be given a draft of the description of their contributions for them to check. If they were not happy with what was written as attributed to them, they could ask for the text to be altered or deleted from the descriptions.

3.2.2 Insider/Outsider

A second ethical consideration this study raised was the problem of being both an insider and outsider. This study, as mentioned in the earlier section, has features of etic as well as emic perspectives of events. Being connected to some of the people in the school over many years and it being a place maybe of future employment could cause a situation where the researcher, because of a conflict of interest, might “white wash” negative findings by either avoiding the collection of data that may be negative about the program or people, or avoid negative conclusions (Rabbit 1994).

Concerning the first problem, the open-ended nature of interviews used provided more opportunity for all manner of data to be collected. As much relevant data was collected as possible over a six month period from a wide range of resources and people. Relevance and importance were established on the grounds of people’s direct experience of the program without knowing what they were going to say about it. The second aspect of avoiding negative conclusions was addressed by trying to let the data speak as much as it could for itself by immersing oneself in it. Practices such as listening to the interviews several times, combined with the knowledge that the school has a culture of honest appraisal and evaluation, helped to minimise this problem. The school would not appreciate the avoidance of negative findings if they were fair.

The advantages of being a ‘situated knower’, as Smith (1999b) referred to inside participants, is that one could make good use of body language and Hall’s (1973) ‘silent language’ of communication. It was easier to read the information and be sensitive to possible gaps and uncomfortableness of the participants.
3.2.3 The Impact of the participant observer

Stevenson (1996) raises the issue that being an observer in a class may affect the conduct of the course and the learning of the program i.e. causes problems related to intervention. The changed condition of having a visitor sitting in back of the room inevitably does change the dynamics of the class’s operation. However, all steps were made to ensure that these changes caused no harm. The reassurance to the participants that the purpose of the research was to investigate the program rather than individuals associated with it, plus the longevity of the research (the students soon get used to you being there and even forget about you) enabled the teacher to say that, from his perspective, the classes operated within a day or two as they normally did.

3.2.4 Power and persona

Jennifer Bryce (2002) suggests that in most case studies with researchers requiring long engagements with institutes that the persona presented needs to be carefully worked out as they live with the participants day by day. This was particularly difficult in dealing with the students. The persona of an outsider, a researcher with no power or authority over them, was important to distinguish from the persona of a teacher. Yet, there was also the balance of establishing enough relationship and not being too distant that some trust could be established, so that students would feel free to share their thoughts. Balancing this distance was a tension, that, as a researcher, I had to keep in mind.

3.2.5 Ownership

In the agreement with the school, the issue of ownership was negotiated. It was agreed that both the school and the researcher would hold rights over the original data findings and permission from each other would be sought if further use were to be made of it. Permission from both would be needed if an outside body wanted to make use of it.
3.2.6 Dissemination

The final ethical issue was the matter of dissemination of the study. It was agreed that a copy of the published thesis would be placed in the school library and available to all the community to read. Too often researchers visiting or commenting on communities fail to pay respect by not showing the community the results of their work. It was important also that a copy be given to the chairperson of the Yuendumu Council.

3.3 Shaping the Initial Research Questions

Perecman and Curran (2006) in their introduction to field research remind their readers that there can be no attempt to answer a question without deep knowledge of the specific contextual parameters defining those circumstances. In this analysis, the broader context of what was happening in other schools and the nation was part of the first step in methodology for this study and its results were outlined in the first chapter. Another important context was the history of the program and the history of the school itself (see Chapter 4).

In a brief way, this interaction between practice and context led to the initial interest and questions surrounding the MECS Indigenous Studies program. An established way of identifying a research problem in case studies involves taking something that is routine (in this case, a long established practice) and placing it in its broad political and social context. When the practice and history of the MECS program is placed in its context it made looking at MECS an interesting case study. In the light of the context of the 1980s it led to the initial question, Why was starting and developing this program around Warlpiri and Yuendumu, making it central, compulsory and sustaining it so important to MECS?

The literature review pointed strongly to an answer to this question. The way communities frame and understand culture, as well as the purpose of schooling and knowledge can begin explaining differences in practices. So a secondary question emerged that asked, What views of culture and schooling were held by the MECS community that led to its practice. Anecdotally, MECS
does not seem to sit easily with the three existing paradigms for understanding other cultures and the teaching about other cultures outlined in the introductory chapter. Views and beliefs about culture and schooling come through in practice. It was therefore important not only to ask these questions directly of the participants but to gain experience of the program as a participant.

3.4 Gaining experiences of the program

Before one can reflect and analyse experiences, it is important to have them. It seemed important in the approach to this case to experience the full range of the program for myself. Some argue for the principle of the ‘detached’ observer approach to investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Rosaldo’s argument for the benefits gained if the researcher is ‘connected to a community, not isolated and detached’ is compelling (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 194). The very “human-ness” of the lived experience of the respondents is subtle, ephemeral and certainly idiosyncratic, and demands therefore subtle approaches to investigation. Natural data only are obtained by the immersion of the inquirer in the culture or cultural phenomenon being studied. Paradigm-level problems of truth and objectivity are lessened by conducting inquiry into complex human activity within natural settings, using more qualitative data methods, grounding theory in the inquiry itself rather than specifying causal explanations a priori, and by recognising the proper place of discovery processes (Nielsen, 1990, p. 371).

Guba concludes that when a researcher uses naturalistic methods, she/he almost functions as a ‘member of the audience’ rather than as a stage manager (Guba, 1978, p. 14).

I had only limited experience of the program and wanted to become more connected. Over a period of twenty years, I have anecdotally experienced through my circle of contacts (working at a nearby school and others of my church who have been involved with Yuendumu) stories and impressions of the program. These interactions with the program have been brief but have always left me feeling that something amazing was taking place. Many of the
people who had experienced the program seemed passionate about justice issues for Indigenous people, attended rallies, wrote letters, spoke at and attended celebrations. However, it was important to get a more detailed and closer experience of the program.

The acceptance of me as a member of the community of respondents, and as a member of the world encountered by the students in particular, became critical to the research. This was facilitated in a number of ways. The first was to become more acquainted with Yuendumu and secondly to become a participant observer of the program.

3.4.1 Initial visit to the Yuendumu Community

Before constructing a more formal proposal about researching the school’s program I thought it prudent to visit Yuendumu and experience the community first hand and work out some basic things like who was who in the community and who I should ask for permission and what do they think of the idea of researching the schools program and visits. Even though this research was mainly focused on the MECS community it indirectly involved the Yuendumu community and therefore it was important to follow AIATSIS 2000 guidelines which recommend having a research protocol and understanding with Indigenous communities when conducting research.

An important contact at Yuendumu for the school is Liam. Liam is an ex MECS student who has been working and living in Yuendumu for many years. Liam was able make the arrangements and permission from the community for an initial three day visit.

Like many first time visitors to the community, I felt both wonder and strangeness at being surrounded by Warlpiri language and customs.

Liam introduced me to Nampanangka G and Jampinjimp S, friends of the school over a long period. I listened to some of their stories of their own education and struggles and I introduced myself as Jampinjimp a Warlpiri skin name I received through my wife who had been given a skin name following a women’s meeting of Warlpiri women in Melbourne. I spoke to them of my idea of researching the school’s program. They spoke warmly
about the bonds of friendship with several of the MECS community and said it was fine by them to do the research. Reassuringly, Nampanangka.G commented that ‘if all the schools took the attitude of MECS we wouldn’t have an Indigenous problem’.

Recording their names and contact address for further contact I then proceeded to formalize my proposal for the study. This initial visit left me with strong visual impressions of Yuendumu and many questions. I kept a journal of my impressions, thoughts and questions over the initial visit.

3.4.2 Becoming a participant observer

As stated earlier, ethnographic research focuses on collecting and describing the details of everyday events and on providing a window on practice. Collecting data of this sort would involve becoming a participant observer in the classroom setting and other settings of the program. This role also enabled the collection of documents such as students’ work responses, curriculum statements, school promotion and policy. All these are possible sources in uncovering the meaning of the program. As a participant observer, I had to juggle both my own direct experience of the program and my observations of the students’ experiences of the program.

To become a participant in the program, I followed a group of students around for six months, attending their Koori and Warlpiri classes and going with them on the extensive eighteen-day central Australia trip. Participating in this way was thought to be the most effective and thorough way of gaining insight into the program. Adler and Adler (1987) following Spradley (1980), developed a typology for participant observation ranging from passive to moderate to active. Given my position as a visiting consultant and teacher at the school it seemed more feasible to opt for the passive observer role in regard to the classroom activities, which was described as ‘being present at the scene, does not actively participate, only occasionally interacts with the participants and is identifiable as a researcher’ (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 20). This described well my level of membership and involvement with the class.
After nine weeks of the program, the students participate in an eighteen-day trip to Central Australia. My level of participation increased to “moderate” in this part of the program as I was assigned to one of the eight groups as a group leader. Leaders were responsible for leading, debriefing sessions, following up work that was set, and organising the group to do their camp duties. This role allowed me to be part of the planning meetings for the trip. During this trip, I kept a written journal of each day and recorded a journal on tape when walking around with the groups, particularly at Uluru and when I was observing the interactions at Yuendumu.

As part of the proposal, permission was sought from the school principal, the main teachers involved in the program and one class of students and their parents to act as a researcher and seek information from them about the program. In all, nineteen caregivers and the students gave their permission and agreement to participate in the research. It was to these students that I turned for collecting comments, interviews and copies of written responses.

3.5 Collecting the Data

Using grounded research principles, a range of methods was used to collect various descriptions of the experiences of the program from various participants (including myself) as primary data. These experiences were placed into broad contextual parameters and alongside each other. Through this analysis various possible meanings and questions that may be present were uncovered. The next section outlines the means that were employed to collect the data for this study.

3.5.1 Journaling

Comfortably ensconced in the back or side of the class I began to collect data. The data collected was descriptive, in order to stimulate recall of the classes. The main method of collecting notes on these classes was through a tape-recorded journal. At the end of each class I would try to describe what I had experienced and what jumped out as interesting and significant to me as an observer interested in the approach the teacher was taking to teach
about Indigenous people. This journal often contained questions for Colin the teacher to explain what he was trying to achieve and to clarify things I had observed. It also formed a series of memos similar to that described by Corbin (2008) as a tool for recording on the run analysis and fits in with grounded theory research, where analysis of data begins at the point of collecting the first data. Microanalysis or interrogation of this data to make sense of it, leads to further data collection and analysis. Each day I would speak to Colin about what I was observing and ask him some questions.

During this time as a participant observer I worked on better strategies for observing the class, noting that there was so much in a classroom to observe at one time and responding to comments from experienced ethnologists on the potential effects of ennui – being over familiar and missing detail (Harding, 1998). That is why good research tries to make sense of social contexts and phenomena by “making strange the social contexts that we assume we understand by virtue of our taken for granted cultural competency” (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003, p. 47).

To assist me then as a teacher, familiar with the schools to become more “distant and strange” as an observer, I developed and used an observational schedule (see Appendix 2). It helped placing ticks next to some of the possibilities to paint pictures quickly.

I also recorded some of the Warlpiri lessons. They were so captivating and included so many new terms that it was hard to stay focused as a researcher and record in notes the experiences of the students.

3.5.2 Oral histories

Schools generally are not places that systematically record in an archival way rationales and motivations for beginning particular programs. In these circumstances, Giles Vernick (2006) argues that oral histories can provide insights into the past that might remain inaccessible. Oral histories are powerful tools ‘in understanding how people understood themselves, how events and processes unfolded, and why certain people chose (or refused) to participate in them’ (p.86).
Relevant to this investigation is the notion that oral histories, unlike other methods, can help to illustrate specific rich and deeply engaging ways that people understand their changing selves in relation to broad historical process (Vaughan, 2001).

The oral histories collected provided a glimpse into how people of the past constructed their worlds, what they believed, imagined and valued.

### 3.5.3 Interviewing the key teachers

From the beginning it was easy to identify the key teachers that have been responsible for the development and delivery of the program. Colin Japaljarri has been the teacher of the program since its beginning. Roger has been on nearly every trip and is the trip coordinator; Colin Jampijinpa is now the primary school coordinator but was one of the original teachers and has with his family recently worked at the Yuendumu School for a year. The principal over the past fourteen years has been on the trip and is a strong supporter of the program.

Following Rosaldo’s (1993) argument for the use of ‘narrative analysis’ the interviews encouraged the participants to tell their stories. It reinforced Guba’s (1978) emphasis upon the importance of the ‘elite’ or unstructured interview as a strategy to be used whenever the researcher wishes to uncover the emergent narrative of the respondents’ lived experience.

Therefore, all of these teachers were interviewed individually with semi-structured interviews, probing them for their understanding of what the program is about, why it is important and its history. Each of these interviews was transcribed.

### 3.5.4 Interviewing the students

After the school’s trip to Yuendumu, the nineteen student participants were organised into groups of 2-3 and semi-structured interviews were conducted that lasted for about 30 minutes. One of the ethical considerations of researching with students is the issue of the disproportional power relationship between students and teachers that can lead to students feeling obliged to answer or obliged to answer in a certain
way. Even though I was not the regular teacher of these students, they identified me as a teacher and so it seemed prudent to interview them in small groups. With peer support students are more comfortable to answer questions and feel less pressured to talk. To assist them in talking about the program a number of questions and a sheet with key interactions and events of the trip and program was provided for them as a prompt (see Appendix 3). Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed.

3.5.5 Samples of Students’ Work

As part of the program, the students had to write short written responses to some of the presentations such as the various episodes of the “Women of the Sun” series. Some participants willing shared their responses and gave permission for a copy of their work to be made.

3.5.6 Survey

Before leaving on the Centre Trip, the class was asked to fill in anonymously a quick survey trying to capture their initial feelings about the upcoming encounter with the Warlpiri community. The survey explored what students were beginning to see as central to their culture and Warlpiri culture. The questions asked were:

- In the coming three weeks we will get an opportunity to represent ourselves to the Yuendumu community and they will get an opportunity to represent themselves to us
- How do you think we will be received?
- What do you think they will notice about us and list as typical about the “Mt Evelyn Mob?”
- What do you think you will notice about Yuendumu and typical Yuendumu ways of thinking and doing things?

The survey was analysed through coding the key words used by the respondents and noting how often they occurred.

3.5.7 Examining Key Documents

A number of key documents were identified that were worth closer examination. The school publishes a yearly book reflecting the Central Australia Trip with contributions by all the participants. The students also
produced a video, poetry and artworks as part of their art program and held a Centre Trip dinner night to share these with the MECS community. I attended this evening, made notes and obtained a copy of the video. Several students allowed me to read the journal entries written on the trip, as well as written responses to sections of the program. From time to time articles are published in the school newsletter about the program and these were also collected. I spent some time with the librarian and she provided me with a printout of the school’s substantial resources for teaching Indigenous Studies. As well as these, I secured copies of the curriculum policy documents and class booklets surrounding the program.

3.6 Looking into the history of the school

Making sense of the data involves understanding the context. An important context is the overall philosophy and history of the school. Time was spent talking to two of the original founders of the school and researching the movement in the Netherlands that formed the broader and historical context for the early community’s motivation in setting up a school that has a unique identity. It was hoped that using this secondary source would uncover new concepts for describing the workings of community in order to identify what particular case the school represents.

3.7 The Preliminary Phase

The six month period of attending classes and informally talking to teachers and collecting documents took up most of the time as a part-time researcher. It was a time of just wanting to get as much information as possible. There was not a great deal of conscious analysing or cross matching of the data to refine my questions during this period but more a soaking in of the program and a saturation within it.

Addressing the pragmatist roots of grounded theory, Corbin (2008) stresses the importance of recording and analysing people’s personal experience of events. Though acknowledging that people’s account of events are not objective and are influenced by their perspective there can, through reflection on various experiences and action, be an accumulation of
temporary useful knowledge. In particular, interactions arising out of shared perspectives can be a key to building knowledge about a group’s actions. This study was sensitive to the need to uncover the emergent, subtle characteristics and qualities of beliefs held by the respondents and recognised that what people say and do is not always consistent.

3.8 Personal Autobiography

It is naive for a researcher to claim, that an inquiry should be as “value free” as possible. Guba (1978) states that the values of the inquirer are very much a part of the inquiry and, as such, must be stated ‘up-front’ (p.16). In acknowledging this it is important to uncover some of my own background and experiences that will colour the data collecting and interpreting process.

Two relevant experiences of my life shape and continue to shape my outlook. My early life as a migrant boy growing up in multicultural housing commission suburbs in Melbourne provided an ongoing interest in the questions of identity in being an Australian and justice for all groups.

The second major factor has been my Christian faith, a journey that began in a migrant orthodox church, moved through liberation theology to work in an intentional community to one of discovering transformational Christian scholarship. The latter positions me to operate out of critical realism framework of reality that has been describes as,

The existence of reality independent of our representations of it but acknowledges that our knowledge of it is subject to all kinds of historical and other influences. It draws a clear distinction between reality and our knowledge of reality. (Bhaskar criticises postmodern works for failing to distinguish between these).

(Basden, 2004, p. 1).

Reality, also includes for me a spiritual reality and a conviction that faith proceeds and is the basis of all knowledge systems.
3.9 Analysing the data: Recognising emerging themes

The data collected in this study can be divided into two distinct categories. The first category is description of the program from my perspective as a participant observer. It tells the story of the program as an observer. The second category is description of the significance and explanation of these events by the participants. These latter explanations are mainly extracted through interviews with participants, particularly about the history of the school and the program. Rosaldo calls this approach ‘processual analysis’ (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 131). He explains this process by comparing two ethnographic reports of the hunting process followed by two different African tribes. The first, a description of the Bushmen, Rosaldo describes as ‘accurate’ but incomplete, because it follows the classic norm of reporting only what is observed. The second, combines case studies with Indigenous narratives, and consequently reveals aspects of hunting hidden by classic norms of reporting (p.128).

In this process of analysis, my observers experiences of the program were put beside various explanations of the participants so that key concepts about the school’s understanding and use of culture would emerge. This process of analysis is also similar to Spradley’s (1979) method of undertaking a domain analysis or what Guba calls ‘response categories’ in relation to the data (Guba, 1978). Spradley calls the emergent categories “cover” terms, and he suggests that these will enable particular emergent responses evident in the data to be accounted for in an authentic way. The cover terms themselves have become, for the purposes of this study, an organising device. They enable the emergent data to be subjected to a test for authenticity, and facilitate the uncovering of implicit meanings and to enable the connotative meaning of the 'Indigenous' narratives to emerge. When triangulated, these various themes provide a valuable framework for disclosing the agency or ‘motivated reality’ of the respondents. These are consistent with the methods suggested by Rosaldo (1993) in relation to the uncovering of hidden meanings of narratives.
3.10 Silences

Various researchers using qualitative methods have also pointed to the significance of text being expressed in not only what is said but also what is not included i.e. in the silences (hooks, 1995; Morrison, 1992). Eisner (1985) in applying these principles to curriculum evaluation coined the term the null curriculum. An important part of the analysis was to look at the various recommendations for schools in regard to effective Indigenous Studies programs and note the silences or gaps that are not addressed by MECS.

3.11 Summary

This chapter has outlined the details of the type of data that was collected and the approach taken to analyse the data. The data collecting techniques and their analysis followed the traditions of natural inquiry and made out a case that the participant methods used provided a valid experience of place, culture and program. These descriptions, together with intersecting interpretations of various participants, provided the best way to explain the program and its meaning and to answer the questions asked about what view of culture and schooling MECS used to shape its program. This process was also used later to answer the key question: What worldview lens did MECS used to shape its practice? The next chapter begins the detailed description of the school and its program revealed by the data.
Figure 4. Yuendumu visit

As presented in Leader Newspaper (March 24, 2008) and Nurture Magazine (Vol 42 June, 2008)
Chapter 4

Descriptions of Mt Evelyn Christian School and Its Indigenous Studies Program

Trevor Cutter suggested that we should go to a community. He had been working in the communities for years. He suggested this one or that and said you just write and ask them.

After the trip we sat around and reviewed the experience and decided two things, first that we could do it better ourselves and secondly, the trip must include an experience of Indigenous communities.

(extract from Interview with Colin Japaljarri)

4.0 Introduction

The first introduction to the Mt Evelyn Christian School for most visitors is the reception foyer. The foyer is dominated by a large painting of Warlpiri Rufus Wallaby Jukurrpa (dreaming), painted for the school by Andrew Japaljarri Spencer, a Yuendumu long time friend of some of the staff (see fig 1). From this initial encounter, visitors already get a sense that there is a strong Yuendumu connection with this school.

As indicated in the introductory chapter, there are several features of the MECS Indigenous studies program that demonstrate it to be a good candidate for selecting it as a case for investigation. The program began at a time when very few schools were doing anything, and has now has been sustained for over 25 years. Central to the program is an ongoing relationship with the Yuendumu community, including the teaching of the Warlpiri language.

In this chapter various descriptions of the data collected are detailed. The selections were made with two factors in mind. The first was to give the reader a sense of the scope and depth of the program and secondly, to highlight incidents that will be used in the next chapter to develop some initial findings about the purpose, motivation and paradigms in which
Indigenous education is, and has been taught by the school. The chapter begins with an overview of the school

4.1 The School

Mt. Evelyn Christian School (MECS) is set in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It was, with a similar school in Hobart, a pioneer at establishing “Parent-Controlled” Christian Education in Australia. This model for schooling differed from the mainstream government or church controlled schooling not only in its governance but also in its philosophy. The details and historical underpinnings of this philosophy, described later in this chapter, gave the school an alternative foundation for conducting education. In 1963, the first few classrooms were built using a large amount of voluntary help and the community began primary education. Since those early years, the school has achieved continual and steady growth to becoming a Prep to Year 12 school of about 550 students and 30 teachers with well-designed, attractive facilities. The cultural demographics of the students and the staff are predominantly “mono cultural-Anglo”, drawing on the suburbs around the outer east and up the Yarra Valley. The principal could remember only two students identifying themselves as Indigenous, verifying Marcia Langton’s claim that ‘the vast majority of students in our schools have no direct contact with people who name themselves Koori, Murri, or Warlpiri, but instead these people are mediated to them through discursive texts’ (Langton, 1993b, p. 18).

Although the school started predominantly with members out of the local Reformed church, it has a specifically written educational creed as its faith position, which avoids aligning itself with any denomination. Enrolments are open to any family willing to subscribe to the Christian perspective given to teaching and learning. There is a diverse spectrum of Christians amongst the staff and the Board and most classes, particularly in the secondary area, have quite a number of non-Christian students. A retired professor of education, upon knowing that I worked in an independent school, wistfully commented that from his experience, the biggest problem with many of the independent schools was that they were not independent!
MECS has valued its independence. It is governed by a board of directors elected by the members of the school association. Unlike most Australian schools, the school has resisted a uniform, instead opting for a general dress code with a theme of appropriateness. The independence of the school however is particularly noted in its curricula. Its historical roots raised questions about the way that secular humanism framed the education debate and, in particular, knowledge and the organisation of knowledge into discrete subject based parcels. The school has articulated its understanding of curriculum as integral. This term has both an ontological dimension and an epistemological one, understanding knowledge as wisdom (Blomberg, 2007). This term was described in Chapter 2 and played a key part in analysing the data in Chapters 5 and 6. Taking note of developments in state school curricula, it primarily still operates on the model of school based curriculum development. This is evident in several policies and practices in the school. The Prep-10 school curriculum is based around term length integral units of work.

The school has a part-time Curriculum Coordinator dedicated to assisting and coordinating the writing of programs and units. Given the historical roots of the school, it is not surprising that there is an emphasis on the nature of worldview in explaining human differences and possibilities for action. Each of the integral units taught in the school has an introductory perspective statement, which attempts to outline what common worldview is operating, and to define and understand the area being taught. This perspective statement provides a critique of the topic from a Christian perspective and some suggestion for the difference it would make for a person to approach the topic from a Christian worldview.

To prepare students for being religiously critical, students in Year 10 undergo a formal course for a term called “Worldviews” which explores the nature and influence of worldviews in general and looks at several different worldviews in detail. Chapter 5 outlines in detail how the worldview theme influenced greatly the teaching of the Indigenous Studies program.
There are many complexities in identifying a unique identity of one school among other schools and it is possible to write a lot about a school. However, for the purpose of giving some context to making sense of the Indigenous Studies program, four features arising from the history described later have a significant bearing on shaping the school’s practice. They are its transformational purpose of education; taking seriously its independence in developing curricula culminating in the integral curriculum; a focus on worldview; and focus on community and family-generational connection.

4.2 The Philosophy of the School

As well as drawing out the various dimensions of the concept of culture and purpose for schooling from the literature it is important, as Smith (1999a) reminded those researching and writing the social groups, to place them in the contextual story of the organisation. The context for MECS is connected closely to the school’s philosophy. With this in mind a study was done on the philosophical movement that gave rise to the development of Christian Parent Controlled Schools in the 1960s and 70s that helps to understand the particular way MECS uses the key terms under investigation in this research. This historical study was based on interviews with the principal, some of the founding board members and data from the schools publications. The short digression into the history of the Netherlands and into the philosophical roots of the Christian parent or community-controlled schools is necessary to explain the character and workings of the Mt. Evelyn Christian school. Terms like all of life is religious and a Biblical Perspective of and worldview are current and common language in many of the school’s documents and in talk among the staff as well as being foundational to the practice uncovered in the way the school has gone about constructing its Indigenous Studies program. The connection to these religious roots comes from the pioneers of the school, the Dutch migrants in the Mt Evelyn area. The 1950s saw a large intake of migrants to Australia. Many of these migrants were from the Netherlands. Some had grown up in the Reformed churches and had experienced Parent Controlled Christian day schools with
their strong critique of secular humanism. On settling in the Mt Evelyn area they regretted that there was no local Parent Controlled Christian school to partner them in nurturing their children to a Christian perspective of the world. A small group formed the Mt Evelyn Association for Christian Education in the mid 1950s and, being poor, began fund raising, salary sacrificing and promoting the idea of a Christian Parent Controlled School. A grandmother told me how every family in that day had their tin for the school on the mantel piece for their small change. In 1960, after years of sacrifice and hard work they purchased several acres of bush land and in 1963 built the first few classrooms using a lot of voluntary help and began primary education. The school holds in esteem these pioneers; they represent to the school the embodiment of working out a Christian vision of life. In the next section is thumbnail sketch of the religious vision that these migrants brought with them.

4.2.1 The School’s historical religious roots

History has recorded many religious revivals that have swept over regions and nations such as the great awakening in England in the 1740s and the Pentecostal revival in the early 1900s in the U.S. A. However, most in the English-speaking world have little knowledge of the “Kuyperian” revival that took place in the Netherlands in the late 1800s. Abraham Kuyper was a pastor, a politician and Prime Minister. He established the first Christian political party in the Western world and his idea of sphere sovereignty defined clear limits to the power and purpose of societal institutions. Kuyper began his career as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. He went on to form a new Calvinist denomination, organise the first Christian political party in the Netherlands, edit a daily newspaper for 49 years, served as a politician in both chambers of parliament, eventually becoming Prime Minister. He also founded the Free University of Amsterdam and played a leading role in the Dutch school struggle. This was a national controversy waged during much of the nineteenth century over the place of religion in the national elementary school system. Naylor (2006) establishes in her thesis that at the heart of Kuyper’s campaign was the notion that all
cultures and human activity were rooted in a heart commitment to an ideal or religious root. There was no such possibility of religious neutrality and the state schools were working out of modernist, rational paradigms that served the gods of science and rationality. He successfully convinced the people and colleagues that the religious foundations and vision for children was primarily the role of parents and the state should either support all religious visions equally in developing schooling or support no schools and let it be totally privately funded by community associations. In 1917 the Dutch parliament amended the constitution to give parents the right to establish and direct the religious basis and direction of their children’s education and for such endeavours to be publicly funded. Essentially, while most of the west was moving towards a unified, general secular education the Netherlands was moving in the opposite direction to a particular, diversified religious education.

In the early 1900s the Netherlands was awash with Christian media, Parent Controlled Christian schools and the ‘Free’ University (named free because it was supposedly free of Humanistic thinking). The particular outworkings of Calvinism in the Reformed Churches in this nation during this time distinguished it from the common evangelical worldview of other Protestant Christianity on several issues. Its focus was on the cultural expression of a religious worldview, where each aspect of society-Business, Schools, Hospitals, Media, Sporting clubs etc. was a reflection of created dimensions of life and as such, had its own distinct norms to guide it. This ‘particularity’ meant it was to avoid being consumed by other dimensions and institutions.

Second, this form of Christianity which promoted Christian thought and action relegated the role of the state and the church in cultural life to a much smaller role than in previous Western history.

Thirdly, the movement’s focus was on the expression of Christianity in the social and political rather than in the personal, moral dimensions of life. The movement’s prime message was to reject the prevailing humanism of the day and in particular its narrow defining of religion. Its catch cry was
that all of life is religion. It also promoted the idea of pre-theoretical beliefs or worldview as informing all areas of life including thinking.

Kalsbeek (1975) summarises an extract from Herman Dooyweerd (one of the founding philosophers of this movement), arguing emphatically that thinking, independent of everything else, cannot exist and thus cuts through the assumptions of rational modernity.

Thinking is not self-sufficient. On the contrary it is dependent on a religious decision. Our self hood, our heart or whatever we may decide to call it expresses itself in acting, speaking, thinking, feeling and believing yet it never identifies itself with any one of these modes of expression. Neither does thinking coincide or exhaust our self hood, our heart. Instead the heart is the root from which thinking arises, it feeds thinking and gives it its direction. Our self hood transcends thinking. The spiritual direction of the heart shapes one’s philosophy. Since philosophy and theory are dependent on this direction they are self-insufficient. Our self hood is beyond our theoretical grasp. The thinker who asserts the self-sufficiency of his thinking cannot prove his assertion rationally. As soon as he tries to do so he shows that he has already taken for granted his “thinking” or the logical process is self-sufficient. His trust in his thinking is a matter of faith. At this point he has unwittingly transcended his self imposed boundaries.

(Kalsbeek, 1975, p. 54)

Drawing on this history, a particular approach to researching and understanding the world developed under the headings of reformational or, transformational or religio-critical philosophy. This understanding and approach was applied to various disciplines such as political theory (P. Marshall, 1986; P. Marshall, 1990), Christian economic theory (Goudzward, 1997), aesthetics (Seerveld, 1980) education (Mechielsen, 1980) and a systematic philosophical framework for carrying out Christian theorising (Dooyeweerd, 1958).

---

4 The term religio-critical was coined by the early lecturers of the N.I.C.E. courses and appears in their study guides as a way of distinguishing an approach from the normal critical theorists and their analysis of culture on ideology expressed in terms of the social and political rather than the religious motives.
An explanation of this movement of Christianity that made sense to me was to compare it with Marxism or Feminism. Just as it has become accepted that it is possible to have a particular way of constructing a Marxist or Feminist understanding of doing of politics, economics, literature etc, there is also a way of constructing a Christian perspective of doing of politics, economics, philosophy etc. Your starting point for knowing anything is a religious (faith) set of assumptions which then are foundational to all your thinking and acting in the world.

This overview of the history and philosophy of the school is an important context for understanding its practice and will be taken up further in the next chapter. What follows next is a detailed description of the MECS practice.

4.3 The School's Indigenous Study Program

The school has mandated the Indigenous study program as part of its Year 9 and 10 studies. Although there are variations over the years the general curriculum schema that the school has followed usually includes:

- All Year 9 students undergo two periods (40 minutes) of Warlpiri Language tuition per week for one semester.
- In Year 10, the students continue their Warlpiri tuition for the first term and undertake four 50 minute periods of Indigenous studies (usually called “Koori Studies”) up until Easter.
- All of the Year 10 students then participate in an 18-day trip to Central Australia which includes a three-four day stay at Yuendumu, two nights at Uluru and three nights in Alice (see later in this chapter for a description of this event)
- Students then continue to study "Koori" for four periods per week for the rest of semester one.

The following sections describes in more detail each of these parts of the course.
4.4 Focus on the Warlpiri Language

At the supermarket, the Mining Company store around town, and at church we responded to the question “What’s your name?” with, “Ngaju Japljarri, kalu nyuntu? (I’m Japaljarri and you?).”
(from Colin’s editorial, MECS newsletter, May 2007)

One of the distinctive features of the school’s program is its efforts to teach the Warlpiri language to its community. As far as I have been able to tell it is the only non-Indigenous school to do this in Victoria. One issue that is not asked very often when thinking about cultures meeting and interacting is the issue of which language should be used. As some Indigenous people have rightly asked, why should the dialogue always take place in English? (Power & Roberts, 1998)

One issue related to long sustainability of the program that will be taken up in later chapters is the issue of equal benefit. Various members of the Yuendumu community have indicated appreciation for the contact with MECS pointing particularly to the effort to learn their language.

It heartens us that a school down south values our culture by wanting to learn our language and history and experience first hand what our life is like here. As Warlpiri we are expected to learn white Australian ways but not many people show the respect and take the time to learn and understand our ways. By showing this respect it helps to give our young kids the message that our culture is valuable.

(Personal communication from Andrew Spencer).

Central to the language program is Colin Japaljarri. Colin has been associated with the program from the beginning and therefore is a good place to begin the description of this part of the program. What follows is a brief history of the language program as told by Colin and a description of one of the many lessons that I attended.

4.4.1 History of the language program

Very early on in the first trip we met Wendy Nangala Baarda, a linguist and teacher at the local school. Wendy suggested we try Warlpiri at MECS. Wendy came down in 1982 and worked with me on the language. I also went up there for a couple of weeks. I started that
way. And of course living up there in 1984 for four months really helped get some basic language going. I collected bits and pieces as resources and with further help and a grant from the Priority Languages Incentive Element (PLIE) scheme, we put together the Warlpiri Kirli text in 1992 that we have been using ever since. The school at the time was unhappy with the language we were teaching and connecting a language to other programs seemed more in keeping with the integral approach. 
(extracts from the Interviews with Colin Japajarri )

4.4.2 Description of a Warlpiri lesson

In this description, there are three interacting voices; the broader font indicates notes from my observation while the formal font indicates Colin’s contribution, extracted from recordings and the italic font indicate various students’ contributions.

Colin begins by writing two words on the board and says....

Kirlangu /Kurlangu. This long suffix in Warlpiri that is simple in English but also complicated because it is that dreaded thing that people find hard and it is the apostrophe “s” – the apostrophe s. This one goes on ”u” and “l” words and this one goes on ”a” words “

All that for just an apostrophe (student comment)

Kids always say that but in every language there are long ways round and short ways. Warlpiri is just the same. Look at this. (Writes on white board) Wati Kirlangu Maliki. Wati Kirlangu Maliki. The man’s dog. When you write it in Warlpiri, doesn’t it say “man the dog” No, it says man; possession the dog Wati Kirlangu Maliki, Karnta kurlangu Maliki. The K and Ku you hardly hear the difference between them. 
Can we have our tests back?
No, not yet.

(A conversation is held for a minute or two about the weekend) the lesson continues.)

Repeat after me please everybody.


Colin says several others and students repeat the following phrases
Yuwarli-Kirlangu tawa, Try that again, ngurrju (good). Turaki Kirlangu putjikata. The truck’s cat or the cat that lives in the truck.
Jurlpu kurlangu wardinki. The bird’s water. People do use it like that to express the bird that lives on the water.
Yankiri Kirlangu Kurdu. The emu’s child a little emu, wiyarrpa (poor thing)
Yapa Kurlangu karli. The aboriginal person’s boomerang.
OK that will do for now it is straightforward but it goes on the things that does the owning not the thing that is being owned :Watti Kirlangu.

Colin then held some artefacts.
Boomerang KARLI say this karli (karli) is a club like boomerang The Warlpiri don’t have boomerangs that return
Spear kurlada (kurlada), without a barb
Do they still use these?
Yes, we spoke about that the other day about spearing in the leg for punishment.
Woomera Piker (Piker) you might come across these.
I spoke to the principal at Yuendumu this morning and he is looking forward seeing us. (Yeah)

Students then proceed to work on a translation exercise from the Warlpiri booklet. Some were singing a Warlpiri song in the background, some chatted to Colin about the upcoming trip and fears about meeting and talking Warlpiri.
The lesson finishes with the learning of an Easter song in Warlpiri
Colin explained the words and the tenses of the words
Nyanunguju Palija (one of five songs that students learn before going on Centre Trip). Colin explains some of phrases in the song and the languages and the tenses.
This is an original Warlpiri song not one that has been translated like the others
(Student) Are they Christian?
If you asked them they would say they are.
Do all people go to Church?
No, but quite a few do. It depends a bit on what is going on in the Community some will be away because of the holidays.
Will they celebrate Easter with us?
No, because Easter is the week before. The Yappa-Ku Church that is an expression that we have learnt, Yappa means Aboriginal and Ku means for so the Church for Aboriginals holds a big Easter Conference a purlappa (corroboree) and it is held at different places in Warlpiri Country and usually a big mob of
people gather together for Easter even people who don’t normally go to church and they do a purlappa or two usually an Easter Purlappa. Sometimes they will do a new one. There is lots of singing and they debate some topics for discussion like kumanji or avoidance or petrol sniffing or drugs and make some decision about what the Church is going to do about those things. We will be there the week after that so many of them will be tired from this week.

A girl asked when we arrive how do you know which names are taboo because someone has died.

When we first arrive at Yuendumu some of the elders will greet me and they will say did you know the old man over there died and I will say no I didn’t? What skin was he? They will say he was Jupurrula. And then I might ask was he married to that Napanagka Alice and so on and eventually I will be able to work out who it was and then from then on not use that name. I feel embarrassed when after that they whisper the name to you even though I had worked it out.

Colin continues teaching the next song

I don’t know that word. I am told it means...but I don’t know how it says that

All of the kids in the past have sung this.

Colin keeps explaining the words.

The students get into the spirit of the singing clapping along

Colin leads with a good strong voice and the kids join in

Colin then goes over some more phrases in a chanting style with the students following.

Colin then told a story about a visit to Dima ru many years ago.

Above the bar was a Japanese name Kujaku that in Warlpiri means “look out for”, so it said “Look out for the Bar”

It provided him with great amusement.

I noticed at the end of the lesson some of the girls going up to Colin and asking him ‘If I have this skin name does that mean my best friend is...’ while looking at the kinship chart that Colin has provided for them (see Appendix 4). They spent some time discussing the kinship and skin names system. The lessons have already started to generate a lot of interest for the students in the way Warlpiri people organise relationships.

This is just one of about 80 -100 lessons that the students at MECS experience in their Yr. 9/10 program simply called Warlpiri.
4.5 Descriptions of Indigenous Studies lessons

A second dimension of the Indigenous studies program at MECS is ‘Koori’ lessons. The term Koori originated out of deference to the Victorian Indigenous situation where local groups preferred Aboriginal studies to be called Koori studies.

There are four lessons per week over two terms, one term leading up to the Central Australia trip and one term following the trip. Generally, the structure of the course covers the following themes:

- Early impressions and relationships between Kooris and whites
- “Women of the Sun” video series
- The Dreaming
- Aboriginal Christianity and Worldview
- Contemporary issues such as Native Title and Stolen Generation

A stated goal of this course is ‘to introduce students to the notion of seeing that the whole saga (history of invasion and occupation of Australia) viewed from an Aboriginal perspective (MECS Curriculum Outline for Koori Studies, p.1).

What follows are my overall impressions of the way each of these segments were developed based on my notes from attending these lessons with some examples of responses from students and interviews.

4.5.1 Early impressions and relationships between Kooris and Whites

It was very interesting visiting Colin’s class today. He told some very interesting stories of what it is like to deal with Aboriginal people in regards to getting permission.

(from personal journal notes).

The course demonstrates in various ways how Indigenous people operate with a different view of authority, permission and knowledge. The following is a paraphrased recount of a segment of the lesson Colin’s lesson based on my notes.

Different people get responsibility for certain areas, certain roles based on their age and the level of exposure in ceremony to
dreaming. Permission is distributed in different ways and there is no hierarchical order. There is no chief. The first white people meeting Aboriginal people just misread that and it caused so many problems. King Barak was an example - he was not a king at all.

With the Warlpiri people, for example at Yuendumu, if you wanted to go prospecting in the nearby hills for gold they would say which area and you would say over there near those hills. Umm they would say that is Jakamarra's and Jampinjimpa's dreaming you need to go and talk to them they have the responsibility and the most dreaming about that area. So you go and talk to them and get permission.

So as you are driving back from doing the prospecting in that area a Yapa stops you and says hey what you doing “Oh I am just coming back from.” “Oh but did you ask so and so for permission?” “Well no, I asked these other people”. “Well yeah, but now you are driving through his land to get there and you need to ask permission from him as well. Or you could around the long way (usually 300 kilometres to get there) if you want, but if you want to go this way you need to ask so and so”.

So there is a very complicated system of permission and responsibilities spread out among the people that is not obvious to white people or very easily understood particularly by the 18th century English system which was a very hierarchical society. It is very clear how you moved up the hierarchy. How you got to the top. How you got promoted. Whereas in Aboriginal society others gave authority and positions to you. They would come to you when they think you are ready and take you off into the bush for six months and initiate and teach you that part of the dreaming and later in life, they may do it again. There was nothing you could do in Indigenous culture to gain this knowledge or authority. It depended on others who have the knowledge just giving it to you when they felt it was the right time.

Colin discussed how the information about early contact has been put together by various anthropologists and is not complete. It is only a rough picture of how family groups in that desert part of Australia lived but it is important history in understanding who they are today. He tells the story of a fight that broke out and shows how people were drawn in because of kinship obligation. In these stories he adds something that you wouldn’t get in any other courses because he adds “I have met one of the men written
about in this book.” These are stories about real living people; they are just not made up. This is the way people really did live.

The other main theme Colin elaborates on is the view of the land. A Yappa person is spiritually connected to their country. It is not just a material thing that can be sold or used for economic gain. This theme is picked up in the central Australia trip booklets by the ‘Killing Me Softly 5’ article. Colin spoke to me of the difficulty of conveying this understanding to modern day 16 year old students whose experience of land has been usually only material.

**4.5.2 Women of the Sun and History of contact**

“Women of the Sun” is an extraordinary drama series about the lives of Aboriginal women over two centuries of Australian history. The series tells the stories of Aboriginal History from an Aboriginal perspective.’

(Introduction in the Women of the Sun’s website)

The students view this show and after each episode have reflective questions to answer. In the introduction to this study there were outlined many calls from Indigenous leaders about the importance of understanding the history of invasions and treatment of Indigenous people in understanding their situation today. The first episode of the series builds on a class handout, a short section from “Beyond the Frontier” by Reynolds. It explains further the huge clash between cultures and how whites were seen by Indigenous people as distant ancestors and how whites, imbued by the fact that their culture had conquered most of the known world, thought their view of the world was superior.

The question sheet on the second episode focuses on the place of names and language. Indigenous worldview places much more value on names.

---

5 This is an extract from Wallace, Phil and Noel.(1977). Killing Me Softly: The Destruction of a Heritage. Thomas Nelson, Melbourne.
Here is one response by a student that was typical of the many responses to this episode:

Giving Maydena and Birri English names was the beginning of breaking traditions because their names are very spiritual and personal thing. In taking their names away they are taking part of them away. Banning of their language would stop the people talking about important things like the Dreaming which they probably did not know the English words for and would force them to lose their stories as these were passed down by word of mouth. Without their stories, they have lost who they were.

Overall, the students responded well to the series and most of the students I interviewed said it played an important part in their understanding of Indigenous culture. It was interesting to note that some students were shocked and even embarrassed at the history of the way Indigenous people had been treated.

Student A: Well the Women of the Sun series changed my view of Aboriginal people.

Interviewer: In what way?

Student A: Well it showed the history of the Indigenous people on the settlements and how they were treated. Before that, yeah, I thought we took their land and stuff but I didn’t realise how badly they were treated such as the owners doing stuff to the women and the series shows how bad it was.

Student B: Yeah, it was brutal.

This knowledge affected the students because of the warm acceptance they received at Yuendumu. This acceptance was a contrast to their experience in Alice Springs and challenged them because the Yuendumu community as a whole did not seem to hold their history of mistreatment against them.

4.5.3. The Dreaming/Jurkuppa

During the course, the students are introduced to several dreaming stories. Colin provides insight on the nature of Dreaming as outlined by the work of Stanner (1979). Some of these occur in the classroom setting and some even more powerfully when visiting particular sites on the centre trip. Aim 3 of the Course Outline says,
It is hoped that students can come to understand the reasonableness of couching the Indigenous response to the world in terms of the Dreaming. Kids need to be ready to abandon themselves to the Dreaming, to learn to treat this framework with a seriousness we bring to our own didactic folk tales. This is necessary to avoid simply dismissing the Dreaming as primitive clap-trap, as far as is possible. It is also necessary for students and teachers to think about the impact of the Dreaming on modern Aboriginal people.

Colin knows quite a few dreaming stories. Here is just a short transcript of my journal and recordings of the walk around Uluru with a group of students.

See that piece of rock standing up- that is the devil dingo again, Kulpinya. He stands up to see where the people he is looking for are. See the rock pool down there with the yellow grass, that is the Mala initiation watering hole. Mala boys are dunked woora! The little eagle chick was torn to pieces by devil dingo and left little specks of white feathers everywhere. Can you see the white blotsches in the rock face over there? He ran straight up the rock face and over there if you look carefully you see two holes which are his footprints. Further down are two more, then one below that, and two more below that. Then he attacked the Mala men down here where they are having their singing.

When Charlie Nunford, an anthropologist, came here in 1922 the local men took him into that water hole. They told him that the Blood wood tree growing near it is Kulpinya the devil just like old Darby does in that video about “Shifting Dreaming” we saw. In 1940 when he returned, he noticed that the Blood wood tree was dead, but there was a new one a bit further away and they pointed to the new tree and told him the same thing that it was Kulpinya. They had transferred their Dreaming story to a new tree without missing a beat. The whole area here is full of Dreaming stories. The yellow stain down that rock face is the urine of the children of the wagtail women who were hiding back there. The sleepy lizard man who comes from the other side and had come over the top was laying here. See this long smooth stone over here. One of the poison snake people came around from the other side and speared him and that boulder has two little holes, one on each side. These are the spear holes.
Through these experiences, students are introduced to the idea that when looking at a rock, tree, or stars, Indigenous people see stories of spiritual powers. They see differently to what we see and these stories are the basis for organising their everyday life. Attending Colin’s classes there is so much else that is conveyed to the students apart from developing empathy of the importance and respect for the place of Dreaming. Colin’s pedagogical style is one of ‘paradox’. He represents as the older generation with his white beard he gives a vicarious Indigenous way of teaching: “Just sit down and listen” it gives students a little of the experience of the way Indigenous kids are given knowledge. In one class he asked all the girls to leave because someone asked him about a ceremony and he said that it was only men’s business and he couldn’t say any more with the girls there. Even in this, students were experiencing how knowledge is owned in a different way to their own culture. In my interview with the principal, he said this about Colin’s work.

He’s the storyteller. He takes the story and then he interprets that experience for them and sensitises them for what they’ve got to experience.’

Yet the other side of being Japaljarri is he is just Colin. Time and time again in observing Colin’s work in the classroom one sees not only his sincere respect for these stories but his humility in understanding them and the culture as a whole. He often says “I only know a little”. When students ask him questions he is readily admits, “I don’t know what that means”.

One of the debates around teaching Indigenous Studies listed in the literature review was the issue of who has authority to teach. Should it only be Indigenous people as some claim (Muecke, 1992; West, 2000) or can a sensitive non-Indigenous person, in collaboration with Indigenous people, do it? In talking about this with him, I asked him how the community at Yuendumu feels about him telling some of the Dreaming stories or details of the ceremonies. He says that they have told him, “you tell those young ones some of our stories they need to know”. He feels he has their blessing and recognises it as a privilege.
4.5.4 Aboriginal Christianity

In the Women of the Sun video series, the mission era is dealt with, showing some of the negative effects of the attempt to Christianise “pagan” people. However, the current situation among communities is quite complex. Many Indigenous people have adapted the Christian story and included it as part of their own story. One of the past students of MECS, Liam Campbell has been a resident of Yuendumu for many years, working in the Art Centre, Warlpiri media and in the petrol snuffing program. Liam, who is fluent in Warlpiri, wrote a biography of Darby the oldest resident of Yuendumu (Campbell, 2006). In his book he points out that the movement to an Aboriginal Christianity by many of the older people came about because not all of the missionaries adopted a patronising attitude but some, like Reece, a Baptist minister to Yuendumu in 1947, adopted the approach that it was important to learn the language and culture because as Campbell describes the Creator God was not unknown to Warlpiri people.

...but was embodied in the Jukurrpa Warnu jurrpa which means dreaming eternity or eternal spirit of the world. The suffix warnu gives the word its ultimate or superlative meaning indicating that they were referring to the one above all

(Campbell, 2006, p. 88).

Relating the stories of the Gospel in an oral tradition over many years made the people familiar with them. Darby, like many, testified how Wapirra (God) had revealed himself in dreams and visions. In one of the dreams he was paralyzed and Wapirra appeared at Yuendumu Hill, coming through a gate beyond which was heaven and the city of Jerusalem where the land was rich with green grass. This vision inspired Darby to pray and follow Wapirra who in response sustained his long life (100 years).

To the Warlpiri, Wapirra communicates in dreams and these dreams for Darby were revelations of Wapirra visiting the Warlpiri landscape. As well as incorporating dreaming Warlpiri understanding of Christianity according to Swain (1991), compresses time into one day, as Warlpiri people do not have a linear view of history.
Darby attended Church every Sunday and would pray in a mixture of Warlpiri and English. He developed a style, rhythmically repeating phrases and raising and lowering his voice, he prayed for the church, the country around Yuendumu and for the young people. Wapirra thank you, karna jalangu (while I talk to you here today) (Campbell, 2006, p. 92).

The story of Darby and his life introduces some of the complexities of the way Christianity has become an important part of modern Aboriginal Community life and has evolved into its own form, emphasising the paradox that the Christian story has its own cultural setting but has been accepted by many different cultures in its own form and in some ways holds truths beyond any one culture.

One of the resources the class uses for this section of the course is a set of nine drawings found around the church at Yuendumu (see Fig. 5) of dot paintings telling the story of creation, rebellion, Jesus, salvation and God's new family on a new earth.

Colin tries to bring out some of the paradoxes and features of Aboriginal Christianity in work with the students. The work on this section of the course is tied back to the students’ personal experience of their time at Yuendumu where they attend a church service.

The students on return from Yuendumu are asked to complete a research project on one issue that the visit to Yuendumu raised for them that they want to get more information on. The topics varied widely but one student wanted to follow up the idea of Aboriginal Christianity, writing -

On the trip I befriended a girl called Sophie. She said she was a Christian and her grandfather prayed in Church and did some evangelising on the basketball courts some nights. I believed her however she also firmly believed in all the Dreaming stories she told me. I couldn’t understand how she could believe in both at the same time so my question is ‘How do Aboriginal Christians combine Christianity with their Dreaming beliefs?’

(Extract from a students journal)

In her essay on this question she suggested that one way it can be explained is to look at it in a dualistic way, seeing one as culture and the other as
religion. She rejects this (picking up the teachings of the school). It is as she says ‘very hard to distinguish between religion and culture’. Instead she looks at how their culture has similarities with the Christian story and how the similarities lead to both being followed in changed ways.

Gondarra (1988), reporting on Aboriginal Christianity, gives support to this idea, noting that when Aboriginals adopt Christianity they often draw from their ancestral heritage to create a composite, metaphysical belief structure. Bill Edwards also relates this with his description of Tony Tjamiwa, a Pintinjarra elder, who

mythologised the parables in the Christian scriptures with stories of Tjala (honey ants), Lukupupu (ant lions) and Walawru (eagle hawks).
His prayed used the imagery of Walytya (relationship) and of Kurunpa (spirit) and Walap (wind).

(Edwards, 2002, p. 3).

4.5.5 Current issues of reconciliation

In this part of the course, the students watch the film “Rabbit Proof Fence” and read articles about the land rights issue.

With regard to the Stolen Generation, it is easy for students in their analysis of the events portrayed to be hostile to the authorities of the past and paint them as evil people. Colin does not deny the evil of what took place. However, using a worldview lens he reminds the students in his class about the power of living in a culture and the power of a worldview to colour your judgments. The evil was not just personal but included the societal -Social Darwinism had imbued the culture and measured skulls to see who had evolved “bigger” brains and intelligence. It was a view of the world that these people grew up with. He reminds his students of the story of the fish being the last to know he is living in water and says “It is easy for us to see from our standpoint but if you were born in the 1930s or 1940s and were surrounded by this sort of thinking, would you have been any different?”. He then leaves them the question “what is the view of the world that we are surrounded with that might be blinding us from acting justly towards others”?
4.5.6 Guest Speaker

One the important ongoing links with the Yuendumu community is Liam an ex student who has been living and working in Yuendumu for over ten years and introduced in previous sections. Liam, while in Melbourne, visited the school and with slides talked about life in Yuendumu. What follows is a selection of the transcript made of his visit.

Here are some other slides of traditional foods, Bush potatoes. The older people like still to go out on hunting trips to gather traditional foods such as Bush potatoes
Bush tomatoes. The Warlpiri name is….you find them near...
This is slide is a picture from 1928 of local men chained up.
The story of the Coniston massacre still affects many of the old people. The killing of up to 100 people from what were relatively small family groups affected everyone.
(The students are reminded by Colin of the video that they saw starring Jack Thompson of the Coniston Massacre)
This is Jurkuppa site- a women’s dreaming site – Marla
This picture of a Jakamarra chained around his neck after he was caught for allegedly killing a pastoralist
There was a lot of mining in Warlpiri country – gold and wolfram to harden steel.
This is a grave of a miner who died walking back to Alice, yet he was only one kilometre from water.
These are picture of mining sites in 30’s and 40’s where Warlpiri worked from morning to night and were not paid any wages. Today they are paid Royalties.
Skin groups are responsible for different parts of the country. There are organisations set up to distribute royalties each year to the community and some groups do get more than others do.
This picture is the time of the handing over the site to the church. The old men gave the site because the people need a concrete place to connect with their Dreaming stories. They also needed a concrete place to connect the Christian story to set the boundaries, as a Christian Dreaming or story place was important.
Women often told stories by drawing in the sand
Student: Have you ever been to a ceremony – Yes
Which one?
There are still quite a few public ceremonies. Usually they happen at funerals. The young men are quite a tight group and hard to break into. I am probably closer to some of the older people.

Student: Can you sing songs in Warlpiri?
Yes, but do I want to?

Student: Say something in Warlpiri

(Colin and Liam exchanged a few words. The kids try to guess what they are saying)

Student: How do you get your skin name?
Well the older people kind of look at you and they look at the people you hang around with, get along with you, and give you a skin name. Warlpiri has eight skin names, other tribes have only four. They differ around Australia.

Student: Will you be there when we are there? What do you do there?

Yes, I work with the young people like on the petrol sniffing program and I have worked in the Media centre helping to set up recordings. When you get there the rubbish and the strangeness can be a bit overwhelming but you look past that because of the friendliness and generosity of the people.

4.6. The Centre Trip

The trip and stay at Yuendumu is a central feature of the school’s Indigenous Studies program. It makes the ideas and events taught in the class real and personal. It engages the students in all of their dimensions. It introduces contradictions and the unexpected.

The program at Yuendumu varies from year to year. It is usually four days and covers a variety of activities that will be described using my journal, the DVD made of the trip and student comments. Some trips have extended the program to include activities on the Monday in the Yuendumu School. This part of the program however relies on the cooperation of the school. The school has tended to have a large turnover of principals and establishing a continuous good relationship with the school therefore has been difficult to sustain. It is interesting to note the community itself has strained relationships with the school and the N.T. Education Department and is currently looking, with the help of a MECS ex-teacher at establishing a
community school. The next section describe the history of the trip, its build up and the journey to Yuendumu via Uluru and Alice Springs and then details the events at Yuendumu itself.

4.6.1 History of the program: Accidental beginnings

Colin Japaljarri, founding teacher of the program tells in own words the way the trip began.

It was 1980 and we were throwing around ideas about how so many Australians did not have an understanding of their own country, particularly an experience of the desert and the Centre and Aboriginals. The Year 10 program at the time was the only year group without an extended excursion. I was teaching a unit on Aboriginal studies and it suffered at the time by being nearly totally book oriented and far removed from reality, often stereotyping Indigenous people. There weren’t the organisations and resources that are around today. The principal at the time had been to Northern Territory once or twice and we began exploring options, eventually suggesting (because we knew nothing) hiring a commercial tourist outfit to do a Centre road trip. So off we went not really knowing what to expect. We did Uluru, Alice and a few other places along the way. The trip was very conventional and touristy. In Alice we met up with Dr. Trevor Cutter who worked in a health clinic. He introduced us to Pat Dodson who spoke to us about the struggles for land rights. Trevor suggested that we should go to a community. He had been working in the communities for years. He suggested this one or that and said you just write and ask them.

After the trip we sat around and reviewed the experience and decided two things, first that we could do it better ourselves and secondly, the trip must include an experience of an Indigenous community.

To accommodate these ideas the school purchased the first of several coaches. The principal and the Year 10 class teacher got their heavy-duty bus licence to drive the coach.

Secondly, contacts were explored. One of the board member’s brothers had worked as a principal of the Yuendumu School, had been on the Yuendumu Council and was now in Darwin. The principal rang him. That’s great, he said to us, I’ll put you in touch with the pastor, because if the church invites you, the church goes on but if an individual families invite you, those families rise and they fall, you’ll be associated with the family, so he said, get an association with the
church. It’s the only way to fly. He put us in touch with the Baptist mission working in the church at Yuendumu.

And that’s how we got onto Yuendumu. Could have been anywhere. Yeah, It wasn’t our choice. But then, that was the place we had. It’s how we started; we went to Yuendumu totally sight unseen, we hadn’t even seen a photo but we had the word of a pastor that it would be all right.

So off we went in 1981. We did the bookings similar to the first trip but added some of our own. We weren’t really sure what reception we’d get. When we arrived at Yuendumu, football had been mentioned. When we finally arrived in the town we were taken straight over the footy oval. There, standing around was the Yuendumu A grade Magpies. They thought they were playing the A grade Mount Evelyn Christian School because footy had been mentioned in our phone conversation. Anyway we started playing this game and well, it was just the most wonderful thing.

Of course by quarter time we were so far behind it was just ridiculous. They were so fast you couldn’t catch them let alone tackle them. After a short council they came over and in the Warlpiri way said, “we’d like some of your players to help our team” which was their way of saying we think we better lend you some of our players. So we swapped over some players and by half time we swapped over some more. In the end our team was three quarters them and the scores turned out about even. That’s how they work things out. That’s how they like it. It immediately confronted us about the way we do things. They put on a fantastic Christian Coroborree and took us out hunting and we had church with them on the Sunday. Nothing was too much trouble for them. We felt accepted and came away with new friends.

In Alice we visited the Land Council and were introduced to a big conflict that was happening about the development of a sacred site-seven sisters dreaming into a recreational lake.

There was a big rally taking place and we were introduced to the star of that “Jedda” movie who spoke against the development. Pat Dodson was also there and the minister for Aboriginal affairs flew in. After being at Alice Springs and attending the rally, our immediate feeling was, what we were looking at was how these people struggle to survive in the face of a white invasion. Indigenous people have got this huge infrastructure plonked on their doorstep and everywhere we went there’d be Aboriginal people at the Central Land Council, at the
medical crowd and at CAAMA telling us that there are Dreaming sites all around us here but people don't have access to them anymore. They can't use them for their ceremonial purpose because they've got things built all over them and they can't keep white people out. This was a difficult reality to convey to sixteen year olds.

(Extracts from the interview with Colin Japaljarri)

4.6.2 The build up and expectations surrounding the trip

The Central Australia trip is well advertised in the promotional material for the school and in interviews with prospective parents. In earlier years, the students in Year 9 did some fund-raising towards the trip. This process tended to involve the wider school community. The number of students with siblings in the school is quite high (around 60%) and the number of past students who have children in the school is also quite high. This means that many of the students have heard things around the dinner table about the trip. Not only does the broader community’s experiences of the trip contribute to the build up, but also, the wider community involvement in this program is critical in sustaining it (see findings in the next chapter).

There is a continuous build up over Term 1 with a parent meeting in week three and several meetings with the students as well as regular stories in class from Colin and various letters and forms.

I surveyed the students the week before the trip about their expectations of Yuendumu. The most common expectations noted in order were smell, rubbish, affectionate sharing, and hearing Warlpiri people relating, using skin names. Most of these would have come from snippets of past members.

In an earlier visit to Yuendumu, I asked one of the key women in the community about the MECS mob coming. ‘Yeah we liked it,’ was the response. ‘Our kids don’t get to meet other kids from the big city on their own turf.’ In Alice Springs a Yuendumu women I spoke to said that she used to look forward to the school coming because she didn’t have many others kids that were at school for her age to interact with.
One of the other teachers at MECS, Colin Jumpjinjpa, lived up there for a year recently with his family and he said this about the community’s expectations of the visit.

You wanted to know about what they think about us coming up. Well it happens, you know. It's sort of happening not in the way that we would recognise as being organised but it's happening in a deeper sort of community way where there's definitely an awareness, there's a history, there's an anticipation of the MECS mob coming. And there's a group of people who are central in that. A lot them are the leading women in the community, some of the teachers, some of the strong women. And of course Darby, who is no longer alive, was just likethat, he had that sense of anticipation.

What follows in the next part of this chapter are descriptive pieces selected from my journal and other sources trying to capture the interaction and events on the trip at Yuendumu. The students travel for two days straight to get to the desert north of Adelaide then it slows down to take in various places.

4.6.3 The Journey into the desert

In the interview with Colin Jampinjimpa, the trip was likened to a spiritual journey.

There’s a spiritual dimension to the trip. Because not only do you get to visit a remote Aboriginal community but also, it takes a long time to get there, for three quarters of the trip you’re travelling through the desert, it is not it's like a trip to another place you know. So all of that adds to the trip for me anyway, it adds to the mystique and the sense of being displaced from your own, from what you know to what you don’t know.

4.6.4 Uluru- the importance of the land

The material in the Centre trip booklet (Day 3-Glendambo to Day 6-Bush Camp), deals with the issues of culture, our own and others and the killing of cultures through misunderstanding and lack of respect. The “Killing me Softly” article in the trip booklet; a visit to the Cultural Centre at Uluru, and walks around the base of Uluru with stories of the Dreaming by Colin
Japaljarri, all contribute to trying to help the students see the land the way the traditional owners see it. One of the four devotional themes of the trip is cultural respect and sensitivity. The students are encouraged to try and view the land, using the Indigenous worldview, as special places, as a living testimony of the *Tjukurppa* (Dreaming) stories of both creation time as well as the present, and as an important source of food and water. Page 19 of the Centre booklet has a map of Aboriginal places of significance at Uluru and a description of the central place of *Tjurkurpa*. This is followed by a speech by one of the local elders *Nganana Tatinja Wiya*. The central idea in the speech is evident in the title “We never climb” and asks visitors to respect the place and not climb.

The night before arriving at Uluru students study the reflective piece “Killing me Softly”. There is also an open discussion about the school’s policy of respecting sacred sites out of the respect for the people who have this belief which comes down to ‘we don’t climb, we don’t swim if it is a sacred site’. This position was reached after a community meeting in 1994, the details of which are recorded in a discussion of the school’s policy and stance described later in this chapter.

Students are asked to write a response in their journal on day five on the issue of why we should or shouldn’t climb and what they think the Christian faith says about it with reference to social justice in the book of Amos. A small minority retains some annoyance about not being able to climb. Most think it is the right thing to do and some have even expressed anger at the sight of other tourists climbing as is evident in the following poem.

```
See them silhouetted against the sky
Swarming up the rock like ants on a string
They are impatient
And grip the rope
With eager hands
Deaf hands

They have reached their destination
Scurrying feet
Squash the dreaming
```
Camera click
Not capturing the tears
Or the pain
Only the beauty
Becoming bored they leave
Unaware of what they have done

(A past student’s poem)

This issue of to climb or not to climb brings home directly and personally to the students the way Western culture views land very differently to Indigenous culture and robbing them of their connection with a place or treating a place which is sacred to them with disrespect causes them great difficulties and pain. Students are asked to consider how their actions reflect disrespect and add to the continued brokenness and pain of Indigenous people or how their actions can reflect respect which can contribute to reconciliation and a better way ahead.

4.7 Yuendumu

The MECS mob or south camp, as they are referred to by Yuendumu people, usually arrive on a Friday afternoon and set up camp in the school. The school was chosen as the best place because it is centrally located, has showers and toilet facilities, and provides some security. There are always many kids under 12 hanging around waiting to play and be with the MECS kids.

There is usually lots of informal playing, greeting and talking with different kids attaching themselves to the MECS kids based on skin group. The following is just one transcript of group interacting to try to convey the type of interaction that happens when the two groups meet.

The tape begins with the sound of a group of children talking in an excited manner at Yuendumu. The dozen or so kids are sitting in a circle on the red dust, exchanging names, and trying to work out relationships and pronunciations. One of the little girls is sitting on the lap of one the MECS girls.
The younger ones often hang on or sit very close.

S1 What is your name?
Brenda Nampinjimpa
S1 Yeah. Nampinjimpa (laughter)
S2 What skin are you?
Japaljarri
S2 Does that mean you are my brother?
S3 Marita is my friend. She is a Naparulla
S1 Who is my best friend if am a Napangdi
S3 ....Is it Nana or Nunagani?
What about you?
Your turn say Naku nana nanni
S3 Naku nana nanni
Your turn
S2 Naku nana nanni-that means “and you”. Yeah! Go me, I understood some Warlpiri.
S4 What age are you?
13,
S4 I am 15

B.... starts singing the song one of the five songs learnt in class - Nana nuju palija with the others joining in much to the amusement of the locals.

They however also join in and when B. asks for help with what is the next line they offer help.

The Local kids start singing the song and the MECS kids join in. They also sing the Play School song, the Collingwood theme song and ask the locals whether they knew the emu running song. Again, there is much laughter.

A group of MECS girls are playing with a group of younger local kids a circle running game duck, duck, goose.

Another group is playing a clapping type game.

They are showing the kids. “You go clap clap, click click and then pick up yea, that’s it”.

109
4.7.1 Friday night at the disco

The stars above the community centre are fantastic. The music is blaring from the large building that hosts the Friday night disco to which we are all going. The girls are a bit nervous and clutching each other. There are people around everywhere. One of our girls is being led around by two local girls pointing out things, the rest are standing around in groups there is a lot of eyeing off and giggling. There are more teenagers around tonight than during the day. The Disco has a games room for pool and video games, mainly inhabited by boys, but there is not much interaction with our boys. A game of keeping off developed in the disco with some of the younger kids and our kids. The locals sell pancakes and drinks. The way the teenagers dress – label clothing, caps runners and the way they hang around and behave at the disco seemed familiar to any youth club night. Small groups of kids start getting into the music and dancing, others soon joined in.

4.7.2 The art centre

The next morning, the MECS mob visited the Yurulunka Art Centre and was introduced to Jack Jakamarra, one of the older and well known central desert artists. His paintings have appeared in galleries all over the world. He talked about his latest painting, how he paints like all of the artists at Yuendumu, his Dreaming stories-Possum Dreaming. The kids were encouraged to buy a small piece of artwork from the Dreaming story associated with their skin name. Jack spent time telling them about the stories. As the kids were lining up with the pieces of art or cloth or some other items he would call them over and look at the piece they bought and he would say “this one is emu dreaming” and he would begin to point to some of the symbols and talk about the place it represents out beyond Yuendumu. On one occasion, a boy had three items and for each of them he would wave his hand and shake his head and say “this one Women’s Dreaming”. In this way, the students were able to experience the strong connection between art, dreaming and country. Most students tried to buy something associated with their skin name dreaming.
4.7.3 Saturday afternoon

A football match was organised for Saturday afternoon. The local oval has not much grass, but the community is very proud of it. Early on in the afternoon only two local boys have turned up for the game. Even though it was organised weeks ago it is a matter of “hanging loose” at Yuendumu and seeing what happens. After a while a couple more have turned up, shoes off, bare feet is the go. Eventually the game gets under way, skins against shirts. The boys shake each other’s hands and chat and there are high fives all round when there is a goal. Where are the others? Liam said he would try to get the word around. Being a Saturday there is a lot of football happening in Alice and so many families are away. In the end six local boys played.

Ten local girls aged from about 7 to 14 formed mixed teams with the MECS mob. There is lots of chatter in Warlpiri, calling out, encouraging. They seem to be really enjoying themselves. Colin comes over and calls out in Warlpiri and the local kids laugh and cheer. He is telling them to hit that ball. Rules are adjusted to allow the little ones a bit of help. No one minds. The girls seem more involved and our kids are practicing a few Warlpiri words: ‘quick’, ‘run’, and ‘well done’. This interaction of the locals with the MECS mob is enjoyable for them, and they look forward to it. It is friendly and on their turf. I observed that the locals do not make a big fuss about individual efforts. Colin pointed out to me that if you focus too much on an individual they get very embarrassed. They like to be part of the group. If whites do that and boss them a bit (as the MECS principal was doing in running the softball game) it grates a bit, but they are very gracious about it. Colin has been observing and spending time with Warlpiri people for over 20 years now and so he picks up those differences in the way they do things.

4.7.4 The Saturday night elders talk

Yakajirra is a white youth worker with a nickname, which is quite common. He spoke about the battle of 1993 and how the people got rid of the petrol-sniffing problem that has plagued so many communities. It was an inspiring story of the two old people sitting quietly in the dirt beside him of initiative, courage and perseverance of taking the sniffers up to Mt. Theo away from
the petrol and teaching them to survive using the old ways and regain their respect. There was deathly silence as he told the story and the group spontaneously applauded after the presentation. It was very moving of how they gradually reduced the town from 70 sniffers to none. They did this themselves without any Government funding. The old people did it by just loving each of those kids and bringing them back to health. The rest of the town supported the program and have introduced more activities for young people. It was moving. It was a story of strength and success of a community unlike the bad news stories that permeate the media. The students’ comments afterwards were:

Incredible, amazing, interesting. Peggy and Johnny Creek were just amazing people who are from a traditional background and were introduced to Christianity and grasped it the best they can with it and do it for the best of their family and community and they don’t have to be doing it.”

4.7.5 Church Yuendumu style

The plaque out the front of the church says ‘that we the elders of the Warlpiri community have given this land back to God our Father who has given us all things.’ The women sit on the right and the men on the left, dogs down the middle wander in and out. Around the church are local Warlpiri style paintings symbolising Biblical stories. Along the front are some recent Biblical stories in Warlpiri-style painting. The service begins after about half an hour when most people have arrived. An elderly local man rises, clapping together two large boomerangs, and chanting a song he had composed for the Easter Corroboree. Then the regular pastor welcomed the MECS mob and explained how normally one family is rostered on to lead the service but this week they were away so he is doing it. There was more talking about the paintings. After that the pastor led some more singing, some in English and some in Warlpiri. A group performed an Easter song they had composed. Two women gave the sermon based on a painting dot style that explained the passage of the Bible they were focusing on today. The pastor led a prayer time for families in need and also prayed for peace between warring factions in the community. About three quarters of the way
through the service, the students got up and performed three songs in Warlpiri that they have been practicing in Warlpiri classes. The people smiled and appreciated the singing, joining in. One man got up and promised to show us traditional fire lighting in the afternoon and other things but this did not happen. According to Colin, many offers with little follow up is common. The students also presented a donation of money that was collected on the trip. The money goes to the community and the Mt Theo petrol-sniffing program. There are two churches in Yuendumu and about 80% of the people regularly attend them. There is a lot of hanging around before church but once it is finished everyone goes off.

It was important for the Mt. Evelyn mob to experience the way the Warlpiri mob have developed and shaped their own version of Christianity. Harris (1990) points to new Indigenous leadership in the Indigenous church and the emergence of the distinctly Aboriginal forms of worship using iconography and law songs as signs of hope and the beginnings of more positive, new Indigenous identities. The church building stands out a bit from the other buildings because there is no damage or graffiti unlike the other buildings. It was described to me as one of the sacred places and therefore gets treated differently.

4.7.6 The hunting trip

Three of the older women from the community and bunches of local kids piled into the school bus and the MECS coach and drove about 45 minutes down the road to go hunting. Earlier in the day, there was a big group of about 20 local kids gathering at the gate, waiting for this event, they love going hunting. While waiting for the trip to start a couple of local kids were interacting with a few of the MECS students, trying out some of the Warlpiri words. The word was getting out about the trip and you could feel the excitement building. The mood of the locals noticeable changed, they seemed more at home in the bush than even in town. Three of the women elders took us out. They had their digging sticks and a couple of billies and spread out in different directions; each with a group tagging on. The kids seemed to be running around playing games. The women walked slowly
through the scrub talking and pointing out things. They sat at the feet of a wattle type bush and proceeded to dig out the long horizontal roots and break off sections. In each section, there was a big fat witchery grub. There were lots of smiles and laughter as the grubs were put into to the billy and passed around to be poked at. A little later, there was a lot of pointing and discussing as a goanna’s track was found. The track led to a mound that the women attacked with their digging sticks. The patience and hard work that went into digging it out was amazing. There was a cheer, when after about an hour, the sand goanna was dragged out and whacked across the digging stick.

At the end of the afternoon there was a big cook up on the side of the road. All of the kids had a chance to try the goanna and the witchery grub as well as kangaroo tail and damper brought along by the school. There were lots of kids just hanging on to each other, arm and arm. There was an amazing feeling of happiness and peace around the fire by the roadside in the middle of what seems to outsiders as “nowhere”. The local kids are really easy going and smiling and the bond of friendship was growing. One of the MECS boys entertained a group by doing Gollum and other film characters. Some of the local girls are teaching the MECS kids hand-slap games and doing hand signals.

Kids sitting on the road, kids playing football and kids giving each other piggyback rides were just a few things that went on during this time. The local kids occupied half the bus on the way back to town. One student sat in the bus with a four year old boy on her lap who had fallen asleep. She gazed down at him and said “Isn’t he beautiful, what a great kid”. There was real warmth in her voice.

For me the best time was also the hunting trip because you know how they came on the bus with us to the hunting area and one kid was asking me my name and I told him and he said you are my sister. When we got there, we were just walking around with the girls. Afterwards he kept following, coming up to me and not leaving me alone. He was just so excited at having me as his big sister, and he was so great. (from an interview with a student)
The DVD made of the hunting trip captures this amazing afternoon better than words can describe. As evening fell and the kids said goodbye some of the MECS kids shed a tear knowing that tomorrow they would be leaving.

4.8 The Centre Trip Evening

A tradition at the school is that around the last week of the second term or early third term, the students do a presentation of their trip to the community. On the trip the students kept a journal, wrote poems and did several art pieces. The students are given time in class to select one piece that they began on the trip and to rework it to a standard suitable for a wider audience. One or two students each year are appointed filmmakers and video the trip and put a lot of work into editing and producing a film for the evening. A DVD of the trip is given to each person who participated in the trip. One of the features that struck me as an observer of these events is the history of this trip amongst the community. As was mentioned earlier, a significant number of students are now second generation students. Their parents also went on the trip, learnt some Warlpiri and have a skin name. At the start of the evening the parents catch up with each other and soon the conversation moves to their own experiences of the trip. The students, in reviewing their journals for this evening and viewing the DVD, relive some of their experiences. This revisiting deepens the experience together, and being surrounded by the older generation who also have had these experiences works to make this a significant event for the student and for the school.

4.9 Teaching by example: the School’s Action and Stance

‘Example isn’t another way to teach, it is the only way to teach’ is a quote attributed to Einstein. Because example is a powerful teacher it is important to include in the description of the school not only its program but also its policies and practices. These in their own way, also make a statement about Indigenous people and their culture.

The school in 2001 signed up to the “Dare to Lead project”; an initiative of the profession and specifically of Principals Australia, formerly Australian
Principals Association Professional Development Council (APAPDC) acting on behalf of its members and their associations.

It was therefore interesting to note the strengths and weaknesses of the school’s policies and practices using “A School Review Checklist: Indicators of a successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Program (APAPDC, 2003) produced by the ‘Dare to Lead’ project consultation with Indigenous groups. It lists displaying contemporary art as one indicator of good practice. The school had purchased nine large Indigenous art works over the years and has them displayed in the staff room and office area, both as a means to support Indigenous artists but also as a reminder to students of Indigenous presence. In its material to the students, the school doesn’t propose any particular action to deal with the current situation facing Indigenous people except to encourage the students to support Australian Indigenous people’s claims for justice, recognition and compensation for past wrongs, and support them in campaigns for a better future. The school, has however, put in a specific policy about the visit to Uluru. The stance taken by the school of “we don’t climb and we don’t swim” represents respect for the ownership but also originates from the recognition of the spiritual reality of places and events. A consistent teaching of MECS’s worldview (see Chapter 6) is that reality functions in various dimensions and the spiritual dimension is not to be denied. The school argues even if you disagree with the way this spirituality is explained, the significance of it for others’ lives is to be respected. Roger, a long-serving teacher and participant in the program tells the story of this policy.

As a result of going through the culture centre in 1992 on my long service leave, I realised that the Aboriginal people didn’t like us climbing. And we thought that as a school we were very hypocritical to allow our kids to climb or in fact up until 1994, which was the first year I went back on the Centre trip, it was compulsory for every kid to climb. Anyway, we got there and what we’d been doing since 1994 was giving the kids a choice. Before ‘94, we would climb as soon as you got there, on the very first day. However, we wanted them to think about the issue so we forced them to go into the Cultural Centre, look at all the stuff in the document.
Anyway, and then on the last day we would make the decision. I would ask, “Who wants to do the culture walk?” all that sort of stuff. And the night before I sat down with my staff and I said “Right, who’s going to help me climb?” The response was one. That left me in a very difficult situation. Peter is the only one “and I couldn’t send up all those kids without the staff. The next morning I told them we couldn’t climb, they were so devastated. I got things like ‘I’ve saved up all me life for this. And now you’re telling me I can’t climb? Isn’t climbing Uluru the key point of the trip?’ They were tears, one of the kids rang home, a parent rang to my wife, complaining bitterly. So when I came back. I said to the school “I can’t go through this again”. So the board said “Okay we’ll have a forum”. They held a big forum and people came from everywhere. Bob the school counsellor spoke in favour of continuing the way we go. I spoke against. The board listened to parents, parents for both sides spoke. Finally, the board decided it best not to climb. They sent that response to the Aboriginal community at Uluru to acknowledge, that from now on Mt. Evelyn Christian School would not climb. It’s interesting now how a lot of schools have followed that action.

The APAPDC review checklist also refers to inviting elders to do a welcome to country in official ceremonies; and in participating in special Indigenous events such as “National Sorry Day”. The school does not practice these things. The school does have an Indigenous flag, which it flies from time to time.

4.10 Conclusion

Through the voices of the teachers, the students and my own as observer, the descriptions in this chapter have tried to draw the reader into a selection of the experiences that students have of the MECS program. These together, with the information gleaned on the history of the school, were then used to sift through the data to uncover the meaning the program held for culture, obtaining knowledge of other cultures, and the purpose of schooling. These concepts were seen as an important part of the initial question when examining MECS’s rationale and considerations shaping its program and are dealt with in more detail the next chapter.
Figure 5. Poster of paintings in the Yuendumu Church
Painted by Claris Nampijnjina Poulson 1996
The paintings represent nine Biblical stories of God and People from the Creation to the New Creation.
Chapter 5

Initial Analysis of the Data and Findings

“Breathe this. Go to Yuendumu and breathe the pride of these people and their land and breathe the different culture”
(from interview with principal)

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 1 of this research painted a context that led to asking, what was the rationale and motivation for a school in 1982, when so little was happening in other schools and having no Indigenous students that led them to include Indigenous studies as a major part of their curriculum? In addition, why is the program oriented around the Warlpiri language and community at Yuendumu? Thirdly, why has it been sustained for so long? An initial review of programs in schools suggested that one of the primary reasons for differences in approaches to Indigenous studies and the answer to why questions about curriculum practices springs out of the various paradigms surrounding the purpose for schooling, knowledge, and the understanding of culture. This led to the distilling of the initial questions to the main research question asked being: \textit{What perspectives about culture and schooling operated within MECS for it to begin and shape its particular practice of Indigenous Studies?}

The methodology chapter introduced the details for using “procedural analysis” (Rosaldo, 1993) to analyse the data. This suggested closely describing in a narrative style, the researcher’s observation of the program and interweaving it with explanations of various participants. This process would lead to finding key words or “cover” terms or themes, important in gaining insight into the meanings of the MECS practice. The concept of culture can be teased out into many dimensions (Hofstede, 1984). The data were closely read in order to examine which dimension or features of culture are dominant in the minds of the early developers and teachers.
Following this line of analysis, the main key words and concepts to emerge and make sense of the questions of culture were the terms *complexity*, *dynamic struggle* and *worldview*.

Worldview was further analysed to express the theme of being in, and knowing the world in fundamentally different ways, best expressed through language; and religiously directed.

A second theme related to the understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, concepts connected to the ‘teaching’ part of learning about other cultures. The features of *integrality*, *justice* and *challenging worldview* emerged as strong themes in the data surrounding MECS’s understanding of teaching and learning. The focus in this chapter is to demonstrate how these themes emerged from the narrative of the data as well as teasing out their meanings. How these various themes are connected and framed by a single paradigm will be developed more fully in Chapter 6.

### 5.1 All Cultures are Complex and Different

The notion that all cultures are complex in different ways is brought out strongly through the data in many overlapping ways. It is a message that occurs firstly through the selection of the topics encountered. The course does not shy away from difficult concepts and ideas such as the learning of new language. Secondly, the manner in which these complex topics and ideas are dealt with as not being the complete answer or story but are merely fallible peoples’ fragmented understanding of the culture at this point in time. A third dimension of the complexity message in the text focuses on the silences that often occur in answering questions conveying a respect for complexity.

#### 5.1.1 Complexity in the topics chosen

So there is a very complicated system of permission and responsibilities spread out among the people that are not obvious to white people or very easily understood.

(extract from lesson with Colin).
The word “complicated” or “complex” appears in the data often. The comment taken from Colin’s lessons on early contact highlights the fact that each culture has embedded within it highly complex means of accumulating and distributing both knowledge and power. The 18th century English mechanisms were totally different to those of the Warlpiri. The focus in the course is to highlight that the differences are in the type of system adopted by a culture rather than in the level of complexity.

The selection of the material to be studied also highlights the issue of complexity. The course does not shy away from complex issues. There are lots of explanations and examples of the Warlpiri skin names and the myriad of ways they are connected (see Appendix 4). When first encountering this, students often get lost as one students indicated in her journal. ‘How do they remember all this?’

The issue of reporting the history of the encounter between Indigenous Australians and whites is also not a simple one. Many school accounts of the history of “settlement” of Australia focus on the early explorers and the pioneer settler, and major events such as the gold rush, Eureka stockade and convict life. Most of these accounts barely mention the Indigenous people of the region that was being explored or settled, or if they did, drew on the common discourses of the day which positioned the ‘other’ as a nomadic, purposeless, peaceful and timeless savage or as a troublesome aggressive people with no respect for the law (Kenworthy & Kenworthy, 1997). Bradford (1997) describes in detail, for example, how one of the major history texts for students in the 1960s, “The Australian Book”, represented Indigenous people as a unified single culture, simple, lacking technology, and belonging to a mythical and mystical past. In the later part of the 1960’s in the academic world, these white ethnocentric accounts of history began to be contested. In 1968, the distinguished anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner used his Boyer lectures on the ABC to speak of what he called ‘the great Australian silence’: the neglect of Aboriginal people by the country's historians. It was, he said,
a structural matter, a view from a window, which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale.

(Stanner, 1968)

Similarly, John Harris in his monumental work, “One Blood: 200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope”, reflected that ‘far too much of Australia’s recent Aboriginal history has been ignored for far too long. Until the last decade, Australians were taught a laundered history’ (J. Harris, 1990, p. 85). He went on to speak of a ‘whitewashing of the past’ in which Aboriginal people were effectively written out of the history taught to most non-Aboriginal Australians. This situation has continued to change in the last two to three decades through the work of historians such as Henry Reynolds who, with painstaking research into both Aboriginal oral history and European contact history, began exposing the myth that European settlement of Australia was peaceful (Reynolds, 1987). The MECS course uses two articles written by Reynolds in the first section of the course.

Most of the early descriptions of the Australian continent perpetuated the myth of Terra Nullius, which was rooted in imperialistic beliefs where the denial of rights of ownership was justified on the basis that the savage nations had no government or did ‘nothing’ with the land. The 222 years of juridical legitimacy for this concept led to a Terra Nullius mindset and made the occupation of the land by traditional tribes invisible (Butler, 2000). A greater attempt has been made recently to publish local accounts passed down as oral history among some Indigenous groups which re-name these events not as “settlement” but as invasion and dispossession of their land to be recorded such as James Miller’s “Koori, a will to win: The heroic resistance, survival and triumph of Black Australia” (Miller, 1985)

Gilbert (1977) points to the fact that some well meaning critical theorists in representing Aboriginal people as resisters have represented the ‘other’, non-Aboriginal, as cruel aggressors. Personal stories told to him by older
people indicated Indigenous people had a variety of positions regarding the ‘whites’. Some were kind and caring. Similarly, Jordan (1985) found white constructed versions of the repression years (under the protection act) which were taught in Aboriginal studies courses, were characterised by scholarly generalisations and thus depicted the past history in fairly negative images of humiliation and degradation. In contrast he found that Aboriginal knowledge of this era was more particularized with Mr. X being an Ok boss and Mr. Y being a “so and so”. Further, many of the Indigenous people showed a great tolerance and dignity as well as resistance to past injustices.

Some of the complexity of the history of the relationships between Indigenous people and Europeans is picked up in the “Women of the Sun” series without watering down the injustices that occurred and is the main reason the early developers of the MECS program favoured it as a primary resource.

5.1.2 Language

The whole difficulty of learning a new language is also partly about showing the complexity of the culture. The following notes were recorded in my journal after attending a Warlpiri lesson.

Another question asked by the students focussed on the subtlety of the language. The students were saying this language is very difficult. The range of suffixes and how they change the meaning was confusing. It was interesting to see the students notice this. Colin said to me later he was pleased at the students picking this up. He reminded the students in class that Warlpiri people know at least four different languages and their skill at language is generally better than ours, which belies the first impression of them because they might stumble a bit in their English. It can give a false impression that they aren’t very clever. But as you get to realise the number of languages they know and how difficult the language is you get a new appreciation of them.

(from personal journal)

In the interview with Colin he elaborates on the complexity issue of the language:
I've got four or five points that I try to make in my teaching. I'm always upfront with the kids about doing Warlpiri and one of them is that it's a complicated language in its own right. You do meet white people, I haven't met one in a while now, but you do meet them that say “Well their language was just a collection of grunts wasn’t it really?” but it’s not, it’s really a complex thing.

(from interview with Colin J)

In addition, in the introduction to the Warlpiri text used by the MECS students, Colin writes,

Europeans will find the regularity and complexity of the language intriguing. Any study of the language in the limited way as done by MECS will demonstrate that the language is not ‘primitive’ in the sense of being limited or simple and lacking complexity. Being brought face to face with the ergative case will convince anyone that here is a language grammatically exact and yet subtle


5.1.3 Humility

The idea of complexity is also conveyed in the manner that questions are dealt with. Colin pauses quite often when asked questions about the culture and frequently his reply is hesitant not because he has no knowledge but because he realises cultural knowledge is complex and he only knows a little. He is quite quick to say to students as in teaching the songs for Easter: “I don’t know what that word means I have asked and every time I get something different”. He is quite comfortable in replying to some questions asked by the students with “I really doesn’t know” or qualifying his answer with the phrase “well, it is quite complex really” or “it’s a bit to do with that” or “I would say, but others say” These phrases occur frequently in Colin’s communication about Indigenous issues with others.

In the introduction to the text on Warlpiri written he writes:

This book is written by a European who thinks like a European and who stand outside Warlpiri culture. I have no right to speak on behalf of those people. A Warlpiri person might use a different approach to learning the language.

(C. Youl, 1993, p. 3).
5.1.4 Avoiding romanticising

This focus on complexity is very important to counter previously held approaches to Indigenous culture that tended to focus on the technology and suggested that traditional Indigenous culture was ‘primitive’ or simple. Colin, well aware of this bias, makes the quip that this view not only looks narrowly at one dimension of culture but also only looks at recent history.” If you look at the history over a 40,000-year period”, he declares, “Indigenous technology was ahead of European tribes for quite a while”.

The course also tries to avoid the opposite of the simple or primitive picture of culture, through overly romanticising the culture. It does this by reminding the students that Warlpiri complexity is no more complex than the student’s own culture and by pointing out various similarities.

Colin says “in every language there are long and short ways of saying things, Warlpiri is just the same”. Colin is keen to bring out the similarities through reminding the students -“they love football”.

Yeah, they were cool. They were very like us I suppose with a family with kids and the kids had friends

(student interview)

In the interview with Colin, he points to the problem of studying groups academically as only highlighting the differences.

You could look at tribal people academically, but the books that you would use, should invariably be the subtitled ‘101 Really Strange Things about Aboriginal People’. Moreover, I’d just highlight the things that are most alarmingly different. We have used some of those books in the past. But they give kids a really distorted view ‘cause they represent the difference without looking for similarities.

(extract of interview with Colin Japaljarri)

Actively countering the ideas of either culture being “inferior” or “superior” but both being complex but different is important. History has recorded the negative effects of painting cultures as primitive or romantic. Bain Atwood describes how,

The various discourses of “Aboriginalism” impose real limits on what can be thought said or done about Aborigines. It dis-empowers them
because they are made into objects of knowledge over which European Australians as the dispensers of truth about their needs and requirements gain control and determine the terms of their existence.


Michael Dodson sadly commented

That as much as we may want to dismiss these constructions they are the context in which we live, they inform not only the way others think about and react to us but they are also the lived experience that we have of ourselves and of each other. They become the enemy within.

(M. Dodson, 1994, p. 6).

The fine balance of highlighting differences to develop cultural insight and sensitivity to similarities is seen as an important issue by those working in second language teaching who wants to do more than just improve communications.

Too much emphasis on differences can result in a view that there are unbridgeable differences between Us and Them. On the other hand, failure to address cultural differences will result in arrogant and insensible universalism without empathy towards the ‘Other’. Even if the reality is somewhere between such extreme views, cultural teaching is a delicate exercise.

(Dobson, 2001, p. 1).

5.2. Cultures are Sites of Dynamic Struggle

As a follow up to yesterday’s lesson Colin was saying that the Hooker Creek people have handed over some of their Dreaming stories to the Warlpiri people and they themselves have moved further up north and taken over other Dreaming so the ownership of the dreaming is changing over the last 50 years with all the white contact and resettlement.

(from personal journal of lessons.)

The shift in viewing culture from being a static fixed entity to one that is diverse and dynamic was discussed in reviewing the history of the teaching of other cultures in the Chapter 2 (Beckett & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies., 1988; M. Dodson, 1994; S. Hall, 1996).

The picture painted by the course of Warlpiri culture is not only one of being ancient but also of being modern and changing. It is constantly
evolving. Colin uses the phrase ‘They used to’ and ‘some still do- some don’t’ readily when answering student’s questions. The manner in which the material on Aboriginal Christianity is presented also highlights the way Warlpiri culture has adapted and is adapting to its own special way to the daily confrontation of Western culture. The stories of the Scriptures are told using dot painting rather than traditional “sermonizing”. The program therefore does some justice to the call for ‘ambiguity and contradiction not to be swept aside in considering Aboriginality’ (Keeffe, 1988, p. 7). It also presents a concrete example of what Keefe calls resistance by appropriating and giving new meanings to elements of the dominant white culture.

We also see this theme in the point that Colin makes about the adaptation of the Dreaming story described in the previous chapter about Uluru where adaptation took place to incorporate a new tree. Locations and items are important but not as important as the story and adaptations can be made over time.

In the presentation by Peggy and Johnny Creek of their work with petrol sniffers, students also witnessed the response to clashing of culture and new challenges and ways of responding. One student expressed this with the following comment.

I found their love very moving they were prepared to break through normal kinship relationships to care for just anyone.

(from student interviews)

The sociologist Schwartz advocated a view that does more justice to a rapidly changing culture. He argues for a distributive model of culture based on the distribution of knowledge – of beliefs, art, law and customs (Schwartz, 1978). This then allows for a considerable variation in cultural knowledge depending on individual experience.

At this point in the analysis of MECS understanding of culture as complex and dynamic overlaps strongly with the postmodern views of culture outlined in Chapter 2 where under the heading of Culture as Language the ideas of writers such Rorty, Smith and Hall were described. Their position emphasised the fluidity, dynamic and diverse character of the way a culture
is expressed. Although sharing some similarity with these views of culture the understanding behind MECS’s practice has other aspects to it, which set it apart from postmodern views. In particular, MECS has adopted a vertically stratified, dynamic and subjective understanding of culture similar to the culture as perspective position. This position acknowledges the dynamic diversity of cultural expression but also looks for the unity of what a culture expresses, namely, its worldview. This idea is taken up in the next section.

5.3 Cultures are Enacted Worldviews

Two words that appear in most parts of the program are perspective and worldview. The data reveals three ways this idea is central to the understanding that MECS brings to the notion of culture. Worldview deals with foundational beliefs about time, knowledge (ownership and authority) and relationships. The different beliefs about these things are often exposed through the misunderstandings between cultures and the causes of the misunderstandings explained through people using different criteria and values. Examples of this were given in Chapter 4 and are expanded here. As well as different beliefs, the literature review also brought to the fore the role that language plays in viewing the world (Deyhele, et al., 2008). A third aspect of worldview explored in this section is the idea that worldviews are founded on and directed by religious visions (Wentz, 1987). These three aspects, values, language and religious foundations and direction, are connected and expanded in this section as the way MECS understands culture as enacted worldview.

5.3.1 Seeing ways of responding and differences as expressions of worldview

Colin treats the hierarchy and distribution of knowledge of the Dreaming; the transition of this knowledge and ownership; and the relationship to land carefully. Wendy Brady noted that the question of access to knowledge is dealt with quite differently in Australian Aboriginal culture. It is not governed by curiosity but by rules connected to kinship and Dreaming site responsibilities. It is a knowledge that cannot be fragmented and alienated
from its creator (Brady, 1997). This type of access to knowledge is so different for those growing up with knowledge systems historically derived from the Renaissance and Reformation philosophy that it was, and still is, a source of tension and misunderstanding between Indigenous people and curious outsiders.

Colin presents both ways of gaining knowledge. It is presented as the basis for the confusion it caused the early settlers who had a very different idea of hierarchy and ownership. By presenting it in this way, he highlights the interaction of cultures as a clash of two worldviews.

As I am teaching the kids I am trying to bring out that differences and the paradoxes too that each of those positions holds so as not to try and box each position but to show that each position is quite complex (extract from interview with Colin Japaljarri).

This approach creates a kind of spectator space for the students to view both sides and how difficult it was for each group to make sense of each other. What was happening was a fundamental clash of worldviews.

Swain also recognises that there is a huge clash between modern Western culture and Indigenous culture at the level of worldview. He claims that the creating spiritual essence is the key feature of the Aboriginal worldview and it confronts the spiritual/matter dualism of the Cartesian world (Swain, 1991).

Through the training the MECS teachers receive from the National Institute for Christian Education and its core unit on “Worldview”, MECS adopts a pre–rational, dynamic and fluid understanding of worldview (Fowler, 2006). In terms of the discussion about worldview held in Chapter 2 the outworking of the program places worldview closely to an overriding story of life, expressed culturally (Fernhout, 1997; Lyotard, 1984). Equally, it places the understanding of culture as both perspective and object. It understands in Gullestrup’s terminology how this worldview foundation (story) is responsible for the shaping of all the layers above it and as such is the key to understanding why cultures differ (Gullestrup 2006). Culture is not treated by MECS purely as worldview held internally, but it is something
always expressed externally in the pattern of social and economic
teractions, and the shaping of materials. Nor is it just the physical patterns
of responses. The position of culture as *enacted worldview* straddles the
ideas outlined in Chapter 2 between culture as perspective and culture as
object.

In the earlier discussion about worldview, the importance of internal
consistency of a worldview and its own rationality was highlighted and the
importance of thinking about what another culture does in terms of its
worldview rather than one’s own, was put forward. An example of this
teaching was outlined in the literature with the analysis of Bororo’s thinking
as “irrational”. The understanding of other cultures as enacted worldview
and viewing them in terms of their own worldview will be argued later as an
important key in establishing a good basis for valuing various cultures.

In the literature on worldview it was argued that worldview beliefs were
deeply held beliefs. The depth of the different beliefs held by Indigenous
people is also shown in the detailed stories of the disruption that Colin tells
was caused when traditional owners of the knowledge had no one to pass
the stories and songs on to when people became alcoholics or died or when
access to the land was denied. The enormity of these events changes when
viewed through an Indigenous person’s view of the world. Who passes on
the knowledge, who now owns it? The depth of the link with the land is also
brought out by revealing to students the enormity of the loss of land
(country). Colin acknowledges the laments of the older people when they
ask who will do the ceremonies that bring about health for the land and
them as a people.

Indigenous people have this huge infrastructure plonked on their
doorsstep and everywhere we went there’d be Aboriginal people at the
Central Land Council, at the medical crowd and at CAAMA telling us
that there are Dreaming sites all around us here but people don’t have
access to them anymore. They can’t use them for their ceremonial
purpose because they’ve got things built all over them and they can’t
keep white people out. This was a difficult reality to convey to sixteen
year olds.

(from interview with Colin Japaljarri )
The rationale for using "Women of the Sun" and the local Warlpiri media videos such as "Bush Mechanics" in the course is justified by the school because it is seen as very important to look at events past and present from an Aboriginal perspective. The aims of the course state ‘it is too easy to represent events from our own viewpoint’ (Aboriginal Studies Course Outline, MECS, 2004 p.1). Viewing events as much as possible from an Aboriginal perspective is listed as one of the primary aims of the program in the school’s curriculum document.

5.3.2 Language and worldview

The choice to teach Warlpiri language was also linked closely to the theme of wanting to expose the worldview of the people. Language is seen by MECS as an important tool into showing the way people think about the world. Social theories of language see language as a creation of the social world, and consider that individuals are apprenticed into the rules and conventions of their social groups (McCoy, 2004; Trudgen, 2000).

The argument that culture and language are closely connected has been made by social lingual theorists such as Malinowski, Saussure, Sapir and Whorf. Learning a language also entails the internalisation of the ideology embedded in that language (Gadd, 1999).

Even if Whorf’s hypothesis is seen as an extreme case and his examples misconceived, his belief that language influences our thought and that language and culture interact and influence each other persists (Weirzbicka, 1997). Many people who have crossed linguistic boundaries witness and experience instances that confirm the notion that language and a way of understanding the world are closely connected.

Belcher (2005) writes about the importance of realising that in one’s own culture there are gaps and silences to represent certain ideas and concepts found in other cultures and in those cases it is important to adopt the new word from the other language (Belcher, 2005). This is one of the reasons that students are encouraged to use the word Jurkuppa rather than Dreaming.
What the students and I experienced in the Warlpiri lessons could not be easily placed into any of the three paradigms outlined in the history and development of Indigenous programs for schools in Chapter 2. Even though there was a serious attempt to learn some language, the overall aim was not to make students competent in Warlpiri and improve clarity in communication, as is the aim of those working from a purely communications paradigm (Liddicoat, 2001). Most students in the interviews lamented at their inability to be competent in a conversation with people in the community.

My regret is we didn’t do more Warlpiri. The little we were taught made it difficult to understand even simple things they were saying.

(from student interviews)

The focus of the course instead was to establish a link between culture’s worldview and language. Some of the chapters in the students’ Warlpiri booklet have a footnote section called “Aren’t Languages Wonderful”. These are sections which explicitly link the language with the culture. An example of this is the use of please and thank you.

Warlpiri does not have a word for please or thank you. The reason for this is the strong emphasis in Warlpiri culture of obligation. When you operate in a culture that has serious obligation and responsibility towards people then doing things for them is expected, so you don’t need to ask. Similarly, when the act has been done there was little choice, so saying thank you is not appropriate.


Colin shifts easily between vocabulary and the use and meaning of objects; language and views of Christianity; language and the subject of taboos such as Kumanji. Each year Colin makes sure he teaches the importance of the word Kumanji, bringing it up in several contexts. It is a word used to replace the name of a person who has died. The presence of this word immediately points to different cultural understandings about death.

Seen this way, the teaching of Warlpiri language plays a decisive role in helping the students to understand that the Warlpiri people perceive and structure their world differently (Dobson, 2001).
5.3.3 The Dreaming and worldview: The Centrality of being religious

In the lesson today Colin dealt with the Dreaming ancestors in Warlpiri culture. He started by showing how the whole country is a grid of Dreaming places. Every place has a dreaming ancestor and Dreaming story. He recalls actual places he has visited, draws maps on the board in relationship to Yuendumu and just describes beautifully all the places around Yuendumu. He is easily sidetracked in telling stories to emphasise a point about the people he has met. He links the stories with the people. He highlights the points like - "I can’t tell you that name because the person has died and it not proper to use their name" He told a story of how people found their way around the country and of a person who got lost because now they travel so much by car they don’t know their way around the country as much as they used to. He told a story about the importance of ceremony in bringing out the power for the land to reproduce. He knows the stories of Honey Ant Dreaming, Kangaroo Dreaming, Emu Dreaming and Seven Women Dreaming.

(extract of personal journal,)

A third element of understanding enacted worldview is the religious character of the beliefs that guide the pattern of people’s living. This comes through in the data, particularly the way the Dreaming is presented as a religious perspective, integrally connected to everything. Many commentators acknowledge that an important key to understanding Indigenous culture revolves around understanding the Dreaming.

The Dreaming holds the key. It provides the ontological, epistemological and evaluative framework that shapes and directs all aboriginal thought and action So to understand the Aboriginal worldview we must examine the Dreaming.

(Teasdale & Ma Rhea, 2000)

April Wilson and Lynda Matthews, Indigenous workers in the education system, reminded teachers at a national conference that,

The Dreaming is central to existence of many Aboriginal people as it gives meaning to everyday life it determines values beliefs relationships with every living thing and is the link between people and the environment and it establishes kinship laws and social structure.
Where these things are understood and included in the centre
Aboriginal families and children feel valued.

(Wilson & Matthews, 2001, p. 2).

Yet despite this sacred and worldview nature of the Dreaming, some paradigms of teaching about Indigenous culture persist in presenting the stories within the European mechanistic paradigm of seeing the land and other objects with no inherent value, supernatural or otherwise (Teasdale & Ma Rhea, 2000). Common in Western society is the belief that nothing in nature other than the human mind is capable of making judgments. Values in human society and nature can therefore only be subjectively determined (Slade & Morgan 1997). This leads inevitably to relegating the Dreaming to the status of a "fairy tale" rather than as a sacred text, that informs all of life.

This comes through when the stories are told without any connection to a place or particular groups of Indigenous people. I have personally seen classes that deal with the Dreaming as a genre for writing and encourage students to write their own "dreamtime story". Partington (1998) advocates that discourses on the Dreaming and spirituality ought to recognise the subtleties and specificity of Aboriginal beliefs and their diversity. In an Indigenous sense, the boundary between religion and culture is blurred and has a strong bearing on how you deal with Indigenous culture.

The Dreaming is not put into the category of “legends or myths” but as spiritual stories. The literal truth of the stories is not the issue, and is treated the same way as the school treats parables and stories like the creation story in Genesis.

It seems clear from the data that MECS does adopt the position of seeing the Dreaming as “religious” and as a worldview. It interprets the word religious in a broad and deep way, arising from the philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd who put forward the idea that all humans are centrally religious beings and live their life as an outworking of faith commitments (Dooyeweerd, 1957). (See chapter 6 for the development of this point). In this paradigm, it is normal to allow religious beliefs to influence all of daily life. In contrast, those adopting a secular framework of religion would see
the notion of religious beliefs guiding every action in life not as normal, but strange and exotic. The call for religion in a secular framework is usually for it to mind its own business and keep out of politics, education and stay segregated to some areas of life. This secular stance on religion can create alienation when relating to an Indigenous culture. Alternatively, using a worldview approach blurs the boundaries between religion and culture. Considering all cultures as “out workings of a religious vision for life” provides more opportunities for building respectful relationships between cultures than one that restricts religion to certain area of life.

A second failure of many schools is to keep the Dreaming to a time gone past. Putting the dreaming into a Western ontology of time rather than acknowledging time in an Indigenous sense which has the past and present occurring at the same time. Stanner (1968) referred to this as “everywhen”.

The grounding of the stories to certain people and places adopted by MECS also avoids the problem of romanticizing religion and spirituality, and trying to keep it in the metaphysical realm (Rolls, 2001). One the aims for Dreaming section of the MECS course states

To help the students to see the central and religious nature of the dreaming for Indigenous culture and to acknowledge this as a key to understanding Indigenous people and cultures.

(MECS’ Aboriginal Studies Course outline p.1)

Colin reiterates this with,

But in their society it is unconceivable for an Aboriginal person to step outside his Dreaming in order in order to see what the world would be like, they just can’t. The Dreaming and the understanding of life that comes from that permeates everything they do. It is central to their understanding.

(extract from class notes).

This understanding at MECS comes through with the linking of Dreamtime/Jukurrpa to issues such as the importance of the land, kinship and social structure, explanations of artwork and Aboriginal Christianity. It is also not surprising that these distinctions between Dreaming, worldview
and religion are fluid and broad given MECS’s own understanding of these concepts, and which are the subject of the next chapter.

5.4 Ideas about Teaching Culture: Integrality

As well as teasing out various dimensions from the data about culture there are also key concepts surrounding pedagogy and curriculum i.e. issues in how to teach about culture. Two shaping forces that emerged from the data were the integral curriculum and challenging culture/worldview. Where and how they emerge from the data is described in the next section.

5.4.1 The integral curriculum

The school at the time was unhappy with the language we were teaching and connecting a language to other programs seemed more in keeping with the integral approach. (from extract of interview with Colin)

A red flagged term in going through the data was the word integral. This word occurs 23 times in data, collected through interviews and in the school literature. It is a key word in understanding the paradigm of curriculum that the school uses. As outlined in Chapter 2, various conceptions of curriculum influence the development of teaching Indigenous studies in schools. The concept of integral is distinct from subject, thematic or integrated based programs. One of the features of an integral curriculum is its ontology, declaring a world as existing in discreet but related entities subject to and expressing itself in multidimensional ways. One subject alone cannot capture or develop this concrete, multidimensional experience of the world.

On the surface it seems the approach taken by MECS is similar to the approach advocated by some Indigenous people such as West (2000) who encouraged schools to integrate the Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum to all subject areas. Language is taught in the context of culture and culture is taught in the context of language such as the aside Colin makes when teaching the word for spear and boomerang.

Boomerang KARLI say this karli. It is a club like boomerang. The Warlpiri don’t have boomerangs that return. Spear-kurlada. It is without a barb Woomera - Pikirri you might come across these.
Students also experienced the fluid boundaries between history, culture and language. Some found this confusing while others enjoyed it.

The course can be a bit confusing sometimes the language, history and culture seemed to be all mixed up and not just connected to our Warlpiri class or our Koori class.

I loved the style of teaching. One minute he may be talking about the history of Victorian Aborigines and the next about Queensland or Christianity at Yuendumu.

Warlpiri and Koori were nearly the same subject. He talks a lot about Warlpiri people in Koori and in Warlpiri classes he talks a lot about history, they we nearly the same subject.

( a selection of student interviews)

The notion of fluidity across subject boundaries is one aspect that has similarities with an integrated approach but an integral approach has other dimensions that make it distinct. The first is that the starting point for developing understanding about the world and cultures is direct or everyday experience. Second, closely related to this is the sticking to particulars. Both of these are further explained.

5.4.2 The importance of direct experience

The importance of direct experience of Indigenous people and their lives in an unstructured way as a starting point and testing point for the development of knowledge comes out in several ways. Excursions and camps have played a prominent part in the students’ learning program in the development of MECS’s curriculum. In 1981 there was a lament that this philosophy had not been as developed in the Year 10 program. Colin recalled “At the time the Year 10 program was the only program without a major camp or excursion”

In an interview with one of the schools founding board members, the school’s philosophy was prominent in their decision-making.

At that time, the principal had come with a detailed proposal for the purchase of a bus and we discussed it. We were all enthusiastic about this, it was a natural development of the school’s philosophy of getting
involved experientially in the creation. We jokingly called it the mobile classroom. One board member who had been to the centre several times and to communities was enthusiastic about the idea.

Colin also points to earlier attempts to teach Indigenous culture without reference to an actual experience of Indigenous people.

Without experiencing the Aboriginal people for themselves the program had the potential to descend to lots of generalisations contributing to stereotyping.

The avoidance of stereotyping and over generalised understanding of Indigenous history, culture and the everyday lives of Indigenous people is critical for the course.

When asked what he saw as the values of the Centre Trip Colin states:

So what we’re able to do through Yuendumu is now, I think, we can view the whole of what happens in central Australia more from an Aboriginal perspective and we can say that these are tribal people, this is what tribal people are like, we can convince them 100% convince them that skin names are real, that they really do use them every day and the kinship system really still works, all of that stuff. They’re not naked people, they don’t use spears anymore, in the case of fighting. They live in a sort of accommodation with Western society but when they go home to Yuendumu, they really are stepping back into their own society and all around them there are the place names and Dreaming sites and Dreaming paths going across. The ceremonies still happen. When they go into Alice Springs, it’s like, they’re different people. And many groups of kids experience that for themselves ‘cause they’ll see individuals in town that they’ve also seen out at Yuendumu and they’re just different, they’re an underclass in town and they act like an underclass.

The integral approach has embedded within it the idea of unity and diversity. The philosophy behind this approach and the technical details of this were introduced in Chapter 2 (Blomberg, 2007). It suffices here to say that an out working of this philosophy is to acknowledge that there exist general patterns that enable us to recognise and identify distinctions between things, people and cultures but these unifying principle or patterns (norms) are expressed in millions of diverse ways. These patterns or
generalizations are not legalist laws but broader boundaries within each dimension or entity that has endless possibilities for expression, yet the norm gives it a distinct identity. In the physical world, a great example of this principle is snowflakes.

For this reason, it is important in this approach when identifying a general characteristic to connect it to specific contexts so that both the multitude of diverse responses and the ‘laws standing behind it’ can be experienced and appreciated simultaneously. A way this happens in the MECS Indigenous studies program is in the constant personalising of the general.

5.4.3 Personalising the General: Grounding ideas in particularity

Colin refers in his stories to the names of actual people and places and the way things happened to them at a particular point in time. An example of this was related from my journal in the previous chapter. He recalls,

The story of a fight that broke out and shows how people were drawn in because of kinship obligation. In the stories, he adds something that you wouldn’t get in any other courses because he adds “I have met one of the men written about in this book. These are stories about real living people, they are just not made up. People really did live this way.

(personal journal)

We see the same thing in action in the description of injustices perpetrated against Indigenous people. In his slide presentation, Liam showed some pictures of mining sites and various Warlpiri men who worked from morning to night and were not paid any wages. His presentation is full of particular people and places that anchor the stories of injustice to specifics that are complex and multidimensional.

What comes through in this initial analysis of the data surrounding the teaching of Warlpiri is the overriding influence of the school’s philosophy of Integral curriculum and it focus on concrete specific people and events as one of the key drivers in shaping the practice of the program.
5.5 Transformational Purpose: Challenging one's own Culture

The introductory chapter of this study posited that various purposes for schooling also influence the responses to teaching Indigenous culture in schools. The earlier literature review outlines the liberal democratic ideals of tolerance (Kymlicka, 1995) and suggests expanding one’s horizons of reconciliation and social justice as some of those purposes (Apple, 1990).

In the last chapter the description of the encounters between new arrivals and Indigenous locals was portrayed as a clash of worldviews. Giroux (2000) warns that ideal approaches to teaching, for example language skills, can easily be subsumed under various paradigms and purposes for education. Similarly, the approach to understanding a particular Indigenous group in terms of their own worldview can be subsumed by other motives. MECS goes further than just trying to understand the differences as differences in worldview. It wants to use these experiences to challenge the students’ own worldview and culture. In their short time at Yuendumu it is hoped that the students are confronted with difference. An important part of this process is not to experience this difference as a basis for boosting one’s own identity at the expense of others but to begin the process within the students of challenging the worldview they are working with daily.

What became clear in looking through the data was challenge as a significant factor in why MECS do Indigenous study the way they do. Various practices exposed students critically to their own worldview. This was a major aim of the school. In the interview with the principal it was the first thing he noted regarding the value of the program.

When I get new parents here I talk to them about the culture and being educated. An ignoramus is a pawn who is used by all sorts of cultural forces, doesn't think, not aware of culture, just reaches decisions, without thinking about his decisions. If you think about it, most of the decisions we’ve made are so channelled by our culture, the car we buy, what we wear, what we spend our money on, are so channelled by our culture that an uneducated person doesn’t know culture exists. He’s a will-o’-the-wisp, he’s washed along by culture isn’t he? A challenge for schools, for parents, a challenge for parents
and schools is to ensure that all our young adults are aware of their culture.

(extract of interview with principal)

The theme of challenge can also be seen in the historical basis for the school. Challenging the secular humanism of modern society was the prime concern of the founding parents, and has been taken seriously by past principals. Teachers are encouraged in educating the students in critically examining the tenets of secular humanism and the way it shapes everyday “normality”.

Starting from a position that all human cultural activity is religious in nature that ultimately serves some cause, idea or God, the school has also become critical of a system that favours rationality and mastery above other dimensions in the establishment of truth. ‘A fundamental critique of Western education is its reliance on mastery without reference to the other purposes of knowledge such as appreciation, critique and service’ (S Fowler, 1988, p. 2).

When placed in a spectrum of curriculum ideologies, MECS regards itself as ‘Transformational’ which has the most overlap with ‘social reconstructionalists’ who see the role of the school as preparing people to transform society (Schiro, 2008, p. 149).

You cannot lead students to a critique of culture if your staff has not developed it for themselves; therefore MECS has a staff employment policy that asks all staff to undertake postgraduate training with the National Institute for Christian Studies. These studies introduce the staff to the religious roots of the movement, the key features of a Christian worldview and process and understanding of curriculum evaluation and development from the perspective of knowledge as wisdom. Several of the key staff involved in this study have undertaken these studies.

Challenging one’s own worldview is easier said than done. The discussion in Chapter 2 about the nature of worldviews led to the acknowledgement of difficulty of exposing one’s own worldview (Fowler, 2006). MECS has developed a number of ways to meet this challenge
5.5.1 Methods employed to challenge the student’s worldview

An important contribution to the conversation about worldviews that MECS brings is its experience of how to teach about worldview and challenge students’ worldviews. As stated in the literature worldviews are not just what people say they believe but can only be confronted when experiencing differences in patterns of living and it was claimed that the exposing and challenging worldviews is difficult work. The data reveal three methods that MECS uses to teach about and challenge worldviews.

The first method involves the deliberate teaching and information about the nature of worldviews, in a formal course on the subject. Closely connected to this is the application of these formal ideas in explaining patterns of responses attributed to Indigenous people in the stories of early contact and other parts of the course material. The second method is through the language work and the third is through the experience of being in Yuendumu.

5.5.2 Formal teaching of the terminology and concepts

Initially the students are exposed to the terminology and ideas of worldview through a formal subject called “Worldviews” which is taught throughout Term 1 as a standalone subject. It explains the different patterns of responding to common things such as family as expressions of worldview. The content of this course follows some of the text from the “Transforming Vision” (Walsh & Middelton, 1984) which introduces the four basic questions of Who am I?; Where am I?; What is wrong? and What is the solution? These questions are then referred to in the Indigenous studies program. In the trip booklet, on Day 3 is a study that the students do in the bus that says,

Our culture is never a product of an individual but of the group’s response to the following four-worldview questions
Who am I?, Where am I?, What is the problem ?and What is the remedy?
Culture has to do with all aspects of living. Seldom is there one best way of eating, dressing and worshipping. Culture is learnt unconsciously by living in a situation. It becomes habit or what seems
normal. Our culture makes sense to us, Aboriginal culture makes sense to them. No culture is primitive, they are all complex.

(page 17 of Centre Trip booklet)

The term worldview is also used in course to explain the clash between the first arrivals and Indigenous people. For example, Colin refers to the way a person’s worldview stops them from thinking of alternative explanations. In the lesson on the first contact he tells the students, ‘no one ever leaves their land because it is their source of life, so it was logical for them to think of white people as returned ancestors or ghosts’.

It is easier for students to see the process of how a worldview works its way through a different culture to express itself than to see this in their own culture. Colin acknowledges this process with the following observation:

I've noticed in many kids the effects of looking into the Warlpiri culture (which is not to store up a lot of information so that it can be used later in life), is that it makes you focus on your own culture. And that is the spin off. Though the kids become very aware of what the Warlpiri do, they also begin to ask how do we do that and why do we do it differently. Why do we do it our way and what has shaped our past to do it that way?

(extract of interview with Colin).

As well as general information on worldviews, students are provided with detailed background notes of the articulated beliefs, foundational to Indigenous life. The course has, as described in the last chapter, a large section on the Dreaming and Aboriginal Christianity which are the source of many of the beliefs that shape their everyday life. The course covers eight lessons specifically on the Dreaming using Stanner’s seven key principles. The students study a documented parallel view of the key ideas in Western worldview and in Aboriginal worldview. These teachings or beliefs, together with modern secular humanism compete daily in the outworking of a complex worldview that influences and makes sense of daily life in Yuendumu. The teachers use this information selectively at appropriate times to guide the students to interpret the meaning of Indigenous responses to events. Hopefully, student begin to interpret what they experience in the light of this complex set of competing worldviews faced by
Indigenous people, and it gives them a deeper understanding of the ‘surface’ culture experienced.

5.5.3 Language

A second aspect of confronting worldview comes from learning the language. In the literature review various authors such as Friere, Conde and Io Bianco draw attention to the close links between worldview and language. Various examples of the way the Warlpiri introduces new concepts and ideas were described in Chapter 4. These include words for those who have died, or for responsibilities for sites, or how skin names determine relationships and create new possibilities to give insights into these events that the students’ normal language does not allow.

Morrow, a researcher who accompanied the students for one of the trips observed in his journal the importance of the language program. With the following:

Warlpiri is complex and can express things that our language can’t. Through the language you get to think about things differently. The beauty of the Warlpiri course lies not just in the teaching of the language for the language sake but also in the opportunities it presents for the students to work through cultural and spiritual aspects of the Warlpiri system and society. They think differently, teaching the language therefore helps to engender a deeper interest in the culture.

(Morrow, 1997 p. 33)

5.5.4 Direct experience

By far the most effective strategy to confront and challenge worldview is for the students to experience life in Yuendumu and Alice directly as part of the trip. Chapter 4 described several graphic encounters of experiencing acceptance, sharing and community. Colin comments on what happens when the students get to Yuendumu.

The students are constantly playing around with a way of seeing the connections to others and obligation responsibilities. They really do this. They have their own skin name and work with it constantly over the three days at Yuendumu. For a few days after that on our way home my life is constantly interrupted by kids wanting to know “if I am
such and such who’s my first choice in marriage”. “That kid who always wears the Collingwood jumper how am I related to him”. All that stuff we talked about in the class becomes alive and real for the kids as a way of relating and being.

There are two aspects to why this direct experience is so powerful in challenging worldviews. They are “strangeness” leading to disequilibrium and the opportunity for guided interpretations.

In the literature review, disequilibrium was identified as one of the key factors in changing and challenging worldviews (McNally 1973). Being exposed to a different worldview was one way disequilibrium occurs. It was there in Colin’s comments about the students’ first experience of the way the Yuendumu team played football with the phrase ‘That’s how they work things out, that’s how they like it. It immediately confronted us about the way we do things’. Our worldview provides a sense of normality and predictability about what we see and expect around us (Fowler, 2006)

Immersing students in another culture where people respond beyond what is expected raises the feeling of strangeness. One student commenting on the way they were received, was surprised by the unexpected welcome:

Getting there it was heaps different; I never expected them to be so welcoming and friendly as they were. After all we had never met before.

Similarly, another teacher familiar with the trip and the community over many years, Colin Jampinjimpa, refers to the feeling of being displaced through the desert journey. “It adds to the mystique and the sense of being displaced from your own, from what you know to what you don’t know”.

Bennet (2004) argues that the feeling dimension of strangeness is important. This is particularly true if you acknowledge that worldview is more than a mental construct and also penetrates other dimensions of being human. This aspect of challenging worldview is also acknowledged by the teachers who teach the formal course on worldview. One teacher put it this way
You can get kids to answer all of the questions in an assignment on the worldview of Western culture but you sense that for many it is an intellectual exercise and the personal challenge is avoided.

(interview with a MECS Year 10 teacher)

This view was also expressed by several of the students.

I think the course is OK but you really have to see things to make an impact on you. The info is interesting but they stay in the realm of stories and they might or might not be true and you have to experience it for your self.

In his interview, Colin reflects on the time he spends with what he calls his Warlpiri brothers and sisters.

No matter how hard you try to keep thinking of them as being close and the same as you, you also keep bumping into that they aren’t, they view the world differently.

The best example in the course of the power of experiencing different behaviour attributed to different worldview is when the students are confronted with the bearing and outlook (spirit) of Indigenous people being connected directly to place. In Alice Springs many Indigenous people look ‘dispirited’, they keep their head down, they look out of place, even the Warlpiri people who are known. At Yuendumu they are different, they stand erect, smile, seem purposeful, friendly. On the hunting trip in country away from the town, the demeanor changes again. There is real joy, laughter, a sense of belonging as described in Chapter 4. Colin prepares the students to notice this and several commented about it. He reminds the students of the implicit nature of worldviews by noting that it is not that people say to themselves “I am going to behave like this here”. It is something that just bubbles up from the inside and has to do with the view and understanding of place. Seeing this, experiencing this, is being confronted by a worldview.

An important part of these different confronting experiences leading to challenge is the pointing out that goes on when the students reflect on their experience. Colin assists them in interpreting their experiences. Colin explains to the students the meanings of their experience of Indigenous people and their way of doing things. He is a person who has observed for a
long time and listened to their explanations. He is particularly attuned to the way Warlpiri culture view knowledge, ownership and relationships. He makes sense of things such as why getting permission and deciding on things can be difficult for whites, or why they sit segregated in the church. The challenge to worldview can also be seen in the description of the issue about the film “Rabbit Proof Fence” where Colin reminds the students who were quick to judge the people of the past that the people of that era were looking at life through the worldview lens of Social Darwinism, which measured skulls and believed that white culture was more evolved. This worldview made what they did seem normal. He challenges the students that it is easy to see the false worldview of others that lead to destructive acts but are they aware of our current worldview and the destruction it is reaping on the world?

This last comment is pivotal in understanding the motivation and rationale for the program at MECS. Becoming aware of the worldview that surrounds students and challenging that worldview is a one of the primary reasons for the schools existence.

By experiencing the power of worldview in another culture it became easier to convince students that it also operates behind their culture and to pose the questions to the students such as-what are the beliefs that underpin their way of being in the world and further, what does the Gospel say about these beliefs.

In an interview with the principal he sums it up this way:

> It reminds me of the story of the professor who had a gold fish in his bowl. A young girl visiting him felt sorry for the fish. And so while he was making a coffee she freed his goldfish, she set his goldfish free. And he came back with the coffee and he said “Excuse me, where’s my goldfish?” and she said “It’s alright professor, don’t worry. It’s free. I set it free.” “Where did you set it free?” “Underneath the sofa.” And he got it back into the water and the fish was (gasping). The goldfish never realised there was such a thing as water until that girl rescued him from it and he nearly died. Now I think the beauty of our Aboriginal Studies program, particularly the culmination in the Centre Trip is to remove these often self-satisfied, often affluent, eastern
suburbs of Melbourne kids, middle-class kids, lift them out of their culture and put them out of the water. And breathe this, breathe these drunks in the street, breathe the white man walking past the black man on the street and never making eye contact. Breathe this. Go to Yuendumu and breathe the pride of these people and their land and breathe the different culture. I think our kids are challenged by being confronted with something very different. And the value is not for me that they all get knowledge of an Aboriginal culture. The value is that having that insight, they then think “Oh that’s why Ruby’s going to marry that man. Why do we do it differently in our own culture”? or “That’s why he’s called such and such. How do we do it in our culture”? What is valuable in our culture? They realise the existence of this culture they live in, and I think that is arming them to be culture shapers rather than culture followers.

5.6. What beliefs and values were challenged?

The previous section outlined the strategies employed by the school to make students aware of their own culture and values. The data were examined to see what particular beliefs were challenged. The evidence from the students revealed a spectrum of challenge. The staff noted that every year there were some students, a small minority of students unwilling to reflect or challenge their own culture perspectives as demonstrated in the resentment to the “we don’t climb” policy described in Chapter 4. On the other side, each year some students are very challenged and based on their response, two students are sponsored to return to Yuendumu to do work experience in one of the towns’ industries, such as the child care centre. Writing in the school newsletter two girls wrote “We want to go, we feel safe going on our own to our friends”.

Confronting and challenge comes out strongly in the interviews with the students. They expressed this in various places.

A past student wrote this in his poem response while on the trip.

We have experienced different cultures
become fish out of the water
Shame it all has to end
Our minds being stressed and stretched
Our brains being battered and burdened with experience after experience
Shame it all has to end

In this next section I have selected samples of some of the challenges that students articulated through participating in the program. One of the common themes was the confrontation and awareness of individualism of their everyday world.

The football game was amazing. I was in the forward line and kicked three goals but what really stood out to me was the way they played, they weren’t selfish they were so sharing and kind and passed the ball off all of the time and, like, depending on your skin relationship they would be kind to you and go easy on you. Like in our culture we want everything for our self the goals for ourselves but they didn’t seem to mind who was winning. They just wanted to get out there and have fun they are not really as competitive as me.

And

It didn’t matter that they were only five, they all played and had a go and encouraged each other even changing the rules to help the younger ones. That kind of hit me that, would we do it that way? They didn’t really care who won, they just wanted to play.

And

Yeah, on the hunting trip, I was eating my kangaroo tail and it took me ages to get it and I was standing in line for what seemed like an hour and I thought right that is it, no one is going to get any of this and D.. asked me for a bite and I said “no! nick off it took me ages to get this” and one of the aboriginal kids said to me “Hey he’s your brother you must give it to him” like he told me that and so I did and then I offered it to him , and then we were just standing together with our arms around each other eating this kangaroo tail, just sharing it and wow-you never forget that.

A lot of students also commented on the way the skin name system enables everyone to relate instantly.

Yeah, like when I came here from another school it took me a long time to get to know everyone that I do know now and like there you just rock up and you are friends instantly.
A third area mentioned frequently related to the message of our culture that the greater number of material goods will make you happy.

Yeah well I was struck by the way they are always so happy in all the circumstances that they had. If we were living in that circumstance we would all be complaining I want this or that but they barely had anything but they were so happy because they have got each other. We are nothing like that.

In the interviews, several students talked about experiencing how they view the land:

I felt the closer the people are to their land the happier and more relaxed they are, just comparing the hunting trip with the way people were in Alice you get a big difference. The place means more to them. Our moods and wellbeing have to do with other things.

Just before the trip, based on their studies so far, I surveyed the students. They were also asked to fill in ways of categorising what each culture would notice about each other. Students were aware that their Western ideals of being independent and the community would probably notice such things as self-absorbent, not sharing and loudness about them. Conversely, they predicted that what might stand out to them was the community's sense of belonging, respect of elders and being generous.

Most the parents also noted changes in their students after the trip. At the Centre Trip celebration night held later that term, one parent said their son had become more culturally sensitive and another commented on the fact that her daughter was less materialistic and less ‘cliquey’.

No specific data has been collected to see what effect the program has on past students but anecdotal evidence from students I have met and other teachers have met over the years is strong. Several past students and teachers of the school are working with or for Indigenous communities.

One of the biggest challenges is the issue of injustice. The course and the trip, both confront participants with the past and present injustices facing Indigenous people. This issue is taken up in the next section.
5.7 Concern for Justice

One way of explaining why the program is an important one is because of its themes of justice and culture. An educated person is a person who knows what justice and injustice is. That’s an educated person, a well educated person, however, has a commitment to justice. You cannot really have a commitment to justice unless you have experienced injustice. And I think our Aboriginal Studies program can give them a vicarious experience of injustice. Because it puts them in a position where they empathise with Aboriginal people and empathising with them, dealing with them and looking at their history, they get a view of the injustice. And I like to think a lot of our kids get passionate about the unfair treatment of Australia’s Indigenous people. It starts at primary school but it comes to fruition I think in Year 10. So that’s the justice side of it.

(extract of interview with the Principal)

A further reason for starting the program and sustaining it was the issue of justice. The first encounters with Indigenous people challenged not only worldviews but the place and role Indigenous people had and have in Australian society. The original issue on the first trip encountered was the building of a recreational lake on a sacred site. This issue was multiplied all over the country and through history. As the MECS community began to hear the stories of the Warlpiri people and the events of their lives such as Darby’s stories of his work on cattle station where he received no pay, or stories about the work on the mines with little or no pay they were confronted with injustice. The MECS community experienced the stories of the people’s love and attachment to the land and how they were removed from some their Dreaming places and from their mothers. When they experienced firsthand the health problems, poor education and crowded living conditions, MECS, like anyone who begins to spend time with Indigenous people, came face to face with injustice. The school’s acknowledgement of this situation was first of all to take the responsibility seriously of confronting students with these stories. That is, not to present a whitewashed version of what happened and what is happening or to remain silent. It also, through its focus on worldview, identified the source of these actions as a commitment to Western ideals of ‘progress’ and ‘ownership’
with its roots in Humanism as being superior and of more importance than an Indigenous view of the world. The forceful dispossession of people from their own land, forceful separation of communities and families was, and is, represented by the school as gross acts of injustice. It was felt that students at this age were old enough to be confronted with these realities and to be encouraged to support the Indigenous communities’ calls for justice. Many of the students spoke about how the course shocked them about the realities of what had happened in the past and of the treatment of Indigenous people by white people.

It also makes me sad and frustrated. I wish so much that the problems that still exist, after all this time, could be over. It is a shock to see the way they live. I fear that if all of this isn’t resolved soon those who embraced me will lose who they are and forget where they have come from.

I found it is interesting to see the ones in the missions and how they were forced to change their names. It was losing a whole part of them and the white people didn’t care. They didn’t really see the Aboriginals’ side of things.

Yeah it made me realise how nasty the whites have been towards the Aborigines. Just separating the children from them so they never got to see them again. I thought that was rally harsh.

They probably didn’t realise, because they thought of them as not quite human.

(Quotes from various students’ interviews)

In a school newsletter Colin Japaljarri writes

Yuendumu is a complex place. Life expectancy is not high. There are preventable diseases, which do not get checked. The education system fails to work for many people. There are many paradoxes. Our students are tomorrow’s citizens, tax payers and voters. I hope that any of us who own the name of Christ will always seek to be loving, just and kind in considering our social and political responsibilities. As well, I hope the experience of a Centre Trip and a few days in another world will mean that our kids resist negative, crippling stereotypes and
if faced with them will be able to say something like “Wait a minute. I met some of these people and they were not like that!”

(MECS school Newsletter May, 2005)

5.8 The Role of Christianity in it all

One cannot talk about justice or injustice in a vacuum. The title of ‘Christian’ in Mount Evelyn Christian school distinguishes it from other independent schools and implicitly connects it with the lineage of the ‘missions’ era in Indigenous history. In representing a great deal of the actions towards Indigenous people as unjust, the role of the church and Christianity cannot be ignored. On the one hand there is the prophesy of the minor prophets of the Scriptures condemning the rich and powerful for their treatment of the poor and more vulnerable, prodding the ears of people committed to ‘Kingdom of God’ principles and yet history has shown that there was a very close alliance between colonial domination of other nations and peoples and the role of the church. Civilising ‘primitives’ was often synonymous with ‘Christianising’ them and missionaries and missions were often complicit and uncritical of liberal and humanistic schemes of their day to ‘educate’ Indigenous people and assimilate them into white culture, eradicating their culture and lands. The video presentation of “Women of the Sun” showed the mission era as one that forbade local people to practice their culture and language. Brian McCoy interviewing Pat Dodson and Jacinta Elston on their church experience acknowledges the assimilation approach.

The pressure to assimilate from churches has rarely been acknowledged nor have the church’s own particular and historical forms of prejudice about Aboriginal culture and beliefs been much explored. Not only did missionaries work closely with the Government and accept its policies but they accepted that Christian faith was superior to Aboriginal beliefs and culture and also their belief about the sacred and spiritual was considered lacking and deficient.


Yet the picture was not always negative. Harris (1993), in his in-depth research of the role of Christianity with Indigenous communities over the past 200 years, speaks not only of the complicity, but also reports on
some resistance to government policy and practices. He cites the life and story of Ernest Gribble at Yarrabah mission who showed care for the sick and protection for women. He instigated a royal commission in 1927 for the deaths around the Forest River mission standing up to the pastoralist.

Weiss (1994) also noted how some missions in some areas, began the fight for homelands for Indigenous people.

By the end of the 1920s it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Adnyamathanha to move from camp to camp in the traditional manner. Many station owners were unwilling to have them camp on their property and those who managed to find work on stations had their mobility restricted by their employment. Missionaries from the non-denominational United Aborigines Mission had begun their work eight years earlier at Ram Paddock Gate, a traditional Adnyamathartha campground, but the station owner was increasingly unwilling to have the people stay there. In 1930 Nepabunna settlement was established about 190 kilometers north of Hawker after prolonged negotiation by the missionaries with the owner of Balcanoona Station for some land. (p. 172)

Chapter 4 also recounted how the MECS Indigenous Studies program tries to represent the current complex situation of the Indigenous owned and run church life at Yuendumu and the place these beliefs have in the current community’s lives.

The reality of the relationship between Indigenous people and Christianity is a mixed and complex one. The temptation for courses starting from an uncritical secular humanistic position is to ignore this aspect of Indigeneity or to only highlight the negative impact. The temptation for MECS, starting from a Christian worldview would be to uncritically reveal the positives and not face the ugly negative history. It is important to note here how dealing with, and being aware of one’s own worldview assists in avoiding the two extremes in telling the story of Indigenous past.

MECS wants students to see that the difference between confessed beliefs (religion) and worldview. This distinction was discussed in Chapter 2 under ways of viewing religion, being religious and worldview. English society of the 19th and 20th Century professed Christianity but did not allow this
Christianity to critically examine the worldview of humanism and dualism and so developed syncretic “Western” forms of Christianity which were destructive to Indigenous people. Colin, in several places in the course encourages the students to examine their own worldview and how it might be out of line with the principles of the Kingdom and the Gospel. He asks whether the things we value and how we treat others are instead products of our individualistic and materialistic generation. This approach resonates with the transformational purposes of schooling described in Chapter 2 (Thompson 2007). It also distinguishes itself from this paradigm because it doesn’t start from a Marxist or postmodern suspicion, but from referring to the person and work of Jesus who MECS believes stands in and above all cultures.

5.9 Silences

In the preceding sections the focus was on key words and concepts that dominated the data and emerged as themes providing meaning and interpretation to practice of MECS. As well as looking for common and dominant ideas, Eisner also developed the notion that one of the strongest indicator of what a school was on about was to look at what they didn’t teach and is typically referred to as the “null” curriculum (Eisner, 1985). The idea of examining silences is also a strong emphasis in post colonial critique (E. T. Hall, 1973; Harding, 1998).

One positive silence is the lack of material on traditional food, hunting and dwellings that often dominated curricula working the more traditional paradigms of culture as outlined in Chapter 2. This seemed to indicate that the school was not overly influenced by this approach. Its position has greater sympathy for culture that is widely expressed in the every day events and has a dynamic quality.

A challenging silence in the data was the little being said of the local Indigenous urban population. Although the research on the issues section left open the option to look at local issues, only one student took up this option completing an in depth project on the history of the Indigenous
people around Melbourne. The facts from the 2000 census tell us that suburban Indigenous people are in fact the majority of Indigenous people in Australia. Keefe (1988) poses challenges to schools that celebrate ‘aboriginality as persistence’ because they exclude students who have no identifiable Dreaming or language. In recent years the Indigenous studies program in the primary part of the school has made more use of the local Indigenous people and the cultural centre nearby at Healseville in the outer east.

Policies from the Aboriginal studies forums and Aboriginal Educational advisory groups promote not teaching “about” Indigenous people but with Indigenous people about their culture. This is only partially fulfilled, for even though some Yuendumu members have been to the school and have given permission to tell some of the Dreaming, most of the community is not aware of, or had input into the details of the program. This is an area the school is aware of and is working on.

The Dare to Lead (APAPDC, 2003) initiative check list for schools also exposes other significant gaps in the practice of the school such as the acknowledgement of the land the school is built on, and celebration and participation in Indigenous events such as Reconciliation Week. These silences and the program’s focus on the Warlpiri people could inadvertently perpetuate the myth that Indigenous people mainly live in remote parts of Australia or contribute, as Butler warns of, ‘the trap of synthesizing desirable Aboriginal cultural traits into a generic Aboriginal culture in which the central Australian traits are seen as desirable and appropriate for all Aboriginal people’ (Butler, 2000, p. 98). How the school counters this is one the challenges for the current program. Concern for not wanting to “essentialise” Warlpiri culture on all Indigenous people is expressed often through Colin’s frequent phrases exclaiming “other groups have different stories and practice” as well as his warning to students that artefacts such as boomerangs, didgeridoos and dot painting “are not common to all groups”.
5.10 Summary-New Questions and Directions

This chapter has highlighted a number of key themes emerging from the interaction of the participant’s voices and with my observations surrounding “culture” and “teaching”. These help to explain MECS’s practice and answer the main question asked in this research about which perspectives about culture and schooling operated within MECS that influenced its particular practice of Indigenous studies. The themes of cultures are complex, dynamic yet different, and can be thought of as enacted worldviews, religiously driven were developed. The themes of integrality and transformational purpose of learning were also prominent in unfolding meaning of “teaching and learning”. Common through both these themes were the important roles of direct experience and language.

Through studying various words and phrases surrounding the attributes of culture it could be seen that MECS considers worldview as a primary force of difference between cultures and as the basis for a culture. It is clear from this review that MECS strongly connects with Gullstrup and Harris’s understanding of culture as being dynamic, vertically stratified and resting on the foundation of a worldview. A good way of summarizing this view is to see culture as enacted worldview. Both Western and Indigenous cultures are consistent expressions of particular worldviews.

The pedagogy used to teach about cultures revealed the importance of integrality with its sub themes of direct experience, particularising the general, and learning language.

It could also be clearly seen from various sources in the data that challenging worldviews was an important theme for developing and sustaining this program as a core program for Year 9 and 10 students. This framework has much in common with the intercultural competence movement described in Chapter 2. However the competency focus is not developed, because the whole thing is placed in a larger context of the challenging worldviews framework, where the emphasis is not on gaining competence to enable equality of access to goods, services and ideas (which is the normal broader context for the intercultural competence movement)
but instead, the focus is on exposing and critiquing one’s own worldview and learning to understand another culture’s actions through understanding their worldview.

The injustices to Indigenous people, both past and present, was also a theme in starting and sustaining the program over a long period.

These findings also challenged some of my own thinking about researching a school’s program. The Indigenous studies program at MECS had developed out of the school’s own culture. A culture that regarded an integral approach to curriculum and challenging the Western worldview story surrounding students as distinctive reasons for the school’s existence. These were two important dimensions of the school’s worldview. What were the other dimensions and features? MECS’s own approach could be turned in on itself and the original questions asked of the program could be sharpened to ask: What worldview lens did MECS utilize to develop and teach its program? This question becomes the theme for the next chapter and a device for integrating the various findings about the program.
Figure 6. Peggy Nungarrayi Emu Dreaming
Chapter 6

Being Religio–Critical: Putting together some answers

*It is not just Aboriginal culture that compromises. We in the West are happy to make compromises with prevailing ideas such as self centred individualism and let them shape our worldview. Both groups of people, Aboriginals and Europeans, need to allow the light of the gospel to lead us in our own way and time to new patterns of living, starting from where we are.*

*(C. J. Youl, 2006, p. 20)*

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the ways used by MECS to understand Indigenous culture are applied to examining more closely the MECS culture itself. The question of what *particular* worldview lens operated within the school, shaping the program and positioning it in such a prominent place within the school’s practice is examined in order to provide a further integration of the themes outlined in Chapter 5. The answers also provide deeper insights into the meaning of the program held by the community of the foundational beliefs shaping the practice. The answers, drawn from a closer analysis of the history and philosophy of the school described in Chapter 4 are outlined under the term-a religio-critical approach.

As well as discussing the overall linking effect and features of this approach, the second part of this chapter examines the implications of this finding. It considers the contribution this study makes to the broader conversation about schools undertaking Indigenous studies.. In particular, six issues stood out from the case study that I believe are important in considering the why and how of schools taking up Indigenous studies.
This chapter also raises and discusses questions about the equality of the partnership between MECS and Yuendumu and discusses several implications for future research.

6.1 The Centrality of Worldview and the Religio-Critical lens

The answers to the major question developed in this research about the perspectives surrounding culture and schooling that operated within MECS for beginning and shaping its particular practice of Indigenous studies has revealed the primary finding that MECS relies heavily on the understanding of culture as enacted worldview. The notion that worldview is foundational to culture and cultural difference has some overlap with the ideas outlined in the literature review with the culture as perspective paradigm (Gullestrup, 2006; M. Harris, 1999) and culture as language (Lo Bianco, et al., 1999; Ovando, 1990).

However, simply employing the understanding, that worldview is foundational for understanding another culture (because culture can be thought of as enacted worldview) does not necessarily lead to a school adopting the study of Australian Indigenous studies as a priority for the school or to best practice in teaching Indigenous studies. For example, a school using a liberal framework of respect and tolerance for all different beliefs could ask their students to become familiar with a number of different cultures and the worldviews underlying them. Even if these studies also adopted MECS’s approach of demonstrating the strong links between a person’s worldview and the way they respond i.e. treat the various cultures as enacted worldview, there would be no strict imperative to see Australian Indigenous culture as any more important in meeting the school’s educational goals than studying Kenyan or Indonesian culture.

What this study shows is MECS employs not just a worldview perspective on culture but frames this understanding in a particular approach to humans and human activity in a religio-critical paradigm. The religio-critical framework was strongly present in the school’s history and philosophy and strongly directs the purpose of the school and all its workings. Essential to
the religio-critical approach is the understanding that the central nature of humans and culture is religiously driven to serve some ultimate end, that is, culture and religion cannot be easily separated. The approach that MECS uses in some ways collapses the boundary between culture, religion and worldview or at least makes the boundaries between them permeable. The religious direction of a culture, person or school must be critically discerned and understanding worldview behind actions is vital in this approach. The religio-critical points the goal of schooling and curriculum into the transforming culture paradigm outlined in the literature review chapter (Thompson, 2008). It sees the goals of training students to be critically discerning of their own worldview and the religious direction of their own lives and culture as a primary purpose. In this process direct experiences of one’s own culture and of other cultures play an important role, an idea also supported by Schiro where he says about curriculum planning that,

This means that one's experiences play a crucial role. Students obtain more from them than knowledge of a social experience. They also acquire feelings, a social perspective and a set of values about what is socially just or unjust.

(Schiro, 2008, p. 66)

The description into the historical movements behind the school’s beginnings provides the basis to link most features of the program identified in the analysis. The themes of understanding cultures as enacted worldview, dynamic, complex, and based on religious ground motives are directly related to the characteristics of a religio-critical approach. Directly flowing from this are the curriculum and pedagogical issues to do with teaching about cultures (worldview) that emphasize direct experience, language, and the sensitivity and willingness to understand and challenge one’s own worldview which are linked to the themes of Integrality, and knowledge as wisdom. The connections comes from philosophers and educators such as Dooeewwerd (1979), Blomberg (2007) and Walsh (1984) who, working the religious ground motive of human life, not only wanted to critique secular humanism’s spiritual heart of modern society but attempted
to picture educational practice beginning with other religious ground motives derived from the revelation of the Scriptures.

So there you have it, even though it was partly by accident, the initial experience of spending time with a people whose spirituality visibly influenced all they did, and was radically different from Western modernism, totally supported an opportunity for the school to enact its distinctive vision and philosophy of teaching students to be discerning of religious direction and its outworking in culture, and to challenge students to be active in transforming their own culture.

It is also an outworking of pedagogical ideals related to the Integral curriculum and knowledge as wisdom. In one of his earlier chapters of his book *Wisdom and Schooling*, Doug Blomberg uses his early experience of MECS to construct an imaginary dialogue with the principal to give examples on the Integral curriculum. He asks the principal about the Aboriginal studies program and principal replies,

> The Aboriginal studies program is a general feature of the school that springs from an attempt to recognise the diversity of ways of knowing and to engage with it as a concrete complex whole.

(Blomberg, 2007, p. 43)

The program quickly became an exemplar of what the school is on about and explains to a great extent why the school has developed a central role for this program, why it has developed it the way it has, and why it has been sustained for so long.

### 6.2 Learning from the Case study

In Chapter 1 a description was provided of the calls for the compulsory teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island studies in all schools. Implicit behind these calls are also the rationales for these calls. Indigenous advisory groups emphasised a curriculum that provided a deep appreciation of Aboriginal perspectives of history and of the land and recognition and appreciation of the diverse expressions of indigeneity (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 1998; M. Dodson, 1994). It was felt that these two features were important in achieving the goals of greater ability to work
with and relate to Indigenous people and support of justice for Indigenous people. School communities should also lead by example and include local Indigenous people in equal partnership arrangements in constructing and teaching Indigenous studies (VAEAI/DEET, 2001).

Accepting these as a guide, a discussion is begun in this next section as to how the findings of MECS’s approach may contribute to achieving these aims. This chapter also picks up the discussion raised in Chapter 3 about the tensions between emic and etic paradigms for researching programs. Several of the views uncovered such as the place of religion in humans moved the analysis to the etic plane and are put forward as challenges to all schools.

**6.2.1 Presenting Indigenous worldview with appreciation and respect**

The analysis and findings about how and why MECS constructs and teaches its Indigenous studies program is a valuable contribution to the ‘how’ of the call for programs to build appreciation and respect for Aboriginal perspective on history and land. Trying to understand a person or community without knowing their worldview is fraught with danger and misunderstandings. Trudgen (2000) points this out in the attempts to understand simple concepts such as ‘sickness and health’ in dealing with the Yolngu people. The concepts become so complex when viewed from different worldview lenses and problems arise when one assumes that because people are using the same English word, they mean the same thing! If the understanding of another person doesn’t go to the point of how they think (ATSIC, 2003) then understanding of their actions could lead to false judgments. Much of the construction of Indigeneity under colonial times interpreted Indigenous actions and behaviour from a white standpoint (Beckett & Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies., 1988; Maddock, 1988; Russel, 2001). There would be few people today that don’t accept that Indigenous culture is diverse and vertically stratified and founded on a different worldview to Western culture (Hofstede, 1984).
Courses on Indigenous Studies must come to grips with the radical nature of the Indigenous worldview. This finding is not that startling. Many more groups are heeding the calls to include Indigenous perspective into the curriculum such as the recent Melbourne declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australian declaration stated that, ‘in addition, a focus on environmental sustainability will be integrated across the curriculum and all students will be given the opportunity to access Indigenous content where relevant (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 1995, p. 14).

However, what the MECS case study has brought out is a particular understanding of worldview and important tools to understand one’s own and others’ worldview so that when one’s own and another’s perspectives are brought into focus they can both be appreciated and respected. Simply presenting the worldview of others in itself will not encourage appreciation and respect. If, for example, students have a low opinion of and understanding of the nature and role of worldview they may stay disconnected from being understanding. The students in the MECS program had a term of concentrated teaching on the nature and the importance of worldviews as a subject.

MECS’s understanding of a worldview as an \textit{implicit set of beliefs} and as a \textit{pattern for living} points to the impossibility to fully capture what lies below the articulated conceptual level of human action (Fowler, 2006) and can be better thought of as a narrative, a story (Fernhout, 1997) that one lives out, and presents as an alternative to conceptual understandings of worldviews (J. Spradley, 1972). The MECS position on worldview challenges modern rationalist understandings. It became clear that MECS, adopting this understanding of worldview as something that cannot be easily stated in a set of concepts or propositions and cannot be presented to students in the usual way concepts are taught, had implications for the gaining of knowledge about worldview. Worldviews from this understanding must be experienced through direct interaction with a person and their community. It must arise out of whole concrete and personalised experiences. Secondly,
language is very important in providing new words and ideas to explore ways of understanding. Both of these factors are addressed in more detail in the next section.

The introduction of the Warlpiri worldview in the MECS program comes from viewing the Warlpiri films such as "Bush Mechanics", learning the language and spending time with the people. Lessons on the Dreaming and the skin name system are useful tools for beginning to sense the implicit beliefs and how Indigenous people may view things. Warlpiri worldview was a reality behind the way ordinary people react and respond to their every day issues. No course can ever teach someone else’s worldview; it can only give snippets into it and the glimpses of how it is different from one’s own worldview. One of the biggest challenges facing the teaching of other cultures is how to place that difference in a setting that doesn’t romanticise it or denigrate it. Throughout the MECS course the complexity and depth of Warlpiri worldview was foremost in the presentations. A big part in building respect for this worldview was identifying that it had the same characteristics as their own worldview and of any other culture. Indigenous worldview provided meaning for everyday events and emanated from a religious core, a point that is developed further in the next section.

In summary, the MECS case points to the importance of schools doing some philosophical work on the nature of worldviews with their students and their importance in understanding everyday life as enacted worldview. Alongside this, it also important to be aware of the overarching religious and philosophical systems that may frame the worldview work undertaken by an organization. When these frameworks are disclosed a focus on worldview opens up greater possibilities for appreciating and respecting other cultures’ perspectives.
6.2.2. The difficulty of understanding your own and others’ worldview: The importance of direct experience and language.

I have nearly completed a major in Indigenous Studies at University and even though we have had some great guest lecturers from the Indigenous community, it somehow doesn’t feel right to say that I know Indigenous people or their culture. I don’t know them personally, or where they live or how they live.

(recent conversation with a university student)

The second point to learn from this case study is the practices used by MECS on how to learn about your own or another’s worldview. The religio-critical standpoint holds that the purpose and role of education is exposing and challenging a student’s worldview and its religious roots i.e. the importance of critique. This is no small thing, one’s worldview is so familiar, like the air breathed, and it is easy to take so much of it for granted when looking at any issue. A key component of this religio-critical perspective and its transformational goals is the importance of direct experience. Direct experience was outlined as important for the role it played in challenging worldview. The literature review showed that exposing someone’s worldview cannot be just an intellectual exercise; it needs to happen at the level of whole, full bodied experience of living amongst other people and language (Tin.C, 1999). Even though Yuendumu is not nearby, it provides that ‘whole bodied’ experience of being in a different place, rather than a familiar place. The experience of Warlpiri language and ways that people relate moves students to see the world differently for fleeting moments. It was enough to challenge some students’ views of seeing Uluru as a challenging climb, a conquest, to seeing it as sacred place of another culture that needs to be respected. The feeling of strangeness and seeing alternatives enacted out in all its complexity is an important part of the process of becoming both aware and critical of one’s own culture.

The importance of direct experience in challenging one’s worldview is also supported by the cosmological position of the framework that MECS works with. This recognises reality as an integral whole with many complex dimensions and, flowing from this, knowledge of this reality can only begin
with integral experiences of the whole. This is one of the primary directives behind the development of the integral curriculum model that operates within the school. Indigenous people or any event and place cannot be studied as abstract concepts; they need to be rooted in concrete, complex reality. Kalsbeek explains this ideas as,

> Drawing on the ontological position that acknowledges that reality and our responses to it are holistic, incorporating many dimensions at the same time, it is not possible to separate these concepts when explaining and analysing human endeavour or “acting” however they can be distinguished from each other.

(Kalsbeek, 1975).

The unity of life and culture can only be appreciated through direct experience of concrete wholes. Textbooks and films can only give experiences of some dimensions of life not the whole at once. The epistemic partner to this view is that whole, direct experience is important in developing knowledge as wisdom. Responses to complex concrete realities cannot be formulaic but must be sensitive, appropriate unique responses to unique situations. These ideas were explored through the theme of integral in various places in the data and its analysis.

Language is also very important in understanding and challenging the worldview process. Linguists have shown that what a culture values and the way it perceives relationships between things are reflected in its vocabulary, grammar and in language as a whole (Deyhele, et al., 2008; Gadd, 1999). Similarly, post modern reliance on deconstruction of a text highlighted absence of words or the position of words to convey cultural biases (Foucault, 1972; S. Hall, 1980). The methodology of this study also focused on the terminology and position of words used by the participants to gain insight into the perspective, meaning, value and importance of the program. Thus, language is very important in getting insight into the way people view the world.

These findings present many challenges for schools considering teaching Indigenous studies. A commitment to spending extended time being with
Indigenous people and learning their language is not on the budgets or agendas of most schools.

6.2.3 Explaining humans as “being religious” and central to human life

The particular philosophical framework that stands behind the MECS view of culture adds a dimension that is often missing from other practices. It proclaims that the central nature of humans and culture is spiritually driven to serve some ultimate end. That is, culture and religion cannot be easily separated. The lens that MECS uses to view humans and culture in some ways collapses the boundary between spirituality, religion and worldview or at least makes the boundaries between them elastic. The way it does this is to adopt a broader understanding of religion as being religious.

Anthropologically speaking, humans are understood as being not centrally rational or economic beings but as spiritual beings. The position that all cultures have driving through them a religious devotion to ultimate ends that shapes their day-to-day activity, stands in contrast to the prevailing message of the modernism of Western cultures. Commonly, Western culture represents its foundations as derived through the rational scientific framework and therefore sees itself as a religiously and spiritually neutral culture (Pearcey, 2004). This view subordinates the place of religion and spiritual to a minor role in shaping everyday public life and supports modernist ideas that people who take spiritual matters too seriously into every area of life are somewhat “primitive”.

The MECS position is also distinct from most postmodern positions that do embrace the importance of story as opposed to facts, but whose chorus sings that there is no grand narrative, no essential ontological character of being human but only individual ones that need to be constantly negotiated and written as we go (Lyotard, 1984). Both positions deny any authority to transcendent or spiritual realities as the source for cultural narratives.

Both community and suburban Indigenous people place more centrally the role of spirituality with everyday life than the traditional Western person. Pat Dodson, talking about the future, sees great hope in that,
..this generation has brought back to the public arena of policy programs and practice the importance of recognising, respecting and expressing their people’s spirituality and the importance of the spiritual as an essential ingredient for living healthy lives.

(P. L. Dodson, et al., 2006, p. 262)

Until now, not much credence has been given to these different perspectives and position of religion when school communities are framing Indigenous studies programs. The issue of identifying one’s self as centrally a religious, spiritual being is, I believe, a critical issue in the debate about relating to Indigenous people. If people in suburban schools around Australia accept uncritically the prevailing message of modernity with its peripheral role for religion and denial of spiritual realities or post modernity’s claims that religions are dangerous grand narratives they will subtly create some unwarranted limitations in relating to and understanding most Indigenous people.

Essentially, a focus just on worldviews and worldview differences alone without the unity of a common religious anthropology can continue at a more sophisticated level the colonial practices of constructing Indigenous people in binary opposition to non Indigenous people (Attwood, 1992a). The MECS study raises important issues as to the place of religion given to culture formation. What is needed on the part of the people and organisations relating to, and trying to understand Indigenous people is a critical understanding of their own cultural and religious heritage. In a similar vein Attwood (1992a) argues that the best challenge to “ Aboriginalism” was to recognise Indigenous people as subjects with identities relational and dynamic and ‘this approach necessarily involve new objects of knowledge—ourselves’ (p. 8).

MECS, because of its transformational vision for schooling does have this critique of its own Western heritage and of the central place of its faith. Faith, they would argue, precedes knowledge and schooling.

A critique of secular humanism as being founded on religious presuppositions and having a religious narrative about life is a more honest
understanding of humanism (Ellul, 1975). Goudzwaard (1984) studying the
notion of idols and idolatry, identifies several idols, spiritual forces driving
Western culture. O’Sullivan (2004) argues that Western education lacks a
comprehensive cosmology and treats spirituality only superficially and
‘must take on the concerns and development of the spiritual at a more
fundamental level’ (p. 49). An understanding of “Western Spirituality”
would go a long way to seeing and understanding that Indigenous people
are working out their lives in the same mode as every other human, the only
difference being the type of religious beliefs being used. In other words, we
can agree to differ on our starting points rather than, as the debate is
sometimes put, on the methods to arrive at truths. In this framework,
rationality is pitted against religion.

At the crudest level one of the implications of this false tension would be
programs that decentralize and lessen the role of the Dreaming in
explaining the meaning of Indigenous everyday life. The Dreaming in this
case would be treated in a similar way that religion is treated in modern
culture i.e. placed in the private arena of life and limited to important
ceremonies such as christening, funerals, special holidays, and places but
not really directing everyday life and public life. This compartmentalised
way of dealing with life comes through when studies break up the
Indigenous studies into non-connected headings such as family life,
ceremonies, foods, and do not give the depth of understanding to the
Dreaming as being a present as well as past shaper of life. The theme of the
centrality of religion in Chapter 5 demonstrated a way of dealing with the
Dreaming in a more central way without romanticising it.

Recently, more programs are acknowledging the central role of Dreaming
and the spiritual links with country. Teasdale (2005) notes that secular
education courses internationally such as that of UNESCO is starting ‘to
emphasise the spiritual and to advocate the role of education in the spiritual
development of children and youth’ (p. 9).

In the light of uncritical views about their life being founded on rationality,
many non-Indigenous students will unwittingly romanticize Indigenous
culture (Pattel-Gray, 1996). Maybe this occurs because it reminds students of something Western culture has lost, a spirituality and wholeness with everything being organically connected together.

Alternatively, the uncritical acceptance of rationality could subtly, if unaddressed, continue the colonial notion that religiously based cultures and explaining life in terms of Spiritual realities are more simplistic or more primitive because they place non-rational forms of knowledge (revelations) such as dreams and stories in a higher position to explain existence rather than knowledge based on scientific activity. The argument being advanced here is similar to those concerned about schools tackling racism without having a critical understanding of being ‘white’ (Avelo, 1996; Stephan, 1999).

6.2.4 Dealing with the complexity of Aboriginal Christianity

One of the other points coming out of the MECS case study is the appreciation of the dynamic nature of Indigenous religious beliefs. The Dreaming has a dynamic character to it and for some communities the merging of groups and the introduction of Christianity has meant changes to the beliefs shaping everyday life. Some have closely linked colonialism and Christianity and would like to see an absence of the role of Christian beliefs in any discourse about Indigeneity. Fanon (1963), reflecting on the church in the colonies expressed these sentiments claiming ‘the church in the colonies is the white people’s church, the foreigner’s church. She does not call natives to God’s ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master of the oppressor’ (p. 34). The reality is more complex than that and there needs to be given recognition of the spectrum of the varied importance of Aboriginal Christianity across the country. In the 1996 census, 72% of Indigenous people identified themselves as Christian. Writing about Pacific indigeneity, Paumau (2006) boldly claims that identity with Christianity is essential to the identity of being an Indigenous Pacific Islander. She reasons that Christianity has been totally integrated and internalised by the people, it is part of their postmodern identity and, unlike the Western education system it is not an imposed, outside set of values.
Groome (1994) also warns that the adoption of Christianity ‘cannot be equated with the loss of culture and greater recognition needs to be given in studies to the syncretic forms of Indigenous Christianity’ (p. 94).

I liken the recognition of Aboriginal Christianity to that of Aboriginal English. In an introduction to the topic of Aboriginal English Eades (2007) writes,

> Aboriginal English is the name given to the various kinds of English spoken by Aboriginal people throughout Australia. Technically, the language varieties are dialects of English. They have much in common with other varieties of Australian English, but there are distinctive features of accent, grammar, words and meanings, as well as language use. These Aboriginal English features often show continuities with the traditional Aboriginal languages. In many subtle ways Aboriginal English is a powerful vehicle for the expression of Aboriginal identity.

(Eades, 2007, p. 1)

Even though mother language is important to identity, some are beginning to acknowledge a particular way Indigenous people have taken up English as distinctive and worth recognition as part of the picture of what it means to be an Indigenous person. In a similar way for many Aboriginal communities and people such as Darby, Christianity provokes an important set of beliefs shaping everyday life and ought not to be ignored because of political correctness (Campbell, 2006). Silence or simplistic explanations regarding Aboriginal Christianity do not do justice to the diversity of Indigenous culture.

**6.2.5 Knowledge as wisdom**

In explaining the theme of *integral* as a driving force and theme of MECS’s work, both the ontological and epistemological threads of the theme were examined. The ontological thread understands that the world exists as creation. It believes that world exists ‘as a unity brought into being and sustained moment by moment by the word/ order/ law of the Creator’ (*School creed, section 1*). The Word is one unified word and the responses to it are diverse but maintain an integral unity. The appropriate way to
respond to such complex concrete realities cannot be formulaic but must be sensitive, appropriate and unique responses to unique situations. They must be sensitive to the distinguishing character (the unity of a situation) and to its unique differences. This, in simple terms, would be a way of defining what the school understands as wisdom (Blomberg 2007).

Applying this philosophy about the gaining of wisdom, about acting sensitively and appropriately to Indigenous people and communities results in identifying and respecting both the common religious core of Indigenous culture represented in the Dreaming and the unique language, history, experiences of individual people and communities.

A focus on what unifies Indigenous people, ignores the differences and continues the mistakes of modernity in trying to find the one perfect formula to describe reality. It will result in one way of acting to all situations which, throughout history, has led to disastrous consequences. On the other hand, a focus only on the differences and uniqueness of each individual and community fails to distinguish what the communities have in common. This leads to a failure to distinguish Indigenous character and culture from non-Indigenous culture. This may result in the death of a culture.

The knowledge as wisdom paradigm outlined here and in earlier parts of this study is an alternative to both modernist views of knowledge, focused solely on generalised laws, patterns and formulas and of postmodern views focused only on difference and the local. The wisdom as knowledge paradigm provides an important subheading for schools to the earlier challenge of this chapter of critiquing and acknowledging their religious framework to also include an understanding of their commitment to what is knowledge and how knowledge is acquired and distributed.

6.2.6 Meeting people on their home turf

In Chapter 5 under the theme of challenging worldviews the story was told about the difference in the behaviour of Indigenous people in relation to the proximity of their country. Colin added to this recently by telling the story of how Japaljarri Spencer came to Melbourne as a guest of the school in 1983.
and accompanied the school on the trip back to Yuendumu. Colin never forgets Andrew’s discomfort at Uluru. He didn’t want to look at the rocks or talk about them. He just wanted to get out of there; it was not his country! There is an old Kenyan saying that you have not really met a person until you have shared a meal with them in their house. So many non-Indigenous people have only interacted with people in the context of the public space and places, not home or country to Indigenous people. How they act there is not the same at home. At Yuendumu, students experience a vibrant happy community, playing sport, laughing, going hunting, and going to church. I think that is what is behind Colin’s comment in the newsletter quoted earlier.

As well, I hope the experience of a Centre Trip and a few days in another world will mean that our kids resist negative, crippling stereotypes and if faced with them will be able to say something like “Wait a minute I met some of these people and they were not like that!”

(MECS newsletter, May 2005)

The MECS case study throws up the challenge to schools on whose turf are meetings to take place? Logistically it is easier to bring one Indigenous person into the classroom then to bring the whole classroom to them but the insights gained and the quality of the relationship increases dramatically when meeting places are shared.

6.3 Sustaining Relationships and Programs

One of the three initial questions asked of this program concerned the sustainability of innovations. It asked how has this innovative program begun in the 80s been able to be sustained when so many programs began then have disappeared? The data reveal four key ways in which this program has been sustained. The first and most telling is the direct connection between the program and the school’s vision and reason for existence. The study has shown how this program, with its key features of integral, enacted worldview, and challenge, flow from a religio-critical worldview lens for dealing with culture. This same religio-critical worldview has also shaped the schools overall vision and purpose. One of the key
points to learn from this case study regarding sustainability is its confirmation of the findings that for innovation to migrate from the periphery of an organization to the centre, the whole school and all participants must be involved over a lengthy period (Pendergast, 2006).

When a program flows from and demonstrates a schools founding vision, continued support is more likely to occur. When a program operates in this way it is guaranteed more support and resources and will be more sustainable over a longer period than programs put in place merely to satisfy mandated external requirements or a small section of the community. This presents a great deal of challenge to those calling for mandated Indigenous studies. If schools have only ‘academic excellence’ as their core value or vision, connecting Indigenous studies to this goal may be superficial.

Longevity of the MECS program is also achieved through three other means. The first is the longevity of key personnel. Colin and Roger have been associated with the program since the beginning. In 2005 the school celebrated five teachers for being with and serving the school for over 20 years. Many teachers have been there for over ten years. This is an unusual in today’s changing work place. Two of the senior, “20+ club” teachers are teachers who have spent time living in the Yuendumu community and a third has been there many times as part of the Centre Trip. The personal investment, interest and skill of these teachers have assisted in sustaining the program over this time. Developing a successor for Colin, and the teaching of Warlpiri language is of particular concern for the school if it is to sustain the program into the future.

A further reason for the sustainability is the school’s emphasis on regular review process. The staff and helpers involved in the centre trip were all involved in a review process after the trip to voice concerns and issues to improve the experience for the following year. This meeting is minuted and the minutes referred to at the planning meetings. Similarly, the review week (held at the start of term 4) has a process for the whole staff to meet and review its programs. The relationship between Warlpiri, Koori studies and
Worldview studies, time allocated, content are all reviewed in these meetings.

A final impetus for sustainability is the momentum and success of the first ten years, spilling over into inter-generational expectations. In other words, sustainability is easier the longer a program goes. What is noticeable as you begin talking to the students is that about 70% have had an older brother, sister, cousin or their mum and dad going through the school ahead of them. Many of the past graduate parents have retained their friendships made in the school, contributing to a strong community base connected in various levels to the school. They are pleased that their children are receiving similar experiences of schooling that they received.

In the description of the school’s program, the Centre Trip evening was described. The strong desire of being a community, rather than an institution, is one the features of the school. It limits on size, its organisation of students and teachers and its leadership style encourage relating and working together as a community. This emphasis on being a community, and the intergenerational dimension of the school, contribute to the sustainability of the Indigenous studies program and the Yuendumu connection. The MECS parents and teachers do not just see themselves as a school but, as the Yuendumu community sees it, they are the ‘south mob’ the ‘MECS mob’.

6.4 Equal Partnership?

One of the points raised in the introduction and supported by many of the Aboriginal organisations calling for Indigenous studies in schools is the importance of equal partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities in the development of understanding. Too often non-Indigenous groups form a position of the majority or of power, controlling events to their own enhancement. The MECS study raises questions about the quality of the partnership with Yuendumu community which cannot be fully explored because of the limited nature of this research project but neither can it be ignored.
The language and discussion until this point may have a clinical edge to it that places the relationship between MECS and Yuendumu into a negative light. Reading the results of this research one could easily be led to believe that the relationship is heavily biased to only benefit MECS’s vision of education and to some degree the Yuendumu community are unwittingly being used to benefit MECS’s vision of education, a scenario subtle, but no different to the exploitation that has occurred and continues to occur to Indigenous people all around the world. From a researcher’s perspective, I believe that this is not necessarily the case.

The relationship between MECS and Yuendumu is more complex than that. What has not been detailed so far in Chapter 5 in the analysis of the data presented, (but present between the lines, in Chapter 4) is the real abiding friendships that have grown up between individuals from both communities. The people of Yuendumu are not merely people with a particular worldview, but are genuine friends, people with names and personalities. When Old Darby Jumpjinpa died, several of the staff cried and two staff went back to share in the ‘sorry time’ and funeral. Two staff members recently went out to visit two Warlpiri girls at Worawa College, offering contact and help if they needed it. Recently the head of administration has been involved in a campaign to help maintain the bilingual program at Yuendumu, which is under threat and upsetting the community. Connections to Yuendumu made through the school have been working in Yuendumu several months each year, working to support the community in trying to get release of their own money tied up in trusts so the community can build its own school.

There is a level of care and concern for people that extends beyond educational boundaries. The concern for justice as one of the themes in Chapter 5 was overlaid with lots of injustices that had happened to particular people regarded as friends.

The warmth and joy experienced, as the people meet is genuine and goes beyond roles such as teachers and teaching but operates at the level of a person with person. One word that emanates from listening to people from
both communities is respect. The folk at Yuendumu seem to respect the fact that MECS want to spend time with them in a relaxed way without involving them in a ‘program’ and are willing to learn their language. The way the MECS community talks about Yuendumu and its residents is always respectful. The most obvious evidence of respect is that the Yuendumu community each year gives MECS permission to come and camp out in the town. This permission is not presumed by the school, is politely asked for each year, and has been freely given for over 25 years. It is reasonable to speculate that if the Yuendumu community were experiencing negative effects from the visits or the relationships, permission would not be forthcoming.

The school is open and keen to host any visitation from Yuendumu and has explored various options over the years but these visits are very difficult for most of the community and have only occurred about six times over the history of their relationship.

Most ex-students who I have come across speak positively about the Indigenous people of Australia and are concerned about ongoing situations of disempowerment and disadvantage of Indigenous people. The identification of both groups with Christianity has also played a role in how the two groups view each other. Attending and contributing to the Sunday church service at Yuendumu has established a link between the two communities that is important in broadening and understanding their relationship.

The original study design has not collected enough data to defend any definitive statements about the longer term effects of the program and quality of the relationship on the Yuendumu community and on past students except the anecdotal ones described above. However, these initial observations would suggest that though the possibility of the relationship being unequal exists there are many complex factors at work and it would be unwise to jump to a conclusion based on this study alone.
6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has taken the framework of being religio-critical and the transformational goals for schooling flowing from the Christian philosophy of Dooyeweerd in the 1920s and 30s in the Netherlands (reformational philosophy) and showed how it has been given voice in the distinctive characteristics of MECS to be the integrating thread to the various views on culture, teaching culture and purpose for schooling behind MECS’s Indigenous studies program (Dooyeweerd, 1979).

It highlighted six characteristics of the MECS approach that has implications for the way schools relate to Indigenous people and cultures. In particular, the ways to identify and challenge your own and others’ worldview and the importance of understanding of one’s own culture’s spiritual, religious roots and direction was seen as a significant challenge to the ways schools engage with Indigenous people and their culture.
Figure 7. Yumurrpa Jurkurrpa (bush potato dreaming)

Painted by Ruby Nakamarra Collins, 1990

Women are digging the puurda. The two in the centre are Nakamarra and Napurrula. These are the kirda (owners) of this dreaming. The roots of the main plant spread out under the ground.
Final Comments and Conclusion

An ignoramus is a pawn who is used by all sorts of cultural forces, doesn’t think, is not aware of culture, just reaches decisions, thinking about his decisions. If you think about it most of the decisions we’ve made are so channelled by our culture, the car we buy, what we wear, what we spend our money on, are so channelled by our culture that an uneducated person doesn’t know culture exists. He’s a will-o’-the-wisp; he’s washed along by culture isn’t he? A challenge for schools, for parents, is to ensure that all our young adults are critically aware of their own culture and its religious roots and to appreciate and respect differences and similarities with other people and cultures

(extract from interview with principal of MECS)

7.0 Revisiting the story of this study

On the bus travelling the many kilometres to Yuendumu and back, various songs are played. One of the regular songs played is the song “From little things big things grow”\(^6\). Little did the pioneers in 1981 know that they would set in motion a series of events that would lead to a big part of the history and function of the school’s life. I too, have been on a journey over the past six years, reading transcripts, listening to interviews, reading journals and reviewing various literature about Indigenous studies programs. A journey that started with an intuitive sense that what MECS had, was not just different but important. It continued as a participant observer, immersing myself in the complexities of school life and experience of the program. It continued as I sifted through those experiences trying to capture them in descriptive words, and teasing out various consistent meanings about Australian Indigenous culture and teaching about other cultures present in the program. What was at the heart of the school that fostered these meanings when there was so little around in that era?

\(^6\) Paul Kelly, 1991, Mushroom Records
In the introduction, anecdotal gleanings of the program were put alongside the various paradigms for teaching about other cultures. This comparison revealed that MECS began its study long before most schools and has developed its course in ways that did not fit common paradigms for teaching Indigenous studies. This established MECS as an interesting and worthwhile case to study.

The introduction also pointed to how the various understandings of culture and how to gain knowledge of cultures together with the purposes of schooling often shapes practice. Various understandings and paradigms surrounding culture and knowledge and purposes of schooling were developed in the literature review. This part of the study also introduced and discussed the concepts of worldview, religion and languages because they were key concepts discovered in the analysis.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodological and ethical considerations in collecting the data and what data was collected for analysis. Embedding oneself in a school to observe a program had many complexities.

The story of the program, what it looked like, was told in Chapter 4 through the selection of various voices, the teacher, the students and mine own. It covered descriptions of the work in the classrooms, the Central Australian Trip and the time spent at Yuendumu.

The interpretation and meaning of the events described were discussed in Chapter 5, revealing the key themes of culture as complex, dynamic and as enacted worldview, and showing that its teaching about cultures was highly influenced by the themes of integrality, justice and challenging worldviews. The discussion also looked at what the course didn’t look at in terms of silences and highlighted the gaps such as lack of contact with local Indigenous groups.

Chapter 6 drew on the historical roots of the school and answered the question: What worldview lens did MECS use to shape its practice? This led to discussion of the themes of the data in terms of a religio-critical approach. This approach brought to the fore the centrality of all cultures and humans
being religious (understood as spiritual direction) and expressed through worldview and language.

As well as providing a platform for understanding MECS's practice better, this approach also raised six challenges for schools engaging in the teaching of Indigenous studies.

7.2 Limitations of the Study

There were three main limitations to this study. The first was the lack of materials and research regarding what is happening in schools with the uptake and teaching of Indigenous studies programs. This made it difficult to do any comparative evaluations of what MECS has done. Instead, gaps and possible best practice comments were based on Aboriginal consultancy committees' recommendations.

The second limitation in this study was the position of the researcher as being partly an insider and partly an outsider. Had the study been done by a complete outsider or complete insider using, for example, an action research approach, different findings and conclusions may have been reached.

The third limit of the study was the number and spread of participants. This study focused primarily on the existing participants in a particular year. Even though several of the key participants have been with the program from the beginning and some of the documents used looked at previous years, broadening the participants to include past students and more of the Yuendumu community would have added extra voices to the convergence and divergence of the data.

7.3 Future directions

It is hoped that this study creates some interest in what is happening in schools with regard to Indigenous studies programs, and stimulates more people to research and evaluate what their schools are doing. The buildup of this kind of research is vital to policy making. The record summarised in Chapter 1 demonstrated that there have been numerous policies and
organisational structures put in place to support Indigenous people and try to deal with disadvantage faced by many Indigenous people and communities. A key part of this is to better educate the majority of Australians about the past from an Indigenous perspective and the present reality and diversity of being an Indigenous person in Australia. Knowing how well these educational initiatives have been taken up and implemented and whether they are making a difference is vital in considering further new policy or organisational structures. More studies of what is happening in schools need to be made.

The issue of who should do this research is also important. The study raised some advantages in having a balance between etic and emic approaches to researching what was happening. However, it also raised the limitations of both of these being held in tension within the one person. Future studies should try to achieve this balance through a cooperative research approach. Perhaps having one or two outsiders working closely with a one or two insiders to create a research team to look at all aspects of the schools approach to teaching history and Indigenous studies or perspectives would generate better quality data. Ideally, one of the voices of such a team should be a local Indigenous person so that the program is examined from a mixture of standpoints.

This study also strongly pointed to the importance of future studies examining not just a school’s practice but also the worldview shaping those practices. In particular, the school community’s views on what it means to be religious or spiritual needs to be exposed and clarified.

This study has also raised issues to do with the way Aboriginal Christianity intersects and relates to Western Christianity. More studies in the future are needed to explore this relationship and dimension of Indigenous identity.

7.4 In Conclusion

Even though the MECS program has some negative issues around partnership and identifying with local Indigenous groups, it provides some important challenges to the question of relating to and understanding
Indigenous people and culture. The centrality of worldview and religion and their relationship has not just helped to understand the program at a deeper level but has raised important issues for non-Indigenous schools and organisations to consider as they relate and work with Indigenous people. Being blissfully ignorant or dismissive about one’s own worldview flowing from a spiritual centre, directing life, may continue to contribute in subtle ways to seeing Australian Indigenous people as being somewhat “strange”, not normal or romanticises them. Both positions impart barriers to the development of rich, deep, respectful and equal friendship and partnerships between peoples. History continues to show that being the stranger or an idol within your mainstream culture places and holds you in a disadvantaged place.

In a unique way, the MECS approach to culture and knowledge argues that the postmodern suspicion of essentialism has gone too far. Nor does it support a return of essentialism that prescribes a fixed set of knowledge or practices, confining Indigenous people to the past. Instead it prescribes to the essential character of humans as being religious and how distinct beliefs about beginnings and ultimate ends, foundational in a worldview, shape all cultures dynamically into new futures.
REFERENCES


APAPDC. (2003). Dare to lead: Cross-cultural learning and interaction. Canberra: Australian Principals Association for Professional Development.


Bin-Sallik, M., Blomeley, N., Flowers, R., & Hughes, P. (1994). Review and analysis of literature relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education; Part 1 Summary. Canberra: DEET.


Appendix 1 Description of MECS course in the Koori Resource Index

Koori Studies Resource Index : Case Study

ABORIGINAL/KOORI STUDIES : COURSE OUTLINE

PARTICIPATING YEAR/LEVELS :
Year 9 and 10.

PREREQUISITE
Compulsory.

ASSIGNMENT/RESEARCH EXAMPLES :

WARLPIRI LANGUAGE  by Colin Japaljarri Youl.

Staff and students of Mount Evelyn Christian School (MECS) first came into contact with Warlpiri people during a visit to Yuendumu in 1981. We were invited there by the Yuendumu Baptist Church, in response to an inquiry we made at the suggestion of a past principal of the Yuendumu school. The visit was part of the second annual Centre Trip for Grade 10 (16 year olds). Although we had always seen our trip as primarily educational, and intended that it would be a central part of our new Aboriginal Studies programme, the first such journey was pretty conventional, visiting the usual sites associated with White man Dreaming, and included very little contact with Aboriginal people themselves. The second trip initiated our relationship with the Warlpiri people of Yuendumu, and was the beginning of a truly beautiful friendship.

We were immediately confronted with a living language and culture. We stumbled over the few words we were encouraged to attempt, and were reduced to complete confusion by the use of sub-section, or Skin Names by our Warlpiri hosts. We were treated wonderfully, and have always been most warmly welcomed each year since. Many firm friendships have been forged, and have taken have taken on a very familial flavour since. At the suggestion of Wendy Nangala Baarda, a European teacher at Yuendumu, MECS decided to begin a study of the Warlpiri language, and this began, in a very limited way, in 1982.

My family and I spent a few weeks at Yuendumu in 1982, and subsequently lived there for 4 months in 1984, so that my understanding of the language could be developed. Several groups of Warlpiri people have visited MECS and stayed with staff members over the years. We are continually overwhelmed by the generosity of these people who give so freely of their time, and welcome us so thoroughly into their families. Becoming a little bit Warlpiri has been a very humbling and enriching experience.

The Warlpiri course at MECS takes the form of an introduction to the language and culture over a full year, and is compulsory for Grade 9 and 10 students. We have always lacked a text book suitable for our purposes, and this book marks the end of that particular problem. We are extremely grateful for a grant of funds from the Priority Languages Incentive Element (PLIE) of the School Language and Literacy Program which has made this work possible.

Warlpiri is the first language of about 4000 people living north-west of Alice Springs in Australia's Northern territory. All these people speak English, with varying degrees of skill. English really is a second or other language for all these people. The Warlpiri inhabit the area around the Tanami Desert, and because of the inhospitable nature of their country, were spared the brutal impact of the coming of so-called civilisation until well into this century. Yuendumu was established as a government settlement in 1948, and the people were collected onto it. It is situated at a traditional Yurrampi (Honey Ant) Dreaming site, and is now the home of about 500 Warlpiri people.

The Warlpiri language is one of over 200 independent languages which existed at the time of the First Fleet. There are only a handful of these still vigorous, and Warlpiri is one of them. Many non-Warlpiris use it as a second or third language in neighbouring tribal areas. Unlike English, it contains few irregularities, as it has not been subjected to pressures from outside until the last few generations. Europeans will find its regularity and its complexity intriguing. Any study of Warlpiri, even one as limited as the one at MECS, will demonstrate that the language is not “primitive” in the sense of being limited, simple and lacking complexity. Being brought face to face with Ergative Case will convince everyone that here ~137~
is a grammatically exact and subtle language. The Warlpri people always encourage efforts to learn their language and to understand their culture. This can lead to a feeling of having "arrived" after gaining only a superficial knowledge, but there is always much more beyond. This book (see below) is put together by a European who thinks like a European, and who stands outside Warlpri culture. I have no right to speak on behalf of those people and all opinions expressed are my own. A Warlpri might well use a quite different approach to learning the language. A book like this must suffer from being an academic production designed to introduce possible reluctant recruits to the language in a foreign classroom.

I have chosen to use the standard orthography current among linguists working in the area. Readers may find variant orthographies in older works. I have decided, in places, to omit variations in pronunciation of which I am aware. All Warlpiris know that all Europeans are pretty slow when it comes to languages, and I have tried to "go easy" on the learners where I have had a choice. I have also avoided complicated explanations of grammar which presuppose a familiarity with English grammatical terminology which one does not today find everywhere. I hope I have still made myself clear.

My Warlpiri follows the Ngaila Warlpiri used at Yuendumu. There are differences between it and the Warlpiri used further north, and perhaps in other areas.

The book mentioned is Warlpiri-kiri (about Warlpiri). It is an "in-house" book printed in 1992 under the Priority Languages Incentive Element (PLIE).

WARLPIRI SUBSECTIONS

Moieties:

First choice marriage (80% +):
Second choice marriage (15% +):
Third choice marriage (under 1%):
Mother-in-law, son-in-law avoidance:
"Best Friend":

Inner circle marry one another
Outer circle marry one another
Around the "tramlines"
Same circle and opposite first choice
Same circle as self, opposite side
Other circle opposite side
Same circle, opposite side, the brother/sister of the third choice marriage partner.

~138~
The numbers and letters represent the direction of authority along the matriliney lines. All Warlpiris belong to one or the other subsection or "skin". The names technically pass along the female line, that is Nakamarras have Jungarrayi and Nungarrayi children. For practical purposes it is easier to see the names as following Patrimoity lines. If a second or third choice marriage is made, the children take both the names they would have had if the parents had married first choice partners, eg Japaljarri marries Napaljarri the children will be Jungarrayi/Japaljarri or Nungarrayi/Napanangka.

Skin names are taken very seriously still. When Warlpiris ask "Nyila nyiyampa?" they are asking "What are you?" "Where do you fit?" The answer, "Japaljarri" explains the patrimoity, matriliney and generation group. The skin name gives a quick reference to marriage partners, avoidance and "friendship", but the total relationship to other people suggested by the "name" is more complex.

I have used the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle to help my Year 10 students grasp something of the complexity of an area of study too often reduced to inadequate generalisations and simplifications. Identifying the pieces and fitting them together is central to the challenge of teaching Aboriginal Studies in a way that explodes stereotypes, deepens sensitivity and sharpens our ability to 'see' the pieces and the whole picture with God's eyes.

In any case, whatever you identify as the pieces, and however they are pieced together, it is vital to get behind the material and the processes, to discover the face and the heart and the personality of Aboriginal Australia.

Taking students to spend a weekend with Aboriginal people in outback Australia and introducing Aboriginal language studies are two ways of attempting to do this. There are many others.

An Aboriginal Studies course can be designed with the assistance of the many excellent resources now available. Any number of scholarly and balanced texts like Richard Broome's Aboriginal Australia and Henry Reynolds' Dispossession, some that give an uniquely Koori perspective like the now (sadly) out of print Massacres to Mining by Jan Roberts and Killing me softly: the destruction of a heritage by Phil and Noel Wallace. Quite an outstanding collection of videotape is also available, with Women of the sun and Kingdom in exile at the top of the list; the wealth of newspaper articles, Koori music, museum exhibitions, art texts and gallery displays. You soon have too much material to fit into a six or even a twelve month course for senior students, not to mention establishing a course for primary levels.

Every Christian school in Australia probably has the unique circumstances and potential for teaching Aboriginal Studies as it should be taught. It means entering into relationship with our Koori brothers and sisters, understanding and sharing their vision, and pushing towards a realisation of the full meaning of reconciliation. Let's hear a collective "yuwa/i" (YES!) to the doing of this task.
A TRIBUTE TO A BROTHER by Colin Smith.

Darby has a habit of popping up in the most unexpected places. There he was in a recent episode of 'Play School' featured in the 'looking through the window' segment; last week a student reported seeing him in a short Australian Studies clip advertised during an early morning television cartoon program. He featured prominently in the filming of one of the Bush Tucker man's forays into inland Australia and I happened upon him several weeks ago in the foreground of a photograph published in an 'Age' article on satellite technology and its uses in education.

The consummate ambassador for his people, is always at ease, but with a quiet air of authority and bearing about him, usually up the front knowingly pointing here and gesturing there, but without a hint of arrogance.

Darby again appeared unexpectedly on my television screen on a recent documentary, again taking centre stage at an important Warlipiri fire ceremony: a celebration of a 'technology' integral to the lifestyle of the Central Desert peoples, brought to life and into our living rooms by the modern technology of global communications, and endless entertainments.

The contrast in itself was stunning. But even more stunning was the deeper realisation of what this man had achieved. As he danced part of the ceremony to the rhythmic accompaniment of bloodwood boomerangs and hypnotic chanting, it was impossible not to be impressed by his certainty and authority. As he re-enacted this ancient creed and reaffirmed for his community a proper sense of order and obligation, he was confirmed in my mind as a man performing with dexterity the most difficult balancing act of all, the merging of indigenous and western cultures.

How he manages to do this is a testament to his wisdom, his dogged determination, his Christian faith and his humour. As a friend and fellow Warlipiri elder remarked at the height of Darby's dancing, "That's a good one, Darby. You're a real winner!" It was impossible to disagree.

I first met Darby Jampijimpa Ross on his home territory at Yuendumu in the backyard of the Baptist missionary's house. Of course "his country" extended for kilometres beyond this in every direction taking in the many places for which he is guardian and caretaker, along the tracks of the Eagle and Rain Dreaming.

I was introduced to Darby as his younger brother, having already received my skin name through another Warlipiri family connection. In time Darby taught me to call him papardi - older brother, and, in turn always called me kukuru - younger brother.

Most reliable sources agree that Darby is "in his eighties", making him an old man by any standards. We can generally assume that his immediate ancestors lived in traditional tribal manner, and that Darby was accordingly raised in his culture and environment as a fully initiated man, without having had much contact with non-Aboriginal people. We can only guess at his direct or near involvement in a whole series of events that constitute the final chapter of European conquest of Aboriginal lands. For example, he would have been in his 20's when the 1928 Coniston massacre occurred. I have heard him refer to this event as one who knew of its terror first hand and who, no doubt, suffered in its aftermath.
Respect for Darby crosses traditional boundaries. As a fluent speaker of at least 5 Aboriginal languages, Darby takes on the stature of the learned European courtier, certainly with less pomp but definitely more ceremony, Warlpiri style. He is a highly respected artist with examples of his dot paintings hanging in Parliament House, Canberra.

I have been inspired and uplifted by his prayers during worship services at Yuendumu, I have watched with admiration as he gathered a small group of friends together after church to pray for the sick child of a young couple. I have sat with Darby and listened to him tell and re-tell in his pidgin English the stories that made up his life; the journeying, the important places, the connectedness of time and space and people.

He has patiently listened to my questions and observations, drawing me into his life and confirming our friendship by verbal agreement, by touching my hand, by laughing with me. He has taught me with patience how to correctly cut a section of bloodwood or desert oak for shaping into a boomerang. In startling fashion he had broken a casual moment of reflection, suddenly stiffened back, and with eyes following his outstretched crooked arm pointing into the distance, he has spoken commandingly and with urgency of the Law, proper relations, and past events.

I have sat at the feet of this wise man, hushed and still, and without understanding all his words, sensed his meaning and been enriched by his teaching.

I have only spent the best part of 10 days spread over 4 years in Darby’s company and obviously do not know him very well at all, and yet, he has drawn me into brotherhood with him. I am a changed person for having met him and for being able to call him papardi. To an onlooker, Darby may appear to be the atypical Aboriginal loser. To see his abode, his failing eyesight, his ill-fitting, dirty clothes, you might be excused for thinking that. But that’s not the real Darby.

The Darby I know, even the little I know, is the man at the fire ceremony described by his friend, “You’re a real winner, Darby!” Who can disagree?
Appendix 2  Observation Schedule used in Class

My Observation Schedule

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

Seating arrangement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/Category</th>
<th>Interactions</th>
<th>Student Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Style......... lecturing to content</td>
<td>teacher-student: who........</td>
<td>Indifferent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal story telling</td>
<td>when</td>
<td>Bored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General story telling</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>Upset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work from sheet &amp; text</td>
<td>excited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching film</td>
<td>interested</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novel reading</td>
<td>antagonistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral lecturing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTENT of LESSON

Pre contact/ traditional
Other Groups
• Focussed on  **Specific Warlpiri**  Contact

**Generalisations**

Today

Contrasted with our way of doing things
Appendix 3  Stimulus Chart used to Interview Student Groups

- Petrol sniffing Story by elders
- Sharing CHURCH
- Walking around the town
- At the Disco
- The art centre and art
- Softball Football
- Hunting trip
Other Experience on the Centre Trip

People around the Alice

Visiting sites and hearing the dreaming stories e.g. Uluru

Visiting Aboriginal TV and Radio station in Alice

Readings in the Booklets
Appendix 4. Warlpiri Subsections as taught By MECS