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Building On A Dream

During 2012 Worawa Aboriginal College prepared for its 30th Anniversary celebrations to honour the official opening of the College on 19 March 1983. Anniversary celebrations included the production of a DVD, *Building On A Dream*, to record the Worawa journey since the opening of the College. *Building On A Dream* included members from all sections of the Worawa Community, who were instrumental in realising the dream of Hyllus Maris through their involvement in the educational enterprise. Thus the narrative of the first thirty years of the life of the College was encapsulated in the segments of the DVD. The research project 'Walking together to make a difference: A case study of Worawa Aboriginal College' demonstrates the continuation of this narrative. It is important therefore that the methodology employed in the project is appropriate and able to generate and analyse rich data in a meaningful manner.

The project aims to focus on key people at Worawa Aboriginal College and identify factors that enable or challenge:

- the nurturing of a strong sense of cultural identity
- the building of a sense of connectedness through the development of respectful relationships within the learning community of Worawa Aboriginal College
- the empowerment of students and adults in taking responsibility for their own actions
- rigorous student learning

and therefore answer the fundamental research question: What factors do students and adults at Worawa Aboriginal College understand as assisting the nurturing of a strong sense of cultural identity through connectedness, empowerment and learning in their life at school?

and the further research question that goes beyond the immediate context:

To what extent are the findings/ explanations from this project, applicable to the wider Australian education community both Aboriginal and mainstream and to the global First Nations education community?

The key concepts, Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning, present in 'Building On a Dream' and identified in the literature, were related to the Worawa Values of Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour and used to develop relevant questions for interviews. Definitions of Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning derived from the Literature Review are:

Culture: the characteristics of Aboriginal people defined by their connection to people and place, manifested in a contemporary context.

Connectedness: a sense of belonging to a learning community.

Empowerment: the ability to act with confidence in order to direct

one's own life within the context of a learning community.

Learning: a complex co-emergent process of holistic development enabled through the construction of meaning, taking place within a community that is dynamic and robust in adapting to changing circumstances.

1. Appropriate Research Methodologies

1.1 *Towards An Appropriate Methodology*

In March 1999 Lester-Irabinna Rigney, an Aboriginal academic from Flinders University in Adelaide attended the first forum in Australian history that included Indigenous scholars, researchers and post-graduate students for the purpose of developing Indigenous research methodologies that were inclusive of the Indigenous experience (Rigney, 2001). The forum was at the U Mulliko Centre at the University of Newcastle. In describing the need for such research methodologies Rigney (*ibid*) states: "We can never accept that our progress can be measured by liberalist notions of 'equality'. During the 1970s it was thought that 'equality' could be reached in higher education by simply adding Indigenous peoples to the academy of science and giving it a stir." (p. 1). He situates his discussion in the context of the emergence of Indigenism and the struggle for Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty amid the dominance of western scientific 'truth', which views the nature of reality as mechanistic. According to this view western science is the "teller of truth" (*ibid* p. 3). This dominance results in the inclusion of Indigenous people in research as objects of studies only. It is therefore understandable that this has led to the "hegemonic colonial construction of Indigenous identities." (*ibid* p. 3) and that Indigenous knowledge has been undervalued to the extent that it is often deemed worthless. Western science employs dichotomies for example subject/object, rational/irrational and black/white to explain phenomena which engender 'racist distortions' (*ibid* p. 7).

In order to develop appropriate methodologies for Indigenous research Rigney follows Nakarta (1998) by arguing that in order to improve the status quo, Indigenous academics must immerse themselves in the thought processes that have produced the position of inequality and of powerlessness. Rigney calls this the "journey of academic contradiction" (Rigney, *op cit*, p. 8) necessary to "develop a responsible and accountable Indigenist discourse that is theoretically sophisticated and robust" (p. 9). Rigney's stated purpose for his writing is to "promote continued discussion on Indigenist methodology... a transmission of ideas to promote further debate" (Rigney, 1999, p. 632). He defines Indigenist research:

Indigenist research is research which focuses on the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australians. It is Indigenous Australians who are the primary subjects of Indigenist research. Indigenist research is research which gives voice to Indigenous people (ibid p. 637).

and identifies three fundamental and interrelated principles:

- *Involvement in resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research*
- *Political integrity of Indigenist research*
- *Giving privilege to Indigenous voices in Indigenist research (ibid p. 636).*

Rigney (1999) also acknowledges that Indigenous Australians are more aware and respectful of each other's cultural traditions and more accountable to their institutions and their communities and so it is appropriate that Indigenous Australians speak through Indigenous researchers. It is notable that Rigney documented these key principles again when attending the fifth forum for the development of Indigenist methodologies in 2003. It was also in 2003 that Karen Martin incorporated Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing within a theoretical framework based on Aboriginal ontology and epistemology and methods for researching respectfully within an Aboriginal context. Following Rigney, one of Martin's priorities is to give privilege to Indigenous voices.

1.2 Democratic Practitioner Research

A methodology congruent with Rigney's principles is described in the book 'Narrative Life' (Hooley, 2009), which encourages democratic practitioner research, a methodology that is respectful, critical and culturally inclusive and "one that deliberately confronts a complex net of social and educational factors that are seen to interact constantly and exist within a political and cultural gel" (p. 150). It is this methodology that informs the methodology of this research project: *Walking together to make a difference: A case study of Worawa Aboriginal College*.

The framework of Democratic Practitioner Research is "constructed from an Indigenous perspective that enables links to be made across cultures in a two-way inquiry fashion" (*ibid*, p. 143). This framework is appropriate as it enables the exploration of ideas and the construction and connection of meaning in order to consider new ideas and practices. It is critical and emancipatory as Indigenous Australians are its primary subjects rather than its objects and are consequently able to project a strong vibrant voice. This understanding is to the forefront in this case study as an Aboriginal member of the Worawa College Community is both a researcher and participant. This project is practitioner research as it involves a "small group of practitioners involved in a systematic inquiry over time" (*ibid* p. 149) and the involvement of "trusted colleagues who meet regularly to discuss the research and to challenge views that are partially developed" (*ibid* p. 150). Exemplars gathered by the group inform the discussions and the process of theorising these, results in the forming and reforming of views as the project progresses. The many cycles of review enable a reflexive approach, which in turn obviates inappropriate power relations and assists in addressing any issues arising from bias. This methodology is democratic and addresses concerns of hegemony as:

*A communicative rather than instrumental reason is supported,
such that emerging knowledge and understanding is considered*

by consensus and is not imposed by so-called experts. Research of this type is not separated from life, but becomes a part of life, for all participants. (ibid p. 147)

The Research Team commissioned by the Executive Director of Worawa Aboriginal College and consisting of a key Aboriginal staff member and two other staff members from Worawa Aboriginal College, as well as two members of the Worawa Academic Reference Group (WARG), agree that this is an appropriate methodology for Walking together to make a difference: A case study of Worawa Aboriginal College. The members of the research team undertook the process of theorising and making recommendations. Critical friends and an external advisor, all from external academic environments critiqued this process.

The members of the research team are:

Aunty Lois Peeler AM: Executive Director and Principal, Worawa Aboriginal College
Kim Walters: Head of Boarding, Worawa Aboriginal College
Kathryn Gale: Deputy Principal, Head of Learning and Teaching, Worawa Aboriginal College
Pam Russell: Chairperson of the Worawa Academic Reference Group
Dr Mauricette (Mauri) Hamilton: Member of the Worawa Academic Reference Group.

Critical Friends are:

Associate Professor Gary Thomas: Associate Director, Academic Indigenous Knowledges, Learning and Teaching Unit, Chancellery, Queensland University of Technology.
Associate Professor Zane Ma Rhea: Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University.
Dr Shannon Faulkhead: Researcher, Faculty of Arts. Monash University.
Dr Kaye Price: Research Associate, David Unaipon College of Education and Research, University of South Australia.
Lindy Joubert: Founding Director, UNESCO Observatory on Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts
Editor-in-Chief UNESCO Observatory Refereed Journal
Vice President, World Craft Council Asia Pacific Region, South Pacific
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning: The University of Melbourne.

External Advisor: Dr Neil Hooley: Author and Lecturer in the College of Education, Victoria University.

Hooley (2009) recommends that the participatory research team be composed solely of Indigenous researchers with non-Indigenous in the role of critical friends. The members of the research team acknowledge the departure from Hooley's recommended structure by the inclusion of non-Aboriginal people in the research team but think the chosen structure is appropriate for this research project. The chosen

methodology as well as being appropriate for research in an Aboriginal context, allows for data analysis that is, as Creswell (1998) states, “an iterative spiral” (p. 53).

2. Research Framework

The Research Framework for this project is underpinned by the fusion of western academic and Indigenous research philosophies. Figure 4.1 depicts the deep philosophical relationship between western academic approaches to research and the Indigenous Ways of Being, Knowing, Valuing and Doing. The worldview of Indigenous Australians is distinctive as already described in the Literature Review. In order to research in an Indigenous context this must be acknowledged and research conducted in a manner that respects this.

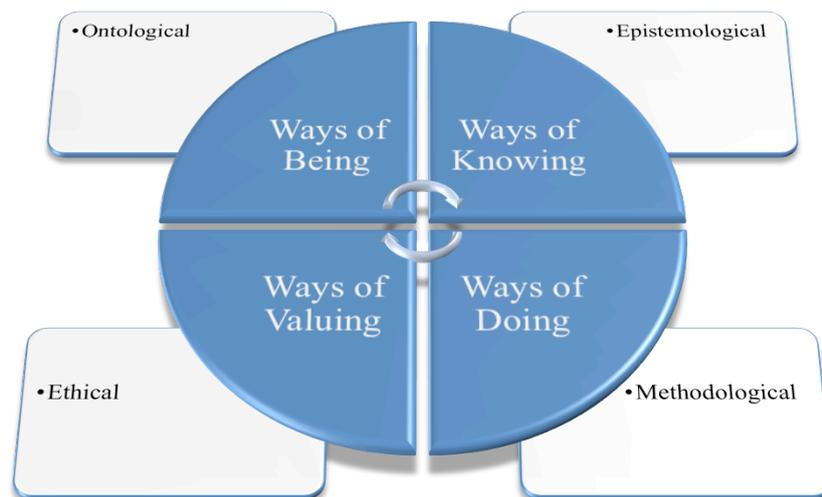


Figure 4.1 *Relationship of Elements of the Research Framework*

2.1 A Qualitative Approach

Research, by its very name involves re-searching (McLaughlin, 2002) and is about advancing a field or discipline and contributing to its development (Gough, 2002a). In order to accomplish this, we need to know how we know what we know.

Qualitative research is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as, “a situated activity, that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). This approach enables the understanding of meaning as constructed by the participants in the research. Knowledge is produced and data generated rather than merely gathered or collected (Gough, *op cit*). Sarakantos (1998), drawing on a number of authors, captures the essence of qualitative research in descriptions involving:

- reality in interaction,
- the researcher and the researched as two equally important elements of the same situation and
- studying reality from the inside not the outside.

Critical qualitative research also situates the observer in the world, using practices that are forms of critical pedagogy and through these transform the world, as the researchers and the research participants share a critical empowering space (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It is emancipatory and involves reflexive discourse (Lather, 2007; Hooley, 2009). Thus critical qualitative research is appropriate for this research project as this approach enables the further development of the story of Worawa Aboriginal College as it ensures the research is grounded in the specific meanings, traditions, customs and community relations within the Wowara College Community.

2.1.1 *Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative Inquiry is story-centred and: “follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field texts (data) to interim and final research texts” (Clandinin and Huber, in press, published 2010, p. 1). Clandinin and Huber further define three commonplaces of a conceptual framework. These are temporality, sociality and place. They also note the ability of narrative inquiry to highlight ethical matters as well as to shape new theoretical understanding of people’s experience.

Stories are developed from the lived experience of people, in this particular project the lived experience of the Worawa Aboriginal College Community. The concept of temporality means that we look to the past and into the present to shape the future. “Rescripting the story is about inventing the future, about imagining how things can be otherwise and about working with colleagues to bring about a better world for all people” (Beatie, 2001, p. vi: cited in Hooley, 2009, p. 178).

Experience over time is integral to any narrative; change over time needs to be understood in relation to the researchers as well as the researched (Clandinin and Huber, in press, published 2010, p. 4). The relationship of the researchers and researched is also an important element of the concept of sociality, which refers to the social conditions in which the events involving people occur. Recognising that all events relevant to stories occur in a specific place, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define place as “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). The people living in these places are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own (Chase, 2005, p. 660). Chase describes a narrative inquiry involved over time in culture as narrative ethnography. Here the researcher and the researched are presented together in a single text with multiple voices.

Hooley (2009) understands narrative inquiry as a democratic approach to qualitative research, because it enables the respectful inclusion of all voices. He moves beyond the understanding of studying from the inside rather than the outside

(Sarakantos, 1998) to say that narrative inquiry allows those involved to look backwards, forwards, inwards, outward. The intention of this project is to develop an explanatory narrative as “the intention is to go beyond mere description and to seek or unravel the explanation as to why experience occurred and to explore causal links between the events uncovered” (Hooley, 2009, p. 178).

Narrative inquiry enables a wide variety of field texts (Hooley, 2009; Clandinin & Huber, in press 2010) that represent the complexity of people’s lives. These include oral histories, personal anecdotes, artefacts, interviews, digital records of events, written material, and results of activities. The range is important as stories are often messy and circuitous depictions rather than linear accounts and so are better told in a variety of ways. There is always the responsibility of developing research texts that “respectfully represent participants’ lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Huber, in press 2010 p. 5).

Many cycles of investigation and reflection are required so that “truth, trustworthy claims, insights and descriptions of meaning are agreed and supported by the research community” (Hooley, 2009, p. 179) thus satisfying the issue of knowledge credibility. Clandinin and Connolly (2006) describe these cycles of investigation and reflection, as “a sense of search, a ‘re-search’, a searching again”, “a sense of continual reformulation” (p. 124). Even after this “inquiries conclude still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up the narrative inquirers’ and participants’ lives, both individual and social” (Clandinin and Huber, *op cit* p. 10). In all of this the voice of the inquirer must not dominate. As this project has multiple inquirers a single voice is less likely to dominate. New theoretical understandings emerge from this approach as inquirers come to understand phenomena in different ways (Clandinin and Huber, *op cit*). Hooley (*op cit*) recommends narrative inquiry in projects involving Aboriginal people because, “[t]his approach is very congruent with Indigenous knowing and the trust and sharing that exists within communities.” (p. 179).

2.1.2 Context in Naturalistic Inquiry

A project from a naturalistic perspective enables applications that are impossible from projects that do not recognise context as paramount. Context situates the project and has the potential to empower the participants. Dey (1993) sees context as fundamental in such an inquiry as through context “its wider social and historical import” are grasped (p. 32).

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) also emphasise the importance of context in any naturalistic inquiry. This emanates from the understanding that “all subjects of such an inquiry are bound together by a complex web of unique relationships” (p.16). It is this web of relationships that both “restricts and extends the applicability of the research” (p. 16). A case study is powerful, flexible and open as it can instigate further study of the same context or stimulate further study of similar contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say a case study is the preferred design for any naturalistic study as it allows for thick description that enables the reader to be a part of the context.

2.2 Epistemology

The four components of the research framework, epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods are related and each informs the other (Crotty, 1998). Selection of an appropriate epistemology is paramount. Constructionism is the most appropriate epistemology for this project as the purpose is to explore and discover meaning, as it is constructed by participants.

The following table (Table 3.1) designates the framework and involves the four elements that inform one another (Crotty, 1998)

Table 4.1 *Research Framework*

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bricolage • Hermeneutical: Phenomenological and Historical • Critical Hermeneutics, Critical Enlightenment and Critical Emancipatory • Symbolic Interaction • Ethnography
Methodology	Case Study
Methods	In-depth Interview/ Semi- Structured Interview/ Observations/ Accessing College Exemplars

2.2.1 Constructionism

Epistemology addresses the nature of knowledge and provides the philosophical basis for how knowledge is acquired (Crotty, 1998). It becomes the vehicle for situating the understanding or way of knowing.

As this research project is concerned with the ways the members of the Worawa Aboriginal Community construct meaning in their daily lives constructionism (McLaughlin, 2002) or constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) is an appropriate epistemology. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe the constructivist paradigm as follows:

The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and subject create understandings), and a naturalistic

(in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (p. 35).

Constructionism or constructivism, defines no objective truth (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Rather than striving to locate objective truth it understands that meaning is constructed from experience. Therefore all is relative. The Aboriginal value system is congruent with this approach and in using this epistemology the project acknowledges and honours both knowledge systems within which the College operates.

3. Theoretical Perspectives

Beliefs underpin research and these define the relationship between the researcher and the researched. A paradigm is a basic set of beliefs that guide an action (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Interpretivism is a paradigm appropriate for this research project.

3.1 Interpretivism

Interpretive social science has its origins in German social science and philosophy, in the persons of Max Weber (1864-1920) and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and is described as requiring “an empathetic understanding of the everyday lived experience of people in specific historical settings” (Neuman, 2000, p. 70). The need for purposeful, meaningful study of social interaction, in order to better understand the reasons for actions was stressed by Weber.

An interpretive approach aims to understand the values, attitudes and beliefs of people as they act in certain situations, and researchers who adopt this stance reject the belief that, human behaviour is governed by general laws (Candy, 1989). Candy, in differentiating between an interpretive and positivist approach, says, “the notion of theory shifts from a search for law-like regularities about the nature of social behaviour to the identification of social rules that underlie and govern the use of social facts” (p. 4). Reliability and validity are therefore defined in this way in an interpretative approach.

There are also a number of assumptions shared by those adopting interpretivist theory. These are:

- *Causes and effects are mutually interdependent*
- *Inquiry aims to understand individuals rather than to generalise*
- *Inquiry is holistic rather than fragmented*
- *Inquiry is always valued laden (Candy, 1989).*

An interpretative approach has the ability to generate data that recognises the complexity of human perceptions and the meaning constructed through them. This recognition can then lead to a greater understanding of what constitutes the values, attitudes and beliefs of the participants in the project.

3.1.1 *Bricolage*

‘Bricolage’ is relevant in this research project as it employs multiple theoretical perspectives in a complex context. Rogers (2012) drawing on Denzin and Lincoln (1999) and Kincheloe (2001; 2004b; 2005b) and Berry (2004a; 2004b; 2006; 2001) identifies ‘bricolage’ research as “a critical, multi-perspectival, multi-theoretical and multi-methodological approach to inquiry” (p. 1). It is a complex approach that allows multiple epistemologies and political dimensions. (Berry (2004a). The relatively new term derived its meaning from the French practice of producing crafted articles from whatever materials happen to be readily available; no materials are pre-ordered for this practice.

Denzin and Lincoln (1999) identified five types of bricoleur, the interpretive bricoleur who focuses on the many-layered interactive processes in complex qualitative research, the methodological bricoleur who designs data generating and analysis methods to suit the intricacies of the context, the theoretical bricoleur who takes into account a range of theoretical perspectives, the political bricoleur who demonstrate awareness of the effect of power in the development of knowledge and the narrative bricoleur who understands that the result of any research is a specific representation of the context. Kincheloe (2001) acknowledges that bricoleurs understand the dynamics of the diverse elements encountered in research and how this influences knowledge production. He identifies a sixth type of bricoleur, the critical bricoleur and extends the understanding to emancipatory research (2005b). Critical bricoleurs are committed to value the knowledge of the excluded (2004b).

Reflexivity is essential for complex research (Hooley, 2009). It is especially relevant for an interpretive bricoleur (Rogers, 2012). Reflexivity “highlights how human positioning influences the research process” (*ibid* p. 4). It allows interpretation of phenomena from multiple vantage points, adding depth to the process. It can be argued that reflexivity is essential in any complex research process and therefore it is essential to all forms of bricoleur. This project can be described as bricolage as it is a “a critical, multi-perspectival, mutli-theoretical and multi-methodological approach to inquiry” (*ibid* p. 1), where reflexive approaches enable complex thinking in multiple cycles.

As demonstrated in Table 3.1 there are four interpretivist perspectives relevant for this project. The first is hermeneutical phenomenology.

3.1.2 *Hermeneutic: Phenomenological and Historical*

Hermeneutics is fundamentally the process of interpretation, while phenomenology focuses on the experience of every day life (Sarakantos, 1998). Crotty (1998) notes that while the word hermeneutics itself is only two hundred years old, Biblical exegesis has always used an interpretative approach, as did literary students of ancient Greece. The concept derives from the supposition that texts have meaning for the reader and that meaning is ultimately the property of the reader. The reader constructs her/his own meaning according to his/her experiences of life. Thus the meaning of the text ascribed by the reader can go deeper than that ascribed by the author. Hermeneutics involves both description and interpretation.

The German philosopher, Husserl (1859-1938), first used phenomenology to study how people experienced their world. Implicit here is the understanding that people only know what they can experience. Here perceptions make meaning and the analysis of these experiences provides deeper meaning. Crotty (1998) describes phenomenology as laying aside as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisiting our immediate experience of them. The term hermeneutical phenomenology is credited to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), although he used the term phenomenological hermeneutics, as phenomenology was very much to the forefront in his understanding (Crotty, 1998). Heidegger purports not to rely on culturally derived meanings, but on those meanings discovered by humans in their quest for 'being'. It is the experiences encountered in life, that are fundamental to human existence and the interpretation of them must be "faithfully rendered" (p. 100).

In contemporary research van Manen (1990) explains phenomenological research in terms of researching from the inside out and expounds the value of becoming so closely associated with the research subject as to be a participant observer. Researching from the inside out assists the understanding of knowledge as a social construct and hence the relevance of a hermeneutic-historical perspective. 'Historical' is the interest of hermeneutic understanding (Terry, 1997). Because knowledge is socially constructed over time it is often challenged and re-defined. Knowing how knowledge is constructed is paramount. Interactive and discursive methods inherent in a hermeneutic-historical perspective enable open, collaborative views of knowledge and the ongoing discussion of data and possible findings (Hooley, *op cit*).

3.1.3 *Critical Hermeneutics, Critical Enlightenment and Critical Emancipatory*

A critical perspective involves both critical hermeneutics and critical enlightenment. As Sarakantos (1998) notes, the critical and interpretative approaches are quite compatible as "critical theorists see people as creators of their destiny" (p. 8). Critical theorists understand that meaning is constructed but constructed in the context of power. Structures that dominate and manipulate, shape the construction of meaning. This may create a state of tension if that which appears to be on the surface, is not, in fact, the reality.

The concept of empowerment is integral to the project, so aspects of critical theory as described by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) are relevant. Originating in Frankfurt, in the first half of the twentieth century, critical theory is generally associated with cultural criticism. Kincheloe and McLaren however, link critical theory with a hermeneutical approach in their description of critical hermeneutics. They claim that this is an often-neglected aspect of qualitative research informed by critical theory. Interpretation is fundamental to a qualitative approach and no interpretation is value-free as researchers always interpret according to perceived relationships (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The purpose of critical hermeneutics, according to Kincheloe and McLaren, is to "reveal power dynamics within social and cultural contexts" (p. 286). Kincheloe and McLaren (*ibid*) also describe critical enlightenment as the context in which "critical theory analyses competing power interests between groups and individuals" (p. 281) and within specific situations,

identifying winners and losers. A critical emancipatory perspective relates to 'knowing why' (Terry, 1997) and focuses on politics and policies in the interests of freedom from oppressive regimes. It is concerned with justice and reconciliation and "the significance of key political issues such as morality, identity, community and consciousness" (Hooley, *op cit*, p. 146). Therefore in any understanding of empowerment that involves both enabling and impeding factors, a critical stance is inevitable and desirable.

3.1.4 *Symbolic Interactionism*

Symbolic Interactionism enables an understanding of society and the human world (Crotty, 1998). It is attributed to the American social-psychologist, George Herbert Mead (1827-1881) although the promulgation of the theory is accredited to Herbert Blumer (1900- 1987), and deals directly with issues concerning "language, communication, interrelationships and community ...those basic social interactions whereby we enter into those perceptions, attitudes and values of a community, becoming persons in the process" (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). Blumer describes three basic assumptions about symbolic interactionism:

- *That human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings these things have for them*
- *That meanings of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows*
- *That these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 72).*

This approach is relevant for this exploration as all participants engage in the use of language and modes of communication often exclusively understood by their peers. This means sub-cultures develop within the school culture and those who are extraneous to the group, may or may not be able to understand meaning as it is constructed by any particular sub-culture. This perspective is highly relevant for any research project within a school setting and methods employed in this project allow for data generation and analysis that recognises this perspective as fundamental to any true understanding of the concepts of connectedness and learning.

3.1.5 *Ethnography*

"Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller more meaningful context" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455) in the daily life of people (Creswell, 1998) "attending extensively to multiple subtleties of meaning" (Abbott, 2004, p. 24) and often in narrative form. It involves detailed description of daily life or 'thick' description (Geertz, 1973). Involvement in prolonged interaction with the participants in their everyday student, community and professional lives is integral to this research and it enables a cultural interpretation through closely exploring multiple sources of data. It provides the "insiders' point of view" (Hoey, 2013). Hoey also notes that meaning is emergent rather than being imposed. Ethnography was originally associated only with cultural studies but as

Tedlock states, it “has also proved useful in a number of applied areas, including education” (p. 456). Creswell (1998) translates it specifically to the school setting.

These perspectives are all relevant for this project as the research team generates, analyses and interprets data gathered from the members of the Worawa Aboriginal College Community in ways that involve close observation in order to interpret and better understand their every day experiences through ongoing discussion of the generated data and exemplars with a view to affirming, challenging and re-defining existing knowledge.

4. Methodology

4.1 Case Study

As this research project is situated in the context of Worawa Aboriginal College with a particular group of Elders, Board members, students, staff and parents, and it endeavours to answer “how” and “why” questions, a case study is the most appropriate design (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1987; Stake, 2000; Yin 2009).

A case study can be both quantitative and qualitative (Stake, 2000). Stake describes a number of relevant criteria in relation to case studies:

- *A case by its very nature is bounded-an integrated system.*
- *It exhibits patterned behaviour.*
- *It cannot be understood without reference to other cases, yet it has its own context* (p. 436).

This project is within a bounded system, exhibits patterned behaviour and has its own context. Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) have suggested that placing boundaries on a case renders the case manageable. This can be achieved by placing boundaries: (a) by time and place (Creswell, 2003); (b) time and activity (Stake *op cit*); and (c) by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This case study is bounded by definition and context.

Stake (2000) identifies three types of case studies:

1. an intrinsic case study,
2. an instrumental case study, and
3. a collective case study.

This project is of the first type as the members of the research team seek to understand the perceptions of Elders, Board members, students, staff and parents in a particular context. When a generalisation is drawn, then it becomes an intrinsic case study becomes an instrumental case study.

Following Stake (*ibid*) the members of the research team must take into account:

- the nature of the case
- its historical background
- the context (physical, social, educational) and
- similar contexts (if relevant).

Stake also comments that all cases have “important atypical features, happenings, relationships and situations” (p. 439). While Stake acknowledges there exists doubt about the validity of a single case study he maintains:

the case study method has been too little honoured as the intrinsic study of a valued particular, as it is in biography, institutional self-study, program evaluation, therapeutic practice and many lines of work (p. 438).

Stake states that his position is corroborated by other researchers. While generalisation is a possibility and must be addressed, Stake warns of the real possibility of an over-riding interest in generalisation detracting from the specific findings of the case study.

5. Methods

This Section has situated this project in an appropriate epistemology, constructionism. It has also identified that an interpretive theoretical perspective will lead to most insight using a case study methodology. In the following sections details of the actual methods employed are given.

5.1 Description of the Participants

The participants are the members of the Worawa Aboriginal College Community. These include Elders, Board members, parents and grandparents, students and staff as well as external professionals working with the students and staff. As some members of the research team are also members of the College staff, they are included as participants. The inclusion of all members of the College Community as participants means that Aboriginal voices are privileged throughout the entire process (Hooley, 2009). External professionals include Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

5.2 Developing Elements of the Research Design

5.2.1 Involvement in Development of the Research Design

As previously stated a small group of practitioners who have similar interests is appropriate for the design of democratic practitioner research (Hooley, 2009). The research team described above consists of five people with two critical friends and an external advisor critiquing the process. The common interest of the five members of the team is the undertaking of a case study to explore and present a rich picture of the Culture, Empowerment, Connectedness and Learning at Worawa Aboriginal College. Their diversity of roles in relation to the College enables broad foci to inform the research design. Frequent face-to-face meetings as well as electronic communication results in ongoing relevant discussion and critique in order to move from “perceptual to conceptual knowledge” (Hooley, *ibid* p. 149).

5.2.1.1 Initial Discussions

Initial discussions immediately following the convening of the research team by Aunty Lois Peeler, Executive Director of Worawa Aboriginal College involved the academic framework, the questions to be asked, the recording of data via electronic devices as well as the more traditional methods of audio recording and note-taking, a brainstorm and subsequent discussion of appropriate methods of generating data from different participants. It was deemed appropriate that data be generated through interview in the following manner:

Aunty Lois Peeler: Elders

Kathryn Gale: Students, in relation to the academic program

Kim Walters: Students, in relation to the residential program: residential staff

Pam Russell: Board members

Pam Russell and Mauri Hamilton: Teachers in the academic program

Mark Thompson: co-opted to gather data from parents.

Alterations to this plan occurred as the project progressed and data was generated through interview in the following manner

Aunty Lois Peeler: Some parents

Kathryn Gale: Students, in relation to the academic program and residential programs

Pam Russell: Elders and Board members

Pam Russell and Mauri Hamilton: Staff, in relation to the academic program and residential program

Mark Thompson: co-opted to gather data from parents.

Early discussions also addressed and collated a list of exemplars already in existence at the College. These include the digital recordings of events and productions, the Debutante Ball (2011), ‘Stylin’ Up With Worawa’ (2012), ‘Sapphires’ (2013), ‘Debutante Dreaming’, 2014 and the Worawa promotional material (2013) and Learning in and through the Arts (2013). Newsletters promulgated each term and material on record from the Awards Ceremonies (2013 & 2014), were also included.

The College Facebook page is constantly updated with relevant material and there is student material in the public art gallery at the College.

5.2.1.2 Final Product

The research team decided that the end product would take the form of a written report. Existing exemplars are also part of the final product. The final report is published in its entirety and in sections to facilitate accessibility in certain circumstances.

5.3 Data Generation

5.3.1 *Gathering Exemplars*

Exemplars are field texts and in a research design appropriate in an Indigenous context it is appropriate to include non-written artefacts (Hooley, 2009). This is true also in relation to contemporary schools in general, as in most schools there are many potential sources of data recorded visually rather than in written description. Written exemplars are also included.

5.3.2 *Observation*

Observation is the fundamental component of all research methods (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003). It is the most reliable form of data gathering as far as the researcher is concerned, as the knowledge gained from observation is his/her own, because she/he is the primary witness. Therefore observation is best conducted in settings that are natural for the participants. Observation in the context of this project was ongoing as three members of the research team were participant observers, while the other two were close observers.

5.3.2.1 Participant Observer

The role of participant observer is “conducted in situ” (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013, p. 76). This process builds rapport with the participants and so they feel relaxed and able to communicate without reticence. Because the participant observer spends a great deal of time with the participants they observe a wide range of phenomena. This is most appropriate for the three members of the research team who are members of the Worawa College staff: Aunty Lois Peeler, Executive Director and Principal, Kathryn Gale, Deputy Principal, Head of Learning and Teaching and Kim Walters, Head of Boarding. Their observations are particularly significant because of the extended time spent in the company of all the participants.

5.3.2.2 Close observer

Van Manen (1990) sees the role of the close observer-researcher as involving "an attitude of assuming a relationship that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of these situations" (p. 69). Relationships are developed over a period of time, by adopting the role of close observer. There is prolonged engagement "so that the ... observer's status becomes less prominent, as evidenced by the participants' conversation and behaviour" (van Manen, p. 72). This is significant in building an environment of trust with the participants with a view to observing and taking part in in-depth conversations. The two members of the Worawa Academic Reference Group (WARG), Pam Russell and Mauri Hamilton were close observers as they were known to the participants and recognised as regular visitors to the College.

5.3.2.3 Field Notes

These provide a record of happenings, anecdotes as they unfolded during observation. These are, by their nature, improvisational, as they are produced without forethought. Ely and Anzul (1991) describe field notes as "those rapid jottings or whisperings into a tape recorder of details and dialogues that serve as guide posts for fuller descriptions" (p. 69). From this data the analysis is begun and continued. Field notes described such phenomena as the setting, both physical and social, the interaction between all participants, the interruptions, the time of day, the weather, atmosphere within the room, direct speech, body language, teaching and learning approaches, expressions of emotions.

Each member of the research team kept reflections completed either at various intervals or after each period of observation, sometimes immediately and sometimes after a short period of time. This enabled reflection upon observation and the return to many scenarios in order to discuss these with either the participants or members of the research team. These reflections initiated many professional conversations in which all members of the research team came to understand at a greater depth the total milieu in which the participants operated and their understanding of many fundamental concepts and issues.

5.3.2.4 Quantitative Data

Quantitative data is data that can be expressed as a number or quantified in another way. The information that quantitative data provides enables educators to make decisions, the goal of which is to improve student achievement. These include identifying the effectiveness of classroom instruction and refining these if beneficial, allocating appropriate time for instruction, identifying students strengths and needs in order to target specific students to provide individualised instruction, adapting the curriculum to better suit learning needs and reporting student achievement to stakeholders in a meaningful manner. Quantitative data made available to the research team included student base-line data, continuing assessments and NAPLAN results.

5.3.2.5 Reflection

In order to reflect at a deeper level the research team, after discussion with the external advisor decided to utilise a set of questions for this purpose. They are:

1. What was surprising by what happened, what we found?
2. Was our methodology appropriate, what other approaches could have been used?
3. Did we collect appropriate data; what other data would have been useful?
4. Were we rigorous enough in analysing data, looking for different explanations?
5. How did the project challenge our own thinking, do we understand differently now?

5.3.3 *In-depth Interviews and Professional Conversations*

5.3.3.1 Question Development

The questions for each group of interviewees (appendices M 1 – M 9) are organised according to the elements of the Worawa Way: Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour. They are also related to the relevant key concepts, Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning (Dunbar, Clarkson, & Toomey, 2000).

As well as responding to these questions, the interviewers encouraged participants to elaborate in any way they understood to be relevant. Because of this a great deal of relevant data were generated, data that added significantly to the understanding of the context. In addition there were interviews where a significant amount of time was spent exploring interesting personal reflections of relevance to the participants and relevant to the project.

5.3.3.2 The Interview as an Exchange

If an interview is to generate true data it must involve an exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Both the researched and the researcher need the ability to collect dependable data and develop the capacity to examine this data and make sense of it (Pekrul, 2004). MacBeath (2004) notes that, voices in schools are very complex. He also highlights that voice can be verbal and non-verbal and that it is “neither constant nor without contradiction” (p. 1). Too often students are viewed only from the adult perspective (Lyle, 2000). The model MacBeath describes is helpful, as it portrays the individual as having three internalised voices, that of child, parent and adult. Usually a child responds according to the voice in which they are addressed. If a student is addressed in the voice of a parent, the response will usually be that of a child; if the same student is addressed in the voice of an adult the response will more than likely be in the mode of the adult. This has implications for the researcher, as this is a very significant step in the process of listening to students to generate relevant data.

5.3.3.3 Interview Structure

Interviewing generally refers to face-to-face verbal interchange. This may be on a one-to-one basis or a group interchange. Interviews may also be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The interviewers used in-depth individual interviews in a semi-structured way and decided to refer to them as conversations. The in-depth interviews allowed the participants the privacy to express their views in a very personal way.

The structure of the interviewing process, therefore, was directive using a semi-structured question format. The purpose was phenomenological as the interviewers endeavoured to discover the perceptions of Elders, Board members, students, staff and parents as they constructed meaning from their daily experience of:

- nurturing a strong sense of cultural identity
- building of a sense of connectedness through the development of respectful relationships within the learning community of Worawa Aboriginal College
- empowerment of students and adults in taking responsibility for their own actions
- rigorous student learning.

Interviews were conducted with of Elders, Board members, students, staff and eight parents and three grandparents. The interviewers used a western scientific method or a yarning method as appropriate for the person or group. The questions for all interviews were structured collaboratively with each researcher having the freedom to phrase these appropriately for each interviewee. The interviewers did not aim to address all questions with every person or group. Digressions are often informative and so they used them where relevant. This is consistent with the understanding of the complexities of a learning community.

5.3.3.4 Interview Technique

In a project where interviewees are to share their personal experiences and beliefs in order to build a narrative it is essential to create a non-threatening environment (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). This environment is a space where the participants are able to be open and honest. This is assisted by the adoption of an “unstructured, informal, anti-authoritarian and non-hierarchical atmosphere in which the qualitative researcher and participants establish their relations in an atmosphere of power equality (p. 280). This democratises power relations. This understanding of power is fundamental to democratic practitioner research (Hooley, 2009). For Aboriginal people the technique of yarning is most appropriate. Bessarab (2012) describes yarning as “an informal conversation that is culturally friendly and recognised by Aboriginal people as meaning to talk about something, someone or provide or receive information” (slide 5). She says to yarn with a purpose is an interview and it is useful as a research technique, as it builds on the traditional use of oral means to pass on information in an informal and relaxed setting. The sharing of information adds to the narrative of the group and so is a recognised pedagogical approach. Yarning also allows Aboriginal people to use stories to answer questions, a

form often taken in their conversation. It is important to note that yarning can sometimes be “messy and meandering” (slide 9) as it weaves in and out of the research story. There are protocols attached to this form of information gathering but overall it is similar to a semi-structured interview, where a researcher is interested in a person’s experience in the context of a narrative.

Interview technique is therefore extremely important, as interviews are ways to listen to and learn from people (Madriz, 2003). Ely and Anzul (1991) stress the importance of listening and the necessity of remaining detached. An interviewer must not manipulate the interview if the data generated is to be authentic. At the same time it is important to exhibit active listening skills, as it may be necessary to clarify information from the interviewees or encourage them in their reflection. Fontana and Frey (2003) stress the need to understand the language and culture of the respondents, which impacts on the personal presentation of the interviewer. This is important as the personal presentation of the interviewer, in turn, impacts on the degree of acceptance by the culture of the participants. Voice and demeanour are two aspects of presentation needing to be uppermost in the interviewer’s psyche. Intonation, choice of vocabulary and body language speak loudly and clearly to participants, so both need to be such that the interviewee is comfortable in expressing opinions without intimidation. An interviewer must be aware that in a school context many participants are extremely adept at reading intonation and body language and responding accordingly.

5.3.3.5 Professional conversations

A conversation is also a face-to-face exchange (Groome, 1998). It differs from an interview as the all parties participate equally and each is personally engaged and relaxed in the exchange. A good conversation is usually stimulating for all concerned and does not follow any set agenda and may and often does, arise spontaneously. This is relevant for this project as a number of stimulating conversations with various participants were recorded, some spontaneous and others by design. These were relaxed exchanges and also generated data.

5.3.4 *Data Generating Period*

As previously stated, data was generated through interview in the following manner

Aunty Lois Peeler: Some parents

Kathryn Gale: Students, in relation to the academic program and residential programs

Pam Russell: Elders and Board members

Pam Russell and Mauri Hamilton: Staff, in relation to the academic program and residential program

Mark Thompson: co-opted to gather data from parents.

It is significant to note here that the decision for Kathryn Gale to interview students in relation to both the residential and academic programs occurred because it quickly became evident, that it was more productive to do so. Students when answering questions, found it difficult in some instances, to differentiate between learning occurring in either program. When this was not problematic, there was no need to probe further; when further elucidation was required Kathryn could seek that, with full understanding of the totality of the interview. This enabled the interview to remain conversational and yet elicit relevant data. It also decreased interview time for the students. MacBeath (2004) notes the importance of addressing students in the voice of an adult as the response will more than likely be in the mode of the adult, rather than that of a child. Kathryn's ability to speak with the students using the voice of an adult was significant in eliciting thoughtful responses, often demonstrating maturity beyond their chronological age. The quality of the data in these interviews could only be obtained if the students had confidence in the integrity of the interviewer. This reinforces the necessity of the employment of suitable interviewers in order to obtain the optimum level of data. This is a requirement in any qualitative research, where the aim is to develop a rich picture of the research context.

5.3.4.1 Communicating the project

Initially Aunty Lois Peeler communicated the details of the research project to all participants. After this further details were communicated to prospective participants in a manner appropriate for each group. Elders, Board members, parents and external professionals received further details from Aunty Lois, the Boarding and Academic staff members received further information from Kim Walters and Kathryn Gale. Pam Russell and Mauri Hamilton communicated additional details of the project to the academic and wellbeing staff members. Kathryn explained the interview purpose and process to the students. The girls were eager to express their thoughts in order to assist the development of a picture of Worawa that may inform future students and their families.

The team members were affirmed in the decision to co-opt Mark Thompson when he interviewed three parents and two grandparents at the Parent Forum in 2013. After Aunty Lois Peeler spoke to the parent group about the research project, Mark Thompson addressed the group saying "I am a Yorta, Yorta man and a former Worawa student and I just want to have a yarn to you about your daughters". The data generated by the parents and grandparents from Mark's questioning was videoed by David Callow, a professional photographer, who is well known at Worawa. This field text became a significant research text. The participants were very pleased that this video clip was quickly on the Worawa website and they are very proud of their contribution to the research project. The questions used to generate this data are in Appendix M 10. In 2014 Aunty Lois interviewed five parents and one grandparent. One of these parents was interviewed in 2013. This field text also became a significant research text.

Kathryn Gale, Mauri Hamilton and Pam Russell attended a staff meeting February 26th, 2014 and after initial discussion of the purpose and framework of the project, discussed a staff reflection document containing the research questions for the members of the academic staff. Kathryn Gale had distributed these questions at a previous meeting. These questions provided reflection time prior to their interviews

scheduled for the beginning of April. The teachers were given the option of writing their reflections with a view to presenting these in their interviews, jotting down isolated thoughts that occurred to them during this time or simply reading the questions as a familiarisation exercise. The team thought this method appropriate, as giving the participants' reflection time may result in a more thoughtful response. A similar opportunity was given to the residential staff, after an explanation of the process by Kim Walters.

5.3.4.2 Interview Process

When time came for their interviews staff members had prepared and some handed written responses for Pam and Mauri. The interviews were conducted in conversational style, a style that enabled all to contribute freely. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and written for inclusion in the report. Copies of the pieces for inclusion in the report were then given to the participants for verification and modification as they thought necessary.

Mauri Hamilton used a similar process in her interviews with the external professionals. Pam Russell chose to take extensive notes, write up the interview and send a copy to the relevant person for verification. In interviewing the members of the Leadership Team, Mauri Hamilton gave each the option of a conversation in the context of the questions or the completion of a written reflection. Kim chose to present a written reflection, whilst Aunty Lois and Kathryn chose a conversation. After the conversation, Aunty Lois and Kathryn added to the text given them by Mauri. Some of the details presented by Aunty Lois provide biographical data that contribute to the thick description that enables the reader to be a part of the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another crucial consideration in conducting in-depth interviews is the preparation of the venue and the recording technology (Hamilton, 2005). If the venue is unsuitable, data generation will be limited, as the participants will not be comfortable and focused. Also the recording technology needs to be such so that it works unobtrusively, and therefore is not distracting. The quality of the venue and suitable preparation of the technological aids contributes significantly to the level of data generation from the interviews with all participants. All the venues used for interviews complied with these considerations and so the participants were very relaxed during this time.

All team members were very satisfied with the interview process. As stated in the previous section, steps were taken when communicating the project to the adult participants to reassure them of its positive nature. This was also a focus at the beginning of each interview. Most interviewees commented on the relaxed nature of the interview and how the questions were relevant and enabled them to communicate their understanding. As previously stated the student interviews were conducted by Kathryn, in whom the students have great confidence. In listening to these interviews, it was obvious that the students were responding thoughtfully and enjoyed the process. It is doubtful that these girls would have been as open, if the interviewer was unknown to them, and there had been no opportunity to establish prior relationship. Kathryn's skill in asking the questions in a manner appropriate for each girl was evident and significant in eliciting detail.

After listening to all interviews, transcripts were developed for inclusion in the final report. As previously stated, all adults were given a copy of the material and asked to verify or re-work as they wished. Once this process was completed the material was added to the draft. The participants expressed their gratitude for this opportunity, as it had not been part of their experience when participating in other projects. This opportunity to re-work and re-word ensured the exchanges in the interview were expressed in a coherent manner, conveying the real intention of the interviewee.

5.3.5 Sequence of Data Generation

Earlier in this Section it is stated that the story told in this project develops according to an “iterative spiral” (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). Table 3.3 outlines the cascading sequence of data generation as one stage informs the next.

Table 4.2 Sequence of Data Generation

<i>Term four, 2013</i>	Gathering exemplars Parent forum Parent interviews Presentation Day
<i>Term one, 2014</i>	Teacher interviews and student data Board interviews
<i>Term two, 2014</i>	Student interviews External professionals
<i>Term 3, 2014</i>	Student interviews Boarding House Staff interviews External professionals
<i>Term 4, 2014</i>	Elders interviews Parent Forum Parent interviews Presentation Day

6. Data Analysis, Theorising and Interpretation

6.1 Theme Analysis

As this project is concerned with researching the real world of the participants, the identification of themes as they occur in the data and an analysis of these themes is most appropriate for this project. Ryan and Bernard (2000) describe themes as “abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs that investigators identify before, during and after data collection” (p. 780). Ely and Anzul (1991) say they arise in one of two ways. They can be “a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact”. They define themes as “the researchers’ inferred attitude that highlights explicit or implicit attitudes towards life, behaviour or understandings of a person, persons or culture” (p. 150). As they usually have as their focus underlying ideas about human existence and are supported by the literature review, they are very powerful organising tools for any qualitative research project.

The themes identified from the literature and used to develop questions for interviews are:

- nurturing a strong sense of cultural identity
- building of a sense of connectedness through the development of respectful relationships within the learning community of Worawa Aboriginal College
- empowerment of students and adults in taking responsibility for their own actions
- rigorous student learning.

For purposes of collating the data and to avoid unnecessary repetition, these were incorporated into three themes, using the concepts, Culture, Relationship, Responsibility, Respect and Rigour, used to frame the questions for the participants. These themes are:

1. Connectedness and Empowerment Through Culture and The Worawa Way
2. Connectedness and Empowerment Through Respectful, Responsible Relationships
3. Connectedness and Empowerment Through Rigorous Learning.

The data was then aligned with the themes and, taking note of the “iterative spiral” (Creswell, *op cit*), we found, as demonstrated in the literature review, that empowerment was inextricably entwined with connectedness and learning, thus affirming our themed approach. This facilitates an “iterative spiral”, as the concepts involved in each, if treated discretely, may result in a presentation that is unnecessarily reiterative and therefore, fail to reflect the ecological nature of the case study. The data was then used to weave a story, the story of Worawa Aboriginal College, as an aid to internalising as well as linking material. This involved looking backward and forward and inward and outward (Hooley, 2009). All members of the research team had the ability to look backward, forward, inward and outward in varying degrees. In all the “looking” each team member brought unique perspectives, the intersections of which are significant.

6.1.1 *Theorising in a Narrative Context*

The analysis of these themes involves the “iterative spiral” as envisaged by Creswell (1998) as data generated initially through exemplars, is developed through the observation and interview processes. The task was to constantly revisit the exemplars, field notes, interview notes, student quantitative data, audio and video material, which form the “basis for interpretation and theorising” (Hooley, 2009, p. 184) in order to clarify the analysis of participant perceptions and how they align with the above themes. Many cycles of investigation and reflection were required, “so that truth, trustworthy claims, insights and descriptions of meaning are agreed and supported by the research community involved in the project” (*ibid* p. 179).

Personal and group reflection and theorising, a feature of the research design, enabled views to be expressed, reflected upon, changed or developed. As stated previously, the team members kept personal reflections throughout the process and shared thoughts in discussions. In the context of discussions, world-views and political viewpoints were aired and discussed in a democratic, rigorous manner (Hooley, 2009). In these discussions Pam and Mauri added their thoughts to those of Aunty Lois, Kathryn and Kim, who work at Worawa. Pam’s deep knowledge of the Worawa Education Model added an external perspective to the deep knowledge expressed by Aunty Lois, Kathryn and Kim. Mauri constantly questioned any seeming anomalies that arose from descriptions of concepts or programs described on the website or in publications, in relation to the descriptions of same, or emanating from the interviews. Often Aunty Lois clarified misconceptions for team members. She also identified relevant literature to guide discussions. As each draft of the data was presented, further rigorous discussion ensued, enabling a deeper personal and collective understanding of the evolving story. This enabled the “process of transformative consciousness” (*ibid* p. 149) as the experiences and reflection of these experiences lead to new and deeper thinking. Hooley sees this as generating practitioner knowledge that “would be seen as an additional task in academic research but an essential component of participatory research” (*ibid* p. 150). It is also significant that the composition of the team and the respect of each of the team members for each other, guarded against pontificating by any one member, a possibility warned against by Hooley. The two-way respect, which he says includes respect for culture, local knowledge and community scholarship was evident throughout the process and attested to by its successful conclusion.

After the collation of the data using the above themes, Enabling Factors were identified in each theme. From these Enabling Factors, four Key Enabling Factors emerged. These were then discussed in the context of the relevant literature. Subsequently the research team members formulated commendations and recommendations. Aunty Lois as Executive Director of Worawa Aboriginal College accepted these. The research team also identified the significance of the research for the Worawa Aboriginal College Community, all Aboriginal people in Australia, Mainstream Australian education providers and First Nations people throughout the world. They also identified the significance of the research methodology in informing all researchers in an Aboriginal context.

Sections 5 and 6 demonstrate that, in the presentation, discussion and theorising, to separate these themes entirely, is artificial. After completing a draft of Section 5, the research team returned to the data contained and consulted them again. This recurred as each draft eventuated in order to ascertain the inclusion of all relevant material, to identify any such material that had been inadvertently excluded and to identify any relevant material that had previously been discounted because of apparent irrelevance.

6.1.2 *Role of critical friend and external advisor*

Once analysis and theorising is foremost in the mind of the researcher, it is usually the researcher who “recasts the story into a “new” historical, political and cultural context” (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009, p. 283).

Discussion of exemplars and generated data and theorising its meaning with a critical friend enables further, deeper thinking from alternative perspectives. This was evident during the course of the project. As Hooley (2009) comments, this discussion and theorising rather than being problematic, is important for democratic meaning making. Collaborating with a critical friend brings into focus points of agreement and also views that conflict. This enables robust discussion leading to “critical questioning for self-understanding” (Hooley, *ibid*, p. 185), thus providing a critique of the narrative itself and may “uncover possible insights for follow-up consideration and theorising” (*ibid* p. 185).

According to Hooley (*ibid*), aspects that the researcher may find problematic such as sections of the analysis that the participants may find distasteful if publicised and the deeper questions of whose interests are served by the disclosure, may be clarified through discussion with a critical friend. The research team found that discussion with critical friends also clarified aspects of the research that were thought to be problematic. The broad constitution of the research team as recommended by Hooley (*ibid*) is instrumental in providing a balanced analysis and this also renders the input of a critical friend especially relevant. This project benefitted significantly from the input of critical friends and an external advisor.

6.1.2.1 Choosing Critical Friends and External Advisor

In this type of research project it is necessary that a critical friend include the critiques of the “socio-economic and cultural environment within which the project is located” (Hooley, *op cit*, p. 151). This criterion was addressed as critical friends included, Associate Professor Gary Thomas, an Aboriginal Academic from Queensland University of Technology and former member of the Worawa Board of Directors, Associate Professor Zane Ma Rhea, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, where she teaches the Indigenous Education Program, Dr Shannon Faulkhead, Researcher, Faculty of Arts, Monash University, Dr Kaye Price a Research Associate, David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research, University of South Australia and Lindy Joubert, Founding Director, UNESCO Observatory on Multi-Disciplinary, Research in the Arts, Editor-in-Chief UNESCO Observatory Refereed Journal, Vice President, World Craft Council Asia Pacific

Region, South Pacific, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at The University of Melbourne. The external advisor provided another voice, thus ensuring the rigour of the research process from an additional perspective. Dr Neil Hooley, author and lecturer in the College of Education at Victoria University undertook this role.

6.1.3 Limitations

All research has limitations. “Because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies” (Wiersma, 2000, p. 211) and so a case study cannot be replicated as they can only suggest what may be found in similar organisations. In this case our project relates to one group of people, the Worawa Aboriginal College Community.

Traditionally the roles of the researcher and the participants are mutually exclusive (Reason, 1994) In this project the relationship between the researchers and the researched is complex, as members of the research team are also participants. This is both an advantage and a possible limitation. Relationships are affected not only by the content of the inquiry but also by the institutional context of the project and by researchers and participants’ personal motivations. These motivations take many forms and “can be complementary or contradictory, overt or covert” (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009, p. 281). The research team was united in their resolve to achieve their common interest by undertaking a case study to explore and present a rich picture of Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning at Worawa Aboriginal College. Their diversity of roles in relation to the College enabled broad foci, which enabled a variety of opinions to be aired. Opinions of critical friends and the external advisor also contributed to the broad foci and expertise. This prevented the study from being unduly limited.

The fact that the researchers in this project experienced both roles of researcher and participant allowed a deeper understanding of each role in relation to the other and through this exposed possible ways of redistributing power between researchers and participants (Strier, 2007; Hooley, 2009). Consequently there was a re-balancing of power in the researcher-participant relationship. This enabled new knowledge and understanding and reflected the constructionist viewpoint that researcher and participants co-construct knowledge and so are both equal parts of the final product. There is no ‘right relationship’ between researcher and participants and there are many causes of variations:

The relationship changes according to the researcher’s personality, world view, ethnic and social background, perceptions derived from the researchers’ professional discipline, the qualitative paradigm, the theoretical base of the research, the type of the research and its goals, the research methodology, and the researcher’s own perception of the place and the role of the subject/participant/collaborator/ co-researcher in the research process.

(Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009, p. 280).

The multi-faceted relationships of the members of the research team with the participants minimised the distance between them but there remained the constant recognition that this may also be problematic. A balance was required between developing friendship with participants and maintaining the distance that will allow professional judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2002). This was discussed many times by various team members.

Following Lather (1991) and Smith (2000) the research team acknowledge the fact that a researcher “however well intentioned, is seen as the expert who has power conferred through association with the 'great seat of learning' which influences "the social relations of the research act" (Lather 1991, p.91)” (Smith, p. 162). The members of the Worawa Academic Reference Group (WARG) are understood by the Worawa College Community, more as ‘critical friends’ who give relevant academic advice when requested to do so, by either the Executive Director or the Deputy Principal, Head of Learning and Teaching, or by individual members of the academic staff group, rather than experts who wish to impose restrictions.

6.1.4 *Bias*

By generating data from multiple perspectives through working in teams to access many sources, individuals and groups and including critical friends, the bias of individuals and groups cannot dominate. This is part of the design of this research project. In addition this project has appointed an external advisor to add to the rigour of the process. Hooley (2009) also suggests “that any problems associated with power, bias and influence can be overcome through having longer time lines that enable the discourses, ideas and generalisations that accrue to be investigated through many cycles, indeed unending cycles.” (p. 146-147). This is also part of the design of this project.

The questions for reflection enabled the members of the research team to reflect deeply and compare views. This process was instrumental in exposing bias and enabled further relevant elucidating discussion. The questions are:

1. What was surprising by what happened, what we found?
2. Was our methodology appropriate, what other approaches could have been used?
3. Did we collect appropriate data; what other data would have been useful?
4. Were we rigorous enough in analysing data, looking for different explanations?
5. How did the project challenge our own thinking, do we understand differently now?

As the collating and analysing of generated data progressed answers to these questions emerged.

1. What was surprising by what happened, what we found?

The three team members who are part of the Worawa staff group were affirmed by the continual reference to the Worawa Values of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility

and Rigour, by all stakeholders. They were also affirmed by the multiple consonant voices that emerged from the research and the strength of student and parent voices. The two team members external to the College were surprised by the continual reference to the Worawa Values of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Rigour, by all stakeholders, the multiple consonant voices that emerged from the research and the strength of student and parent voices. Their surprise emanated from their involvement in similar projects in other education settings, where the values espoused by the school community were explicit but not part of the day-to-day conversation of students and staff in the manner evident at Worawa. In these settings student voice related to organisational issues rather than student learning and parent voices were either 'silent' or 'managed' according to the definition of these terms by Spry and Graham (2009).

2. Was our methodology appropriate, what other approaches could have been used?

All team members agreed that the methodology was appropriate as it facilitated the generation of the optimum level of data. Each team member had particular strengths and these were recognised by all. These strengths enabled rigorous, productive discussion resulting in a thorough analysis from different perspectives. This also enabled a reflexive approach as team members returned many times to their interpretation of the data in order to clarify understanding. All team members agreed that the breadth and depth of generated data could not have been attained by any other methods. They also agreed on reflection that in generating data, they as a team operated according to the Worawa Values of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Rigour.

3. Did we collect appropriate data; what other data would have been useful?

The team was very satisfied with both the data collected and generated. All members agreed that no additional data was necessary but there was the suggestion to document further ethnographical data. Due to constraints of time and relevant personnel this suggestion was not adopted.

4. Were we rigorous enough in analysing data, looking for different explanations?

Lengthy discussions and email exchanges lead to a constant re- visiting of thoughts, conclusions and overall findings. These exchanges ensured validity and clarity of material. The roles of the various team members adopted in discussions and exchanges described in previous sections attest to this.

5. How did the project challenge our own thinking, do we understand differently now?

All team members have a more in-depth understanding of the four Key Enabling Factors, which emerged from the data. Before the project all acknowledged the importance of the Founder's Vision and Values of the Worawa integrated model. The continual reference to the Values of The Worawa Way by all participants increased the team members' understanding of the interpretation of these by different groups of

participants. The involvement of the total Worawa Aboriginal College Community, Elders, Board of Directors, Parents and Staff in the provision and successful implementation of a two-way model of learning enabled or reinforced team members understanding of the importance of an Aboriginal initiated, owned and operated school. The holistic model of learning, valued either explicitly or implicitly by all participants reinforced existing beliefs concerning the value of such a model in some members of the team and renewed these beliefs in others. For the team members external to the College, there came a deeper understanding of all aspects of College life, especially the in-depth approach to two-way learning that addresses the needs of real students in real time. The significance of the influence of an Aboriginal leader and a knowledgeable and committed Executive Team, all of whom have experienced two-way enculturation was evident to these team members as they explored the totality of the holistic model in detail. Through the input of critical friends and an external advisor, all team members were led to reflect more deeply on the nature of Aboriginal culture in contemporary society and to contemplate the “pragmatic pursuit of an Aboriginal ontology and epistemology, a pursuit which is embodied in Worawa Aboriginal College” Thomas, *op cit*).

6.1.5 Validation

Dey (1993) defines a valid account as one "which can be defended as sound because it is well-grounded conceptually and empirically" (p. 253). He then notes that this is difficult to ascertain, as it is only through data that we have access to our sources. Therefore the only way forward is by checking findings or explanations through the utilisation of multiple methods. This process is generally known as triangulation or crystallization (Richardson, 2000), which Stake (2000) describes as “using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p. 443). This method also serves “to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen” (p. 444). Flick (1998) understands triangulation as enriching the study. This was accomplished internally by the use of exemplars, publications, observation, student quantitative data and interviews/conversations as multiple avenues of data generation by a team of people with input from critical friends and an external advisor.

The fact that qualitative research may only apply to a single case raises the question of generalisability (Dey, 1993). Even though a single case study provides an opportunity to analyse thoroughly and so provide a valid basis for inference, the findings may not be applicable to the wider population. Miles and Huberman (1994) note that single case studies usually have many traits they share with many similar settings, some traits they share with some other settings and a few peculiar to themselves. The data generated in this project must be sufficiently deep and rich, that researchers may be stimulated to undertake other case studies, in order that collectively, they may provide insights applicable to a wider population. As Worawa Aboriginal College is unique in Victoria, finding studies in similar schools is impossible. Generalisability may be enabled in relation to certain traits that are recognisable in other settings involving Aboriginal students.

Lather (1991) analyses the concept of validity further and defines construct validity, face validity and catalytic validity. Construct validity is relevant for this

project as the research operates from a critical perspective. The research team recognises that meaning is constructed in the context of power and seeks to explore and understand the use of power in this research context. It must necessarily follow that they, too, critique the methods they use, lest they abuse the power entrusted to them. They have reflected individually and as a team throughout the process. They have also discussed their observations with many participants in order to clarify their thinking and, as noted above, have checked their initial reactions to certain perceptions of the participants. They have also discussed their theorising with critical friends. This is face validity according to Lather. Consequently they have been able to evaluate and re-evaluate the conclusions they have drawn from the data generated by their chosen methods.

The research team recycled “description, emerging analysis and conclusions back through at least a sub-sample of respondents” (Lather, 1991, p. 67), as this gave individuals the opportunity to clarify the meaning of statements they had made previously. In working with the adults the team members were constantly able to seek clarification and further elucidation of their observations. This re-engagement (Cutcliffe, 2000) has proven invaluable in theorising, developing emerging insights and recommendations. It also meant that the participants’ voices were in no way distorted (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009). The Worawa College Community has accepted, with a view to implementation, the recommendations of the project and that attests to its validity. Lather entitles this catalytic validity. Thus, according to Lather’s categories, the team members are affirmed in their understanding that this study is valid. The approach taken in this project is “very congruent with Indigenous knowing and the trust and sharing that exists within communities” (Hooley, 2009, p. 179).

5.1.6 *Ethical Considerations*

While absolute privacy and confidentiality is desirable but not always possible (Christians, 2000) they are, nevertheless, major considerations in a study such as this. The Information Privacy Act (Privacy Act 2000, 98 Parliament of Victoria) has placed a great responsibility on educational institutions to ensure the privacy of individuals in a way never experienced before.

The statement, “Indigenous research is fundamentally different to that of normal scientific research and extends past the usual ideology of consent that seems to dominate ethics procedures in formal programmes” (Hooley, 2009, p. 146), reflects the ethics procedures adopted by this research team. Research at Worawa Aboriginal College only proceeds with the approval of the Worawa College Board of Directors, who allocates the role of granting approval to the Executive Director of the College. This process acknowledges the obligation to provide benefits for the participants and to balance such benefits against risks (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). In this instance the research the College Board of Directors commissioned the research and it was agreed that the research remains the property of the Worawa Aboriginal College Community. This ensures that the material from this project cannot be used except with the permission of the College Board of Directors and answers the important question: To whom does the data belong? (Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009).

After robust discussion of the requirements of the Information Privacy Act and ethical processes, appropriate for Aboriginal community members, the members of the research team agreed that the following protocols guide the research process:

1. This research project will be conducted by the Worawa Aboriginal College Community.
2. The methodology, design, implementation and evaluation of this research project will be undertaken by the Worawa Aboriginal College Community through informed consent with the material and intellectual outcomes remaining the property of Worawa Aboriginal College.
3. This research project will enable questions, issues and knowledge to be pursued and at the same time, enable participants to reflect upon their own values, practices, history, identity, land and kin relationships.
4. The ethical framework for research will outline the rights and responsibilities of all participants, the nature of the interactions between them and the manner by which the research protocols will be met.
5. The participation and contribution of all participants will be valued and all will be encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of the agreed work.
6. The research programme will become part of the narrative of Worawa Aboriginal College providing data and experience to enhance all aspects of College life.
7. Critical Friends invited by Worawa Aboriginal College will participate fully in the programme to assist with background knowledge, experience and advice regarding the issues under investigation and to contribute to the methodology, design, implementation and evaluation of the research project.
8. The data, explanation, general findings and theoretical ideas emerging from this research will be validated by reference to all involved in the research project in ongoing cycles of democratic investigation and reflection.

Adapted from: (Hooley, 2009, p. 146)

These protocols are reflected in the Worawa Aboriginal College Research Agreement (Appendix M 11.)

Therefore assurance is given to participants that there will be no disclosure of the data they generate, without their prior permission. Pseudonyms, which will protect their identity from becoming public, have been allocated as requested. Staff members have been alerted to the fact that, because there are so few of them, they may be identified by the views they express. As Fontana and Frey (2003) observe, “because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them” (p. 88).

Ensuring the accuracy of data is another ethical consideration. Christians (2000) points out that “Fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances are both non-scientific and unethical” (p. 140). Therefore, the utmost diligence has been maintained in order to ensure accuracy. The “iterative spiral”, carefully managed, once again becomes an imperative. Copies of relevant documents given to all participants are included in Appendices M 12 & M 13.

Conclusion

This Section demonstrates that the chosen research framework is empowering for the participants and that the epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods used in the research inform each other and are consistent with the purpose of conducting an exploration of Culture, Connectedness, Empowerment and Learning at Worawa Aboriginal College. The members of the research team are also satisfied that, through the implementation of this framework, they will be able to answer the key research question:

What factors do students and adults at Worawa Aboriginal College understand as assisting the nurturing of a strong sense of cultural identity through connectedness, empowerment and learning in their life at school?

and the further research question that goes beyond the immediate context:

To what extent are the findings/ explanations from this project, applicable to the wider Australian education community both Aboriginal and mainstream and to the global First Nations education community?

The unfolding of the ensuing story is an “iterative spiral” (Creswell, 1998). The management of this “iterative spiral” commences and develops in the next chapters, where the data and presented and discussed this in the light of the literature review.