Chapter One
Signposting the journey

It is only in a shared belief and insistence that there are practical alternatives that the balance of forces and chances begins to alter. Once the inevitabilities are challenged, we begin gathering our resources for a journey of hope. If there are no easy answers there are still available discoverable hard answers, and it is these that we can now learn to make and share. This has been, from the beginning, the sense and the impulse of the long revolution (Raymond Williams 1965, pp. 268-269).

Indigenous education in Australia is a highly contested site. This Chapter outlines the key themes and arguments of my thesis, positioning the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program (ICMDP) within various sites of struggle and contestation within the university and the broader social and political context of contemporary Indigenous education. This chapter outlines the analytical frameworks and methodological approaches utilised in this research. It explores political and ethical issues of voice, representation and power relations in terms of my positions as a non-Indigenous researcher, participant and observer within the process. Further, it highlights both my own dilemmas and those of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues as we have attempted to navigate, redeploy and out manoeuvre the often treacherous and deceptively alluring and commonsensical discursive formations and culturalist assumptions that inform contemporary Indigenous higher education. This chapter concludes with a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

Mapping the theoretical and analytical terrain

In this thesis I have attempted to track the various influences and shifts in our positions through different phases of the program development and to explore the transformative and decolonising potential of the ICMRP, which includes an innovative Associate Degree and Bachelor of Applied Science. The community-based program, offered via mixed-mode on and off campus delivery through the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) at Curtin University, commenced in 1989 (see Appendix 1).

I have had a long and passionate involvement with this program and first became involved at the working party stage at the beginning of 1987. I was appointed to the program from
its inception and so began a new sector of what I now see as my own transformative and
decolonising journey. For the first eighteen months I was based in Port Hedland, Western
Australia, as the North West Field Support Coordinator. The position involved liaison and
negotiation with Indigenous organizations and communities and government department
stakeholders throughout the Pilbara and Kimberley in selling the idea and merits of what
was effectively a ground-breaking endeavour, as well as providing an advocacy and
academic support for students. It was one of the most exciting and challenging times of
my life.

In July 1990 I moved back to Perth and was appointed to the Academic Coordination
Team to assist Darlene Oxenham, the Indigenous Program Coordinator, to develop the
curriculum implementation, monitoring and evaluation systems for the program. I have
intentionally included the core elements listed in our position descriptions to highlight the
immediate dilemmas faced by academics (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in
Indigenous education as they/we attempt to fulfil an array of bureaucratic tasks and
academic requirements that do not begin to convey the complexities of working with the
social, cultural and political realities of Indigenous education. Nor will this thesis be able to
fully encompass all of the emotional, social and intellectual complexities that occur in this
highly complex domain as it tracks my reflections about different phases of the journey.
Nor will I be able to fully address all of the problematics and issues that will inevitably
surface for different readers because of their own experiences or just because it's not
possible to cover them. I can only acknowledge that they exist and are ever present in
our work in this domain. It is probably important to note that while I left the Centre for
twelve months in 1996 I have maintained an ongoing involvement with the program for
this research as well as in other research since I was appointed as a Senior Research
Fellow within the Curtin Indigenous Research Centre (CIRC) at CAS in 1997. This thesis
thus encompasses my reflections upon and attempts to define and discuss the
emancipatory, transformative nature of the ICMDP, and its limitations and possibilities for
Indigenous Australians in contemporary Australia.

Indigenous academics often use concepts such as ‘late colonialism’ and ‘late modernism’
to describe the contemporary political, social and historical context experienced by
Indigenous people in colonial countries (Linda Tuhuiwai Smith 1999, p. 24). For some
academics the use of ‘post-colonial’ to describe the contemporary remains problematic
precisely because the legacies of colonialism are everywhere (Hall 1996; Harasym 1990).
As Smith writes, for many Indigenous academics ‘post-colonialism has become a strategy
for reinscribing or reauthorising the privileges of non-Indigenous academics’ because [it]
has been defined in ways that can still leave out Indigenous peoples ways of knowing and interests (loc.cit). With this understanding in mind I will draw substantially on feminism (Code 1995; Gunew 1990; Haraway 1988; Lather 1991), cultural theorists (Bhabha 1994; Giroux 1985, 1992) and Indigenous standpoints (Nakata 1997a, 2000b; Oxenham 2000a; Rigney 1998) to disrupt the pervasive colonialism and culturalism that still underpins much of the policy discourse and practice in postcolonial Indigenous education (Rizvi & Crowley 1993; McConaghy 2000). From this perspective the notion of postcolonialism deployed here offers a key resource for disrupting scientific culturalism and engaging in decolonisation within Indigenous education (McConaghy 2000, p. 269). As Nakata states in the foreword to Cathryn McConaghy’s book *Rethinking Indigenous Education*, we need to know the limits, boundaries and conventions of discourse in order to use it and reconstitute it to serve Indigenous interests rather than ‘extant and implicit knowledge/power relations’ (op.cit, p. x).

In an important sense this thesis looks at how the ICMDP curriculum, strategies and pedagogical practices — teaching and learning and assessment processes — have enabled both staff and students to come to know and interrupt these limits, boundaries and conventions of discourse(s) in order to use and reconstitute them to serve Indigenous interests and to positively and productively change ‘extant and implicit knowledge/power relations’ (loc.cit).

The exploration that follows both raises, and is contingent upon, broader social and political questions regarding the position of Indigenous higher education within Australia and how Indigenous people ‘are actually positioned in their daily lives in relation to colonial knowledges, languages and practices in the material world’ (Nakata 1995a, p.72). In this thesis I describe, critically reflect upon and theorise about the program within the broader historical, social and political context to define those preconditions — the elements and practices — that provide its strategic decolonising and transformative potential as well as discuss how we have worked with the various discourses and assumptions that continue to play havoc with our minds and everyday practice. In particular, throughout the discussion of some of the defining moments, problems and possibilities of the ICMDP I discuss how we have worked tactically with key aspects of critical emancipatory discourses/theories of relevance to positive social change within the sphere of Indigenous higher education. I also examine the philosophical and political underpinnings of colonialism and liberalism; their interconnectedness to the discursive practices and roles played by those in government, bureaucracy and higher education institutions and their responsibility to, and imaginings and assumptions about, and
representations of Indigenous people as ‘citizens’ in Australia's contemporary social democracy. This includes and builds on Foucault's concern with liberalism and governmentality (Foucault 1979) and the implications for subjectivity (Burchell, Gordon & Miller 1991).

An underpinning theme and recurring argument throughout this thesis is that at a rhetorical level Australia's identification as a liberal social democracy infers a commitment to the principles of social justice, equality and freedom. In theory, such a commitment ought to translate into equal rights and opportunities for all Australians, including Indigenous Australians, to access, participate in and influence the social, economic, political and cultural life of Australia. This would encompass all social services including health, housing, education and employment with corresponding improvements in all individuals' material conditions. In reality, and amid competing contemporary discourses, access to equal rights for Indigenous Australians is still a long way from being realised in government and institutional programs, policies, processes and practice, and, in everyday life. This thesis suggests that while there are competing discourses and theories that vie for primacy (for example the economy over ideology, or language over identity and Indigenous capacity) there are other discourses that link ideas such as economy, politics and ideology (language) in relation to each other. The choice one makes between different discourses then is dependent upon ‘the degree to which the competing demands’ of each of these are ‘hierarchized by the subject as by the situation’ (Bernard-Donals 1994, p.127). Each of the following chapters explores the implications of such decisions upon/within Indigenous education and how the Centre and ICMDP have chosen to privilege particular discourses in response to the dynamics of the situation.

Recent research (McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2001a; Walker 2000), shows that attempts by Indigenous academics and other stakeholders to gain recognition of a framework of Indigenous self-determination to ensure their rights and interests in all spheres of education, especially within the academy, have achieved only limited success in quite specific areas. This thesis explores some of the internal and external forces and discourses that contradict the espoused principles and goals of a just and democratic society, and impede the achievement of Indigenous education (and decolonisation) occurring within a framework of Indigenous self-determination.

The interrelated aims of this thesis then, are to describe and theorise the various transformative strategies that contribute to decolonisation and positive social change that we have deployed, or developed within a specific Indigenous education site in
contemporary Australia. As Bernard-Donals states ‘the ways in which humans change their social composition, and more imperatively, their material conditions of existence, must be elaborated for a useful theory of social change’ (1994, p. 113). A major line of argument of this thesis is that the complex interrelationship between modern, critical postmodern and poststructuralist theories, interdisciplinary content and decolonising processes and practices embodied within the ICMDP/curriculum is designed to achieve genuine social change which incorporates local and global Indigenous community agendas. This is revealed in the discussion of the various micro and macro factors in contemporary Australia that are affected by, impact upon, or intersect with the transformative potential of the ICMDP. The following chapters show that changes occur in various ways, in various sites with varying degrees of impact upon the intersubjectivity of individuals and the policies, practices and discourses of groups and organizations — and ultimately their everyday lives.

Redressing the negative effects of Australia’s colonial history on the social and material condition of Indigenous people, the majority of whom are disadvantaged in relation to the non-Indigenous population, creates a moral imperative to integrate discourses of decolonisation, social change and cultural affirmation in Indigenous education. Several theorists referred to in this thesis draw on Foucault to reveal different ways that uncertainty and ambivalence can create the space or opportunity for change. Hodge and Mishra, drawing upon Hartz’ transformational framework, point out that there have been, and always are, contradictions and instabilities in the dominant ideological structures, in which ‘[c]hanges have occurred, resistance has been effective, and progress has been real, if never continuous or assured’ (1991, p. 70). Some of the changes that we have witnessed or experienced will be elaborated upon within the thesis by drawing on the ideas of Bhabha (1994, 1995, 1997), Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), Chambers (1991), Giroux (1985, 1990, 1992), Pettman (1992), Swartz (1997), and other theorists, regarding the role of education in social change generally and the limits and possibilities of Indigenous education in transformation. The thesis acknowledges the need to interrupt the legitimating formations that inscribe and prescribe ‘epistemic authority’ and ‘disciplinary capacity’ all of which serve to restrict the transformative and development potential of Indigenous education (McConaghy 2000, pp. 1-16).

This thesis, and indeed the ICMDP itself, takes up the urgent and necessary task identified by Indigenous intellectuals and practitioners including Arbon (1998), Crawshaw (1993), Nakata (1995a), Oxenham (1999, 2000a), Watson (1989), Rigney (1998) and others to critique and unmask how dominant agendas impinge upon the attempts of
Indigenous peoples (and their allies) to decolonise the languages, discourses and practices in and through education in Australia. In doing so it charts the Centre for Aboriginal Studies’ experience in creating and engaging with a critical transformative curriculum and pedagogy specific to post-colonial Australia. The task is consistent with Indigenous intellectuals in other colonial sites, for example, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) from New Zealand, and Elizabeth Lightning (1997) from Canada, both of whom outline the critical need for decolonising projects for Indigenous peoples at local and global levels.

Using the ICMDP as a case study, this thesis brings together and gives concrete form to the more abstract ideas and concerns raised above. I argue that an analysis of the history and politics of Indigenous education policy and practice reveals contradictory philosophical and political assumptions which have persisted with varying degrees of accommodations and co-optations since early colonisation through to the contemporary policy context. These assumptions still exist in various guises and provide some clues about the contradictory policy issues, concerns and impacts currently experienced in Indigenous higher education. They also suggest some of the contradictory discourses and responses currently operating/prevailing within academic institutions, particularly as they impact upon, or add to, the tensions and dilemmas experienced/prevailing within the ICMDP as well as in Indigenous education generally. The maintenance of these contradictions and ideological instabilities in contemporary discourses (as they are held, deployed and interpreted by each of us as stakeholders in the policy process) help to explain the ambivalence, dilemmas and contradictions in the language and practices, mechanisms and structures that have increasingly influenced the university.

These contradictions are evident despite Curtin’s Statement of Reconciliation and Commitment to Indigenous peoples underpinning the University’s mission, teaching and learning goals (Appendix 2). They also help to explain the persistent awareness and uneasiness held by ICMDP staff about the risks of the curriculum content and processes being oppressive, assimilationist and colonising, or collapsing into culturalism (Dirlik 1990; Mowbray 1990; Rizvi & Crowley 1993). There were associated concerns to assist students being read as welfarism or stuck in the limits of radicalism despite the stated commitment to Indigenous terms of reference and principles of Indigenous self-determination. These terms suggest that these same contradictory elements and pervasive cultural forces also account for policy changes and events that have occurred within the wider political context, creating a sense of being in a ‘constant state of alert’ in the face of impending threats to the work being done and progress being achieved in Indigenous education. Such threats include the ‘leaked’ announcement of plans to
mainstream the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) allowances in
December 1997 just days before the end of the academic year, highlighting among other
things the political nature of the policy environment in Indigenous higher education,
discussed in Chapters Two and Seven.

At the same time the analysis gives greater justificatory and explanatory power to the
existing ICMD theory and practice framework. The analysis not only informs the
curriculum theory, processes, and pedagogical practices but also elucidates issues
regarding both the continued need for and achievement of an emancipatory status and
transformative potential of the ICMDP. The analysis also provides further insights into the
necessary preconditions for transformation that contribute to a more general theory of
social change.

At this postcolonial ‘moment’, no less than ever before, the inconsistencies in the
dominant discourses provide both opportunities and limitations. There is ample argument
to show that classical liberalism has underpinned early colonisation and justified the
continuing disenfranchisement and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples on a global
scale (Macintyre 1991). At the same time, more recently ‘liberal’ notions of rights (and
responsibilities), equality, justice and respect for difference, have also provided the basis
for recognition and negotiation of rights for and by Indigenous Australians (Dodson M.
1996, 1997; Mickler 1998; Nakata 2000c, 2002a). However, the assumptions of liberalism
work in multiple contradictory and competing ways; globalisation, economic rationalism
and corporatism (which also draw their raison d’être from liberal ideas) pose a new threat
to the transformative possibilities for Indigenous Australians which grow out of human
rights — thus jeopardising many of the gains experienced in higher education and in
Indigenous organizations, groups and communities. Nakata (2000b, p. ix) makes the
point that these liberal notions, the ‘champions and workhorses’ for Indigenous education,
have been dislodged from their prior position because they have enabled policies and
practices which have failed Indigenous people.

Despite attempts to adopt a proactive approach in the face of these obvious challenges,
the operations of Indigenous controlled units such as the Centre for Aboriginal Studies
remain vulnerable at a number of different levels to the competing discourses of
culturalism and radicalism with their corresponding approaches and strategies to attain
equity in Indigenous education, and finally to the threats of ‘neo-colonialism’ or
‘corporatism’ discussed in Chapter Seven. Nevertheless, this thesis asserts that amid the
interplay of these discursive formations and ideas the incorporation of Indigenous terms of
reference provides new sites of possibility at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Indigenous terms of reference has been described in ICMDP course materials as ‘a set of principles, core values and a process for applying a framework to determine an Indigenous viewpoint on an issue in an Indigenous context’ (Indigenous Ways Of…1 Workbook, ICMDP, 1996 p.25 in Oxenham 2000b, p.4). A detailed discussion of the concept of Indigenous terms of reference by Darlene Oxenham (2000b) and its application is included in Appendix 7).

Thesis form and structure

The thesis encompasses three quite distinct and multi-dimensional spheres of inquiry that incorporate theoretical, historical, political, philosophical and practical issues. Each is connected by the irony of the contemporary situation, and by my own reflexive attempts to make sense of the multiple and diverse perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders who have contributed to the program’s development over the last decade.

In this process of meaning-making I try to distil what I believe are the pivotal ideas, decisions, and defining moments within the ICMDP’s ongoing and evolving forms of development; and engage with the dilemmas and contradictions of developing, implementing, teaching and re-visioning an emancipatory, transformative and decolonising curriculum. In doing so I include an analysis of the broader historical, social and political context in order to theorise about the actualities and possibilities of transformation and decolonisation in postcolonial Australia; as well as to examine the actual and potential constraints which threaten them. It is through this meaning-making process that the interrelatedness of the various lines of inquiry interwoven throughout the thesis and the full weight of their implications for the emancipatory, transformative status of the program and for Indigenous higher education become evident.

One: transformation & decolonisation in Indigenous education

The first line of inquiry locates education as part of a colonial/modern project. It explores issues and theories of transformation, decolonisation and social change in and through Indigenous education in multicultural Australia. It attempts to answer the questions: What is it that is transformative and decolonising about the ICMDP? What are these transformative strategies? Do these transformative strategies contribute to decolonisation and positive social change? What are the theoretical and practical limits and possibilities of these strategies? What are the major critical issues and concerns for a radical curriculum and pedagogy? What responsibilities do Indigenous and non-Indigenous
academics have in such a process, and what roles do they or should they play? What are the limitations and possibilities in practical everyday terms for Indigenous Australians? What are the challenges to the goals and aspirations of self-determination for Indigenous higher education in contemporary Australia?

**Two: politics and policy contexts of Indigenous higher education.**

The second line of inquiry explores the factors and conditions which enable and constrain academic outcomes in Indigenous higher education. It discusses the very real and perceived threats to the goals and aspirations of self-determination for Indigenous higher education generally, and the CAS and the ICMDP in particular. This second strand of the thesis asks: What are the challenges and threats to Indigenous higher education in contemporary Australia? Why and in what ways is it that a fully established, highly effective degree program so evidently successful in both Indigenous and mainstream terms remains at risk in contemporary, postcolonial Australia? What are the actual events and social forces at work? What are the expected roles and responsibilities of government and bureaucracy — committed to liberal democracy — to assist in the realisation of the goals, interests and aspirations of self-determination for Indigenous higher education in contemporary Australia? What role do they play in legitimating colonial formations, producing and maintaining ‘epistemic authority’, defining ‘disciplinary capacity’ (McConaghy 2000) and circumscribing Indigenous knowledge?

**Three: Transformative strategies, discourses and practice**

The third line of enquiry looks at how the various arguments put forward in answer to the issues and questions in previous sections interact with and influence each other. It attempts to address the questions: What assumptions, discourses and factors are operating as enablers and constraints in this context? Are there any limits to the threats to Indigenous higher education? If so, what are they? Can these threats be overcome? If so, in what ways? How do these factors and forces impact on the emancipatory, transformative and decolonising potential for the program specifically, and for Indigenous education more generally? Will Indigenous peoples and their allies be able to negotiate, appropriate, accommodate and/or out manoeuvre the contemporary corporate discourses of globalisation, managerialism and economic rationalism into their discourse and practice without being inscribed or re-colonised by them? What are the risks of culturalism and radicalism inherent in the discourse of Indigenous terms of reference? In other words, will Indigenous educators be able to continue to positively out manoeuvre and counter the assimilationist agenda/imperatives and other social forces in order to enhance Indigenous
opportunities in the wider society from an Indigenous standpoint and on Indigenous terms of reference?

**Establishing an emancipatory theory and critique**

This research is located in a highly complex, multi-perspectival and contested site, fraught with difficulties and ambiguities at many levels. These complexities relate to theoretical, philosophical and political issues about situation, location, method, representation and voice.

A review of the literature on critical education theory reveals that much of the promise offered by radical, emancipatory and critical approaches to overcome these difficulties has been found wanting under the scrutiny of poststructuralist critique. Several theorists (including Hunter 1994; McConaghy 2000) drawing on Foucault, warn that not only is the emancipatory potential of these approaches lacking, but, paradoxically, their oppositional tactics can serve to further oppress and marginalise groups. In addition several feminists (Ellsworth 1992; Luke & Gore 1992; Lather 1991) and women of colour (hooks 1994; Spivak 1990, 1993), unhappy with the outcomes of their own attempts to engage in transformative education, offer sober and disillusioned warnings of attempting to 'liberate' 'marginalised' groups. Postmodernist questionings further add to the hopelessness/ineffectiveness of education being able to offer anything to move beyond the dilemmas inherent in the 'ambivalence of the postcolonial condition' (Bauman 1991; Bhabha 1994).

The 'postcolonial ambivalence' here encompasses 'the meaning and place of Aboriginal culture in contemporary Australia'. Ambivalence has emerged as a central critical issue in postcolonial theory (Bhabha 1994) to refer to the dangers and opportunities inherent in the 'positive productive social and cultural condition of discursive practice and subject formation' (Bauman 1991). The notion of ambivalence is used primarily in this way throughout this thesis rather than as an anxiety-ridden experience at the individual level, although Greville (2000), McConaghy (2000) and Nakata (2000b) convey the uneasiness and ambivalence that often influences our own work in Indigenous education.

Ambivalence also forms the basis of analysis in relation to the construction of Aboriginality. As Benjamin Graves (1998a) points out, Bhabha has encouraged a rigorous rethinking of representation and resistance that ‘above all stresses the "ambivalence" or "hybridity" that characterises the site of colonial contestation — a "liminal" space in which ‘cultural differences articulate… to produce imagined constructions of cultural and national identity’ (Graves 1998b, p. 1). Such constructions of identity, produced by white
Australians in positions of power, have implications for Indigenous education, particularly when coupled with ‘assimilationist impulses’ that ‘persist in dominant constructions of Aboriginality in contemporary Australia’ (Fielder 1996, p. 3). Nakata highlights the need to disrupt the ‘primacy of anthropological notions of ‘culture’ in Indigenous educational discourse’ and ways of ‘knowing’ that have shaped ‘the discursive constructions of the Indigenous subject’ as well as the policies, practices and pedagogies (Nakata 2000b, p. ix).

Complexities of contemporary Indigenous education

A literature review of Indigenous higher education in Australia registers both the complexities of issues in developing and implementing effective curriculum to meet the diversity of Indigenous education aspirations and priorities and the dearth of informed research to address them. There is some debate about the efficacy and impacts of culturally appropriate versus mainstream courses for Indigenous students and communities. Kevin Keefe (1992) for example, examines the relationship and tensions between the ‘cultural differences’ curriculum approach to Indigenous education in remote and urban areas and Indigenous political power. Quentin Beresford and Gary Partington (2003) in *Reform and Resistance in Aboriginal Education*, drawing on theories of culturalism, colonisation and alienation, focus on the contemporary crisis in Indigenous education in primary and secondary schools in urban and remote communities. They include a range of best practices identified throughout WA to improve academic outcomes among Indigenous students in schools using categorisation of implementation issues and strategies related to government and community involvement and school based operations. Mick Dodson (1994b) and Marcia Langton (1997) provide an historical understanding of the impact of education with respect to Indigenous contemporary realities. Several Indigenous academics (Morgan 1992; Bourke 1994; Oxenham 1999; Nakata 1998b, 2000c) present a strong case for Indigenous self-determination and the recognition and incorporation of Indigenous knowledges in education.

Most Indigenous education literature is intended for teachers of Indigenous students and can be found in journals such as *The Aboriginal Child at School*, *Ngoonjook* and *Kaurna*. These journals track the changes in ideology and practice in Indigenous education over the past twenty years. The literature regarding Indigenous adult education covers higher education, vocational education and training, and community education. Studies of specific Indigenous adult education programs, curriculum, pedagogy and practice in the university sector in Australia emerged in the 1980s (Henry & McTaggart 1987; McTaggart 1988) with the innovative work carried out by Deakin University and Batchelor College.
among the most notable. An annotated bibliography by The Koori Centre and Yooroang Garang (1996) confirms that most studies focus on the relevance or efficacy of different pedagogical approaches. Boughton & Durhan (1997) provide an overview of literature on best practice and benchmarking in Indigenous community-controlled education. There is a small but crucial body of work by Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers that examines the epistemological assumptions underpinning contemporary Indigenous education and suggests frameworks and standpoints which may serve to positively transform Indigenous education and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in the future (McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2000a, 2000c). I have drawn on this important research, as well as feminist and critical theorists already noted to chart, analyse and contextualise this study.

Few studies critically examine how to provide a viable, transformative education that engages with Indigenous agency, knowledge and culture to produce meaningful outcomes at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains. This thesis explores the intersection of contending issues between the aspirations and interests of Indigenous people, transformative pedagogies, the competing and shifting discourses of liberalism, multiculturalism, postculturalism and corporatism and the implications for Indigenous programs in higher education. It moves beyond the ‘Aboriginal learning styles’ tradition (Harris 1990) to locate the exploration of curriculum development, delivery and policy in Indigenous education within a broader social, political and historical context of colonial Australia. Using a case study this thesis examines how Indigenous education programs contribute to the broader political project of decolonisation and Indigenous self-determination in contemporary Australia. In doing so this thesis contributes to the theory and practice of a critically transformative approach to Indigenous higher education in Australia.

Discourses of emancipatory and decolonising education and the postcolonial condition render any discussions regarding Indigenous higher education within the macro political domain in Australia even more complex and contested. There is ample evidence (Dodson 1994b, 1997; Langton 1997; McConaghy 2000) and relatively widespread acceptance of the claim that for over 200 years Indigenous Australians have been the objects/subjects of, and subjected to, a colonisation process in which education has played a major role. Notwithstanding this Indigenous peoples have continued to challenge and influence the process throughout (Nakata 2002a). There are also widely diverging ideas about Indigenous education needs, issues and priorities and the solutions needed to attain them, (see Bin-Sallik 1991, 1993; Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996; Folds 1987, 1993; McConaghy 2000; McDaniel & Flowers 1995; McTaggart 1988; Nakata 1997a, 2002a;
Osborne 2001). These writers and practitioners place a different emphasis on the types of courses and practices necessary to overcome the various obstacles experienced to achieve diverse educational goals and priorities in different geographical contexts. The divergences reflect different philosophies about the educational sector, and whether it ought to meet individual aspirations and/or serve Indigenous community needs and priorities. In some cases the divergence reflects differing positions regarding the role of education, and its relationship to assimilation (McTaggart 1988, 1989; Mowbray 1990; Nakata 1995b). Attempts to meet the different individual and collective needs, aspirations and priorities of Indigenous Australians has resulted in a diverse range of adult education programs, pedagogies and practices — developed under the auspices of culturally appropriate/inclusive education — being offered through both mainstream institutions and independent Indigenous colleges in the post-compulsory education sector throughout Australia.

Increasingly, over the past two decades, education policies and programs which acknowledge Indigenous rights to equal opportunities to participate in the wider society have been developed for, with and by Indigenous Australians to counter past colonialist practices and to redress the consequences of the past. Although, as Chapter Two suggests, there remains diverse readings and conflicting interpretations as to the effectiveness and efficacy of these policies and their implementation. Nevertheless, arguments by some Indigenous Australians for innovative, decolonising education programs developed on Indigenous terms of reference have been widespread, powerful and persuasive (Arbon 1998; Dudgeon & Oxenham 1989; Grogan & Oxenham 1992; Hart & Whatman 1998; Osborne & Dick 1995; Rigney 1998; Watson 1985, 1989).

Even so, given education's civilising aims (Kidd 1997; Rowley 1970; Welch 1996), and the regulatory devices and disciplinary outcomes identified in dominant agendas (which encompass the competing, contradictory and shifting agendas of conservative liberalism, cultural humanism and capitalism) there is widespread concern that most attempts still serve an assimilationist and even re-colonising function (Keeffe 1992; Kirkby 1993; Lanhupuy 1987; McConaghy 2000; McTaggart 1988; Nakata 1995b). The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Draft Final Report 1995 also expressed the need for an education to strengthen the identity and cultural values of indigenous peoples to avoid being assimilationist. In contrast, Nakata and others such as McConaghy point to the problematics and potential oppressiveness of privileging and essentialising ‘cultural difference’ at the expense of Indigenous participation in wider mainstream opportunities. Together these tensions and competing
dilemmas create a pervasive postcolonial ambivalence (Chalmers 1997; Fielder 1996). But overriding this theoretical tug of war is an irrefutable reality that a large majority of Indigenous people remain disadvantaged, excluded and experience the legacies and ongoing social conditions of colonial oppression.

Even with these many complexities and postcolonial ambivalence in mind, or perhaps because of them, I see this thesis as a theoretical undertaking to explore the preconditions for and outcomes of an emancipatory, decolonising transformative education project, situated in postcolonial Australia and developed in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference (Oxenham 1999, 2000a, 2000b). This thesis is primarily about identifying transformative and decolonising strategies for curriculum and classroom practice and community oriented outcomes which may contribute to theories about critical education and social change as well as real change in the material condition of Indigenous students and the groups with which they are working. This practice occurs at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains, recognising that Indigenous peoples are undeniably and inextricably connected to both domains (ICMDP Workbooks 1994d, 1995b; Nakata 1995c, 1997c, 2002b).

These themes are explored through the ICMDP which is positioned here as a case study influencing and influenced by the ideological struggles and cultural politics within the broader social, political and economic context and the attendant changes in Indigenous education policy. The Centre for Aboriginal Studies provides a rich, dynamic and productive site in which to explore many facets of Indigenous education. Several of my colleagues have been engaged in research about the ICMDP and/or the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, although their studies differ in terms of focus and methodological approach. Heath Greville (2000) examines the ICMDP attempts to incorporate transforming literacies within the program. Darlene Oxenham (1999, 2000a, 2000b) explores the application of Indigenous terms of reference as a discourse and conceptual and practical framework underpinning both the ICMDP and the Centre’s broader political practices. Erin Wilson (2001) recently completed her doctoral study of ICMDP student/practitioner’ perceptions of their course experience using in-depth narrative analysis to examine how students and staff are engaged in reinventing liberatory practices for individual and community empowerment. John Scougall & Ricky Osborne (Scougall 1997; Scougall & Osborne 1999) have applied and tested the evaluative research frameworks employed and refined in the ICMDP in their own research in Indigenous community contexts to effectively influence academic practice and government policy. I also refer to work of other colleagues where relevant. Even then the list above is by no
means complete, several ICMDP staff continue to conduct research into aspects of the program philosophy, practice and course content.

By drawing on each other’s research work my colleagues and I have attempted to provide a rich and deeply layered account of our individual and collective understandings, experiences and practice, which are often validated and sometimes ruptured by the individual and collective understandings, experiences and practice of ICMDP students/practitioners. Throughout the thesis I draw widely on relevant contemporary and historical literature pertaining to the specific focus of each chapter including an overview of the policy context and the debate surrounding the appropriateness of competency based education for Indigenous education. Wherever possible I incorporate Australian texts, and more particularly those that have addressed Indigenous matters.

The policy impacts upon the ICMDP

Since the federal government policy changes in Indigenous higher education in the mid to late 1990s the program’s future has seemed uncertain at times despite its evident effectiveness in addressing and achieving Indigenous education and employment policy goals (DEET 1989; Miller 1985). As Chapter Two outlines successive policy changes do not necessarily address Indigenous concerns regarding the potentially contradictory goals in existing National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policies (NATSEIP) pertaining to the maintenance of cultural difference and the achievement of equal outcomes in mainstream contexts (Nakata 2002a). On the contrary they often drive the wedge further and entrench the problematics of unexamined dominant values within curriculum initiatives and classroom practice in Indigenous education contexts.

Furthermore, as other related research I have conducted suggests, these policy changes have been made with little or no regard to existing program processes and outcomes and often counter the ‘effectiveness’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘successes’ of existing programs (Walker 2000). While Indigenous stakeholders support the need for funding accountability by Indigenous education providers, notions of ‘effectiveness’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘academic success’ remain highly complex and contested concepts among Indigenous education stakeholders. There is also evidence to show that changes to ABSTUDY policy have impacted negatively upon Indigenous participation in universities (Moodie 1999a; Schwab & Campbell 1997). These effects have been felt by the ICMD and Indigenous Community Health (ICH) programs (as with other Indigenous education courses), placing them in increasing jeopardy, despite a range of creative responses by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies to deal with these changes (Walker 1997c).
With respect to my thesis, the incomprehensible and unsettling nature of this situation increases the importance and urgency of this research and the necessity to reveal and understand the contradictory and seemingly capricious consequences occurring in this policy context. While an ambitious undertaking, I believe it is important to identify the strategies and possibilities of social change in postcolonial Australia. It is also necessary to reassert the critical need for decolonising processes to be widely incorporated into all social and political institutions in Australia which currently control the discursive and actual possibilities for Indigenous wellbeing. At the same time this larger task reaffirms the importance and efficacy of programs such as the ICMDP which have developed a range of transformative strategies. I will explore in this thesis how these strategies and reworking of poststructuralist, postcolonial and postculturalist discourses contribute to decolonisation and positive social change.

**Situating the ICMDP in a site of struggle and contestation**

The ICMDP is situated as a transformative project within the academy, and within the broader historical, social, political and cultural context of postcolonial Australia. Drawing on the theoretical standpoints and frameworks identified above, and in the tradition of (Giroux 1990), this thesis encompasses a postmodern critique of universal theories together with a modernist search for ethical ideals, underpinned by an assertion and recognition of Indigenous rights amid the existing interplay of dominant discourses upon Indigenous and non-Indigenous social relations and realities.

Indigenous higher education in postcolonial Australia remains essentially an important site of ongoing struggle and contestation. Education, with its concurrent knowledge-producing, civilising and assimilative imperatives, holds both great opportunities and risks for Indigenous peoples. It is widely acknowledged that much of the struggle in the academy still revolves around dimensions of race, gender and class and the corresponding relations of power and knowledge legitimation (Giroux 1983, 1993; Hunter 1994; McConaghy 2000; Morgan 1992; Nakata 2000b). Thus, the ICMDP provides an important, practical and critical case study within the University to investigate some of the key epistemological issues, dilemmas and contradictions that occur within the convergences and divergences of various theoretical standpoints about emancipatory and critical education. This case study enables me to reflexively revisit some of the strategies we have deployed to work with the dilemmas, dangers and possibilities of contemporary education for Indigenous futures. I chart how we have attempted to avoid colonial forms of education which involve the deculturation, assimilation and policing (surveillance, disciplining, and control) by dominant cultural groups (Carlson 1997, p. 137), to actively
engage in postcolonial education. Postcolonial education discourse encompasses a multiculturalism that requires that control of the curriculum development and program delivery is shifted from the dominant cultural group to the groups intended to benefit, and that the goals and outcomes attempt to overcome existing economic and structural disparities and provide equal employment opportunities that serve minority or Indigenous interests (Carlson 1997). By this definition the ICMDP is located within the postcolonial education tradition.

Such postcolonial education projects by and with Indigenous Australians are an advance on colonial projects that were historically developed for Indigenous Australians. Nevertheless the discourses and practices within many contemporary Indigenous education programs are still deeply embedded in and drawn from colonial projects. Many of us within the program (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) were/are painfully aware that even innovative programs, intended to provide students with competencies to meet their community needs and aspirations, continuously ‘walk a fine line’ (Greville 2000) between assimilating Indigenous peoples into, or marginalising them from, engaging in contemporary multicultural society. This reality demands that all of us reflect deeply on our own motives, and to ask the really searching questions as to whether Indigenous and non-Indigenous people committed to emancipatory, decolonising goals can together deconstruct, reconstruct and circumnavigate the problematics of narratives of race, cultural difference and binary power relations (black/white; oppressor/oppressed/ coloniser/colonised). For these factors are always present, always threatening the positive coalitions which emerge to interrupt more all encompassing and destructive dominant and oppositional discourses, colonial legacies and legitimating formations. The warnings of some writers for example (Folds 1987, 1993; Hunter 1994; McTaggart 1988) suggest that radical innovations in education might inadvertently strengthen the university’s role in serving the status quo and reproducing inequalities of race and class.

So what do these conflicts and tensions really mean? I believe that the theoretical undertakings which show the limitations of our operations within the bounds of specific disciplinary methods, methodologies and analytical frameworks, while essential, can also in turn impose, circumscribe and reinscribe their own limits and generate doubt regarding our original intent. They can instigate a crisis of confidence. Our actions and motives, stripped of their subjectivities and complexities, can be re-presented, renamed and reframed for the sake of theoretical coherence and objectivity as fitting within this ism/istic category or that. Such theoretical undertakings flirt with the epistemic violence they loathe. In other words, paradoxically those of us adopting our various standpoints are so
deeply committed to interrupting, challenging, revealing, explaining and rethinking those dominant forces that we often overlook or omit the elements that are working. The final paradox is that we have to maintain our self-questioning stance alongside a commitment to ethical action, together with the courage to share our stories with others.

I suggest that these arguments support the relevance of the critical reflexive curriculum and pedagogy established in the ICMDP. As the following chapters confirm, a major assumption underpinning the program's development was that marginalisation and disempowerment are less likely to occur in programs which both acknowledge the need for, and provide students with, competencies to confront the institutionalised legacies of white hegemony and racism and at the same time advance the agendas of social justice and Indigenous self-determination and rights. A key focus of the ICMDP program is to enhance student’s ability to negotiate the social realities at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface for a more just society on equal terms.

Discussions with many colleagues who have worked with or are still working within the ICMDP confirm a high level of consciousness and concern that the curriculum, pedagogy and administrative processes do not inadvertently contribute to the marginalisation, disempowerment and/or deculturation and assimilation of Indigenous peoples. Sometimes, however, these concerns reflect an entrenchment in the system that is oppositional or sceptical to any departures from mainstream practices, processes and standards. These conflicting concerns expressed about the ICMDP have created tensions and reinforced the need to continually reflect upon and articulate the ‘why’ and ‘how’ imperatives for the program. I will track the program’s journey to show that there have been critical moments in its ongoing evolution where the program’s emancipatory discourses and justifications have lost ground against dominant discourses including traditional education assumptions. Such defining moments have provided the impetus for changes and refocused the need to recognise and live with the multiplicities, paradoxes, complexities and ambivalence of engaging in such a transformative, decolonising project.

Issues of Method and Methodology

This section discusses methodology and methodological issues using the distinctions drawn by Sandra Harding (1987) that a ‘research methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed…’ and, a ‘research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence’ (pp. 2-3 cited in Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 143). As Smith points out: 
Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments being employed and shapes the analyses. Methodological issues entail broader political concerns and strategic goals of Indigenous research. It is at this level that researchers have to clarify and justify their intentions. Methods become the means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed (loc.cit).

It is precisely these broader political concerns and strategic goals of Indigenous research and education that have shaped the methodology and methods of this research project. A key objective of my thesis has been to adopt a methodology that supports open and equal participation and negotiation so that my own research agenda and interests coexist and correspond with and support Indigenous research goals and priorities within the CAS yet enables me to write about my own experiences and understandings of the situation. Thus, the methodological approaches I have employed in this research involve writing about the ICMDP on the basis of my interpretations and experience of a range of different ideas, decisions, strategies, elements and perspectives. Borrowing from Denzin, I have adopted the role of *bricoleur* to ‘fashion meaning and interpretation out of ongoing experience, using any tool or method that is readily at hand’ (Denzin 1994, p. 501), with the caveat that they are ethical and appropriate for doing research in this context. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b, p. 3) describe a *bricoleur* as someone who ‘… understands that research is an interactive process shaped by [their own] personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting…’; as well as someone who also knows that researchers tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism (loc.cit).

Engaging in a research process that recognises and addresses the ethics and cultural politics of this ‘interactive reality’ and the ever present risks associated with it, requires considerable sensitivity and self-reflexivity and a willingness to interrogate our own positions within the research — a position that Jeannie Roberts, Darlene Oxenham and I have explored elsewhere (Roberts, Oxenham & Walker 1999).

I intend to substantiate, problematise and refine my thesis by analysing different aspects of the ICMDP and its ongoing development and implementation, with reference to key
external and internal discourses, decisions and processes. The development of this thesis has evolved through discussions and interactions with staff and students and my reading of our interactions and their narratives as well as my interpretation of the program’s development. I draw upon significant program, public and internal documents, and my journal observations to support my analysis (Silverman 1993). While this interpretative account has been informed by and shared with principal program participants (past and present) in an attempt to ensure its validity, as Dorothy Smith (1988) points out in *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist Sociology*, it can only ever be a partial representation of the program. Catherine Riessman in *Narrative Analysis* also makes the point that different conventions for collecting, transcribing and analysing verbal accounts ‘lead to and support different interpretations and ideological positions, and they ultimately create different worlds’ (1993, p. 13).

Nevertheless, I attempt to build an authentic, encompassing picture of an ever emerging and reflexive transformative and decolonising project by simultaneously engaging in an ongoing dialogue and reflective analysis with emancipatory and critical educational theorists and program practitioners, and drawing on a diversity of perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous intellectuals, academics and practitioners. I also draw upon a range of different theoretical standpoints and frameworks in order to develop a deeper understanding of and theorise about my own and others’ perspectives and experiences. In doing so, my intention (returning to the metaphor of the bricoleur used earlier) is to create a *bricolage*,

... a complex, dense, reflexive, collage like creation that represents the researcher’s understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis... connect[ing] the parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social world studied (Weinstein & Weinstein (1991, p. 164) quoted in Denzin & Lincoln 1994b).

Throughout my thesis I use a range of analytical tools and methodological approaches derived from a wide theoretical terrain in order to examine the various elements that together make up the wider composite picture. For example, I draw upon Foucault’s genealogical analysis to chart Indigenous education policy within the Australian political context and the university in the sense of ‘opening up “spaces” for debate’ and putting “philosophical fragments” to work (Foucault 1981, p. 4 in McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 85). I also undertake an archaeological analysis (Foucault 1972) to explicate the issues, rules, procedures and protocols which govern the nature, limits and the validity, legitimacy and
authenticity of discourse and knowledge claims surrounding identity politics within Australia. An archaeological analysis will assist me to clearly study how relations of power inhere in all discourses and at the same time how discourse works to mediate relations between knowledges, relations of powers, and subjectivity/ies.

This mediating role of discourse is evident in the various texts and discourses used to describe the ICMDP (such as promotional pamphlets, accreditation documents, annual reports, DEETYA submissions, Quality profiles, student course texts, discussion papers, research projects and internal annual planning and review documents). While the narratives differ depending on the nature of the text and the audience, the themes of Indigenous self-determination, transformation and decolonisation permeate the curriculum alongside narratives of cultural inclusivity and cultural appropriateness. This thesis will explore how we worked with the dilemmas and problematics inherent in these narratives to address many of the concerns revealed in contemporary critiques of Indigenous education narratives by writers such as McConaghy (2000) and Nakata (2000a).

**Problematics of representation, voice and experience**

There are a number of issues and questions inherent in carrying out research regarding the relations of power and cultural politics between the researcher and those being ‘researched’, and the related concerns about representations of contexts, events and ‘truths’, and ‘re-inscribing otherness’ (Clifford 1988; Said 1985, 1993; Linda Smith 1999; Spivak 1987) and considerations of voice and experience (Kramer-Dahl 1996). These issues have remained important and relevant considerations in shaping the research methodology of this project. My attempts to locate myself in the research and to establish a speaking position have heightened my sense of the ambivalent zone in which the whole project is situated, and prompted a more subjective and problematised line of methodological inquiry than I initially imagined.

There are two key problematics regarding my location in the research which I have attempted to address by developing and working in accordance with the research protocols and processes outlined in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies Indigenous Research Ethics and Principles Policy (CAS 1999). The first relates to the dilemmas surrounding notions of representation and relations of power — the ‘authority’ and ‘right’ to write; and the ‘rules’ and responsibility of speaking for ourselves and others. Traditionally, in social science research, including some feminist research, these rules have derived from liberal ideas about individual authority, power, agency, subjectivity and identity which are generally privileged over, and at the expense of, the rights and authority of the
collective being ‘othered’. As a consequence research has generally excluded or misrepresented groups especially those disadvantaged and marginalised from the axis of power. In order to avoid or at least limit such possibilities and to meet an Indigenous research agenda I have needed to negotiate a position from which to ‘author’ this research — that is, to establish my author[ity] or ‘right’ to write about my experience with regard to the rights and interests of all other participants.

I am aware that there are a number of problematics associated with being a participant and an observer in this research project, as well as a non-Indigenous woman holding a key academic position of ‘power and responsibility’ in an Indigenous organisation. I hope to overcome the first of these research problematics by adopting the stance of a scrupulous historian and fair and ethical insider (Lather 1991; Denzin & Lincoln 1994a). The problematic of my authorship and research is addressed to some extent by drawing upon Indigenous perspectives and voices throughout my research. However, the practice of researchers incorporating Indigenous voices to gain legitimacy for their research can generate further problems. McConaghy highlights the dangers for researchers, especially those leaning towards radicalism, of resorting to Aboriginalism through the commodification, internalisation and/or indiscriminate inclusion of Indigenous voices (2000, p. 244). While there is no denying that such risks have remained a major concern for me, creating periods of great unease and my own crises of confidence and research paralysis, to exclude or ignore Indigenous Voices in my research would be an act of gross deceit and imperialism. My research has grown out of the shared concerns of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, our struggles to avoid the pitfalls and [sch]’isms’ identified by writers such as Hunter and McConaghy. Throughout my research I have included those Voices or ideas that, from my perspective, have made an important contribution to the program, or influenced my thinking about Indigenous education policy and practice. In a sense their inclusion ‘because they were there’ addresses questions posed by writers such as McConaghy as to whose voices to include, and pre-empts or makes irrelevant the question of how we discriminate between ‘good Indigenous voices’ and ‘bad Indigenous voices’ (2000, p. 245).

Such considerations are answered within this research by recognition that each person involved in struggles within the ICMDP helped to shape it. In terms of Indigenous theorists I have attempted to cover the diversity of issues and dilemmas that are relevant to this thesis. Because this thesis is about my journey I have, wherever possible, confirmed or triangulated my reading of events or issues with colleagues in order to ‘secure a more in-
depth understanding of the phenomenon in question’ (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b, p. 2). And, although this process is intended to provide a richer, more valid account, as Denzin and Lincoln state, the process of triangulation is not a strategy of validation but an alternative to it, to enrich and ensure the efficacy of the research (loc.cit). I also include the different perspectives and voices of many of my colleagues, graduates and students in order to represent and capture the ‘multi-perspectival’ nature of the program. At times this has involved referring to research being carried out by colleagues as an appropriate primary source. Even so, I recognise that in the final analysis, despite my commitment to provide an authentic representation of the ICMDP this thesis reflects my own subjective experience, assumptions and values and is just one of many possible readings of the program. This is not to suggest that we do not have to strive for agreement and maintain this but it challenges rather than hides behind the legitimacy of pure, objective research that often legitimates or fails to disclose oppressive practices. Both this thesis and knowledge production by other ICMDP staff and students are a means to interrupt such limiting and legitimising texts.

Nevertheless, drawing support from Avtar Brah (1992) McConaghy warns of the limits of identity politics in which ‘assertions of authenticity, minority membership and personal experience become substitutes for careful political analysis’ (2000, p. 264). While it is neither possible (nor desirable) to stand outside the research, I attempt to critically reflect upon the possibilities and limitations of the various discourses and theoretical perspectives that have shaped my thinking and practice (and that of my colleagues). This is necessary in order to explore the methodological implications of critical theory and emancipatory research praxis and to examine and theorise the key issues and problematics evident in our attempts within the program to incorporate a decolonising critical education theory and an ethical transformative pedagogy and practice.

This brings me to the second and related problematic which also derives from these ideas, but is concerned with issues regarding the authenticity and validity, and the rights and responsibilities in an emancipatory/decolonising project to make knowledge claims grounded in the subjectivity and situatedness of everyday experience (Alcoff 1997; Haraway 1988). Both of these sets of ideas within feminist research theory challenge scientific and positivistic paradigms which are underpinned by liberal conceptions of knowledge. As Nancy Miller points out feminist research recognises and acknowledges that the personal and the positional are both the same and different (1991, p. 16). Miller also highlights the dilemmas of authority in adopting a feminist pedagogy and the
problematics of ‘representivity’ and positioning in our claims to write, speak or teach “as a…” (1991, p. xii) to which I now turn.

The problematic of speaking

The first of these issues is related to the problematics of ‘speaking’ attached to the different roles and positions I have or have had in carrying out the research. Poststructuralist, feminist and Indigenous standpoints, methodologies or paradigms reveal how the power, authority and ‘right’ to speak are never a constant. They vary over time and are dependent not only on the position(s) we hold but whether these are recognised and validated by other people, which in turn is dependent on where they are located within the research. Besides the general methodological issues in the research associated with participant observation there are other issues involving the relations of power attached, assumed, derived, ascribed and/or negotiated in speaking on the basis of my various identity markers. The most obviously relevant and problematic identity markers in the context of this thesis include the issues of privilege which inhere in speaking as a; ‘a “middle-class” white woman’; ‘a staff member of the program’; and so on. But it is precisely these identity markers that have worked to exclude or silence people such as myself, who have worked in Indigenous education for extensive periods of time. We often choose not to write in order to avoid doing further epistemic violence, inadvertently participating in ‘bourgeois self-representation’ (Miller N. 1991, p. 20) or being accused of ‘getting a PhD on the back of Indigenous education’. The effect of this as, McConaghy (2000) observes, is that dialogue around Indigenous education on the basis of shared cross-cultural experience has been limited. This has not only stifled the debate but also influenced particular ways of working in the field that have perpetuated some worrying trends as writers including Hunter (1994), Langton (1993) and McConaghy (2000) reveal.

Part of the unease resides in the potential for unequal relations of power between the researcher and the researched. The ‘relations of power’ between myself and others involved in this research have changed over time and as I have shifted positions and roles from an insider/outsider in the ICMDP. As an insider I was often speaking from the role (and ascribed identity) as ‘Academic Co-ordinator’. As an ‘outsider’ I have been given legitimacy and support to continue the research in my role as ‘a senior research fellow’, in accordance with the Centre’s own ethical guidelines and processes for Indigenous research. These guidelines and processes are designed to avoid ‘academic colonisation’ while still recognising that my right to make knowledge claims resides in my subjective experience as someone who has participated in and contributed to the development of the ICMDP.
Throughout this thesis I have maintained my commitment to a reflexive practice to overcome the risks of engaging in what Nancy Miller (1991, p. 1) refers to as ‘the imperialisms of “speaking for”… “others”’. In this research my position ‘to speak for myself and with “others”…’ was negotiated with Patricia Dudgeon, Head, CAS; Darlene Oxenham (the Coordinator of the ICMDP at the time); and endorsed by the Aboriginal Management Committee. The research is conducted within the ethical boundaries and with the support and direction of an Indigenous reference group comprised of Darlene Oxenham (Director of CIRC), Ricky Osborne (previously Co-ordinator, ICMDP) and Jeannie Roberts, senior lecturer of the Indigenous Health Unit. In my research the ‘others’ include: Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues in the ICMDP (several of who have left), Indigenous students (some became/are staff), Indigenous CAS staff, and stakeholders including the wider Indigenous community and employer organisations. I am aware that the dangers of collapsing into the imperialisms of speaking for… rather than speaking with… remain ever present in my work because of the fluid boundaries and diverse and multi-cultural identity markers of the 'others' that I refer to at different times. These boundaries and markers also shift with the variations in the topics, focus and scope of the analysis in each of the chapters of my thesis. Often the ‘we’ and ‘they’ I am referring to is both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ICMDP staff. It is never my intention to reinscribe 'others' in any way that marginalises, excludes or misrepresents Indigenous students or any ICMDP staff member.

There are a couple of further points to be made in relation to the first problematic that relate to the risks of the imperialisms inherent in hegemonic and black/white power relations. One of the most worrying aspects of my research for me, as a non-Indigenous practitioner/researcher who has been passionately involved in Indigenous affairs for the last two decades is the risk of inadvertently participating in ‘Aboriginalism’ (Hodge & Mishra 1991) or academic colonisation (Dudgeon & Oxenham 1989) or engaging in research which is not useful or relevant or misrepresents Indigenous peoples. However, I believe it is also equally important for readers to acknowledge the actual, rightful power and control exercised by Indigenous leaders and groups in specified contexts and Indigenous domains over research such as this project. Such acknowledgement helps to both avoid the above pitfalls and create new spaces for dialogue, understanding and negotiation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to produce meaningful research to meet Indigenous agendas. The potential that resides in such negotiated space tends to offset the potential paralysis generated by the first.
Moreover, Linda Alcoff (1991-92) highlights the responsibility incumbent upon those who have worked in such important projects to share their experiences and understandings with others. In addition, Kemmis (1997a, p. 3) states that academics have a responsibility to address various forms of oppression in universities and to reflect on the role universities play in the marginalisation of Indigenous people. Sometimes remaining silent is a 'copout' reflecting a reluctance to engage in the bigger struggle along with Indigenous colleagues, on their terms and to fulfil Indigenous strategic goals. Nevertheless, doing research as a non-Indigenous person is problematic — but it is less so under the guidance of Indigenous people and in accordance with an Indigenous research agenda. For example, Linda Smith (1999) outlines the different models by which non-Indigenous researchers can be involved in research projects that have been proposed in New Zealand contexts that include an empowering outcomes model which addresses Maori priorities. Even so, Smith reminds us that such emancipatory research can still be problematic, reinforcing the importance of key Indigenous people having control in negotiating the agenda (1999, pp. 175-6). From my perspective, not doing research at all, or failing to do so on Indigenous terms, contributes to the continuation of social injustices and cultural dominance.

**The problematic of experience**

Returning to the second problematic, I am undertaking this research in the belief, shared by many of my colleagues, that theorising on the basis of subjective experiences and situated knowledges provides important methodological, epistemological and ontological possibilities for transformation and decolonisation. Such a phenomenological methodology helps to counter the risks that positivistic methods and epistemological and ontological positions hold for colonising education (Rigney 1998; Linda Smith 1999). My own and others’ subjective experiences and situated knowledges, (Greville 2000; Oxenham 1999. 2000a; Wilson 1999) draw upon, as well as push up against and beyond the different readings and perspectives of various theoretical standpoints regarding critical, emancipatory education (Giroux 1985, 1993; Gore 1993; Hunter 1994; Lather 1991). Acknowledging my own and others vexed positions regarding the risks, pitfalls and ambiguities of engaging in decolonising and emancipatory processes with groups affected by colonial hegemonic forces I explore the implications of theoretical claims and standpoints regarding the transformative possibilities at the program level.

These issues are also pivotal to the overall thesis which privileges (and problematises) the place of situated knowledges, and the validity and legitimacy of knowledges located in experience (Code 1995; Harding 1998; Linda Smith 1999) as a starting point for teaching, learning and dialogue. I reflect on my own practices and motivations as a teacher and
researcher from both a personal and professional perspective. As bell hooks suggests ‘Personal testimonial, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making’ (1994, p. 71). In this case I suggest that, together, our individual and program wide experiences also form the basis for a critical theory and praxis that makes transformation possible. The interrelationship between making sense of, or theorising about our everyday practice, and the transformative possibilities that inhere in such praxis is recognised by a number of feminists (Code 1995; hooks 1994; Linda Smith 1999). For example bell hooks writes ‘While we work to resolve those issues that are most pressing to our daily lives, ... we engage in a critical process of theorizing that enables and empowers’ (op.cit, p. 3). This thesis encapsulates my own (and others) understandings and experience to contribute to Indigenous theorising about decolonising and emancipatory projects in higher education.

In a sense this research is a journey back to some of the sites of contestation where the struggles first took place as a backdrop to the contemporary issues confronting the ICMDP within the broader context of Indigenous education. As a participant in the program for several years, like many others, I was often too busy just getting on with it, managing the day-to-day reality, looking ahead, trying to achieve the program’s aims, avoiding the obvious pitfalls, obstacles and dead-ends to do more than register the signs along the way. Ironically, engaging in a new and highly innovative program meant it was often too difficult (individually or together) to begin to question what has been taken for granted at the local level and in the familiar places such as the classroom. Sometimes we did not yet have a shared language to engage in meaningful discourse. The importance for both staff and students of developing a shared language is discussed further in later chapters. In many respects, and for all of the above reasons, this is an exploratory, critically reflective journey to more fully understand and theorise the nature and extent of the decolonising and transformative potential and limits of the ICMDP within the broader contemporary context.

It became apparent early on in the program’s development that we were engaged in a process of theorising at a meta-level. Based on our individual and shared experiences and emerging understandings, we were providing a meta-theory and engaging in a meta-praxis of what we were offering to and expecting of Indigenous Community Management and Development (ICMD) students as practitioners. That is, students were already dealing with, and trying to make sense of — in order to act on and change — a range of issues in the day-to-day realities of their family, work and community contexts. Both as
staff and students we were engaged in a process of continuously creating, enacting and recreating a 'program that acts as a catalyst for social change' (hooks 1994, p. 72).

In theorising about the transformative nature of the program, my research approach embodies my own broader commitment to and conscious engagement in a process of decolonisation at both a very personal and a public level. This means that my research has necessarily involved examining Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in contemporary Australia as well as reflecting on my own roles, standpoints and place within it and in relation to Indigenous Australians.

Within the following chapters I include other interpretations of attempts to define and theorise the rationale for the ICMDP and the relationship between its aims/purposes and the nature of the curriculum, its content, policies, processes and teaching and learning practices and contexts. I recognise that the ‘reality’ I am constructing about working at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous education in the ‘unreal’ dimensions of the academy is highly complex, always at risk of being reduced to radicalised binaries. I also recognise that an author’s intention and constructed realities are altered by the reader’s interpretations. I hope my intention remains clear and unambiguous. In situating my thesis within my own experience, I hope I can do justice for all those staff and students who have shared in this journey and who were or still are engaged in the search for a genuinely transformative and decolonising praxis.

**Theoretical standpoints and frameworks of analysis**

Throughout this thesis I draw on critical, feminist and Indigenous standpoints (Nakata 1997a, 1998a) in order to emphasise the productive elements of postmodernism and deflect the more pessimistic, apolitical and unethical elements of postmodernism (Giroux 1990; Jameson 1991, 1998; Kaplan 1990) without imposing either an unrealistic optimism or a one-off solution to Indigenous education and social relations in Australia. The academy thrives on the theoretical critique of ideas and actions. These critiques, while necessary, are ‘acts’ in themselves, which can create a sense of impotency to act in practical ways to make changes to the status quo, no matter how unacceptable or untenable it seems.

In addition to the theoretical exploration, my research focuses on the outcomes of attempts (and the sites, spaces and intersections in which they occur) to engage with a language of hope, political and ethical agency and transformative possibility in the ICMDP’s curriculum and pedagogy. This involves an analysis of the narratives of what is actually occurring in practice in the program, and different narrative accounts of what is
actually happening because of the program, in various sites in the community and workplace outside the academy at this time (Riessman 1993).

This thesis will provide a multi-perspective analysis of some of the important issues emerging within the ICMDP for others to build upon. I hope to do justice to the difficult, challenging and important work within the ICMDP by conducting my research in the spirit of collaboration and open dialogue with colleagues from the ICMDP and with the support and direction of the Indigenous reference group within the Centre. Ultimately I hope to share what is of importance, relevance and significance to the project of decolonisation and transformation with other teachers, researchers and participants in Indigenous higher education.

I am aware that, as with any research, there are limitations to interpretative research paradigms. In the final analysis the findings still represent my interpretation about the program and that, even unconsciously, I am selecting some things as important and overlooking others. Hopefully, the different strands of inquiry and levels of analysis will be useful for Centre staff in their various shared endeavours and both the research process and outcomes themselves serve as transformative and decolonising strategies.

Throughout this thesis I emphasise the importance of discourse, rhetoric and political vision. I suggest they have a legitimate place in our daily lives and can serve as a useful starting place for transformative practice. A key argument is that the ICMD practitioner, through the ICMD discourse embodies decolonising dialogues and actions which represent a crucial transformative strategy within the ICMDP which moves beyond the impotence and disempowerment embedded in some existing critiques of radical, emancipatory education projects.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two: Contextualising (Post)colonial Indigenous Education

Chapter Two explores the contemporary policy and political debate in Indigenous education in Australia in which the ICMDP is situated. It charts the uncertain and ambivalent place accorded Indigenous Australians in education. I show that existing higher education policies are inadequate to address the complex issues facing Indigenous Australians in order to change their economic and employment situation and overall wellbeing. I highlight the legacies of colonial liberalism that still impact on Indigenous education. I then argue that Indigenous education policies and government programs are
based on the contradictions and limitations of liberalism and not on any clear foundational principles of social justice and equality. I go on to show that the persuasiveness, persistence and ever-changing nature of liberalism still underpins the pitfalls and promises of education and other postcolonial institutions for Indigenous Australians. This paradox is central to this thesis, and connects the seemingly divergent lines of investigation.

**Chapter Three: Defining Moments – Transforming Curriculum**

Chapter Three analyses some of the key narrative(s), discourses, issues and decisions at 'critical moments' which have contributed to the development of the ICMD curriculum and pedagogy as a transformative or emancipatory program. It attempts to capture the efforts, commitment and political motivation within the ICMDP to create an empowering, critically self-reflexive and transformative curriculum to actualise the Centre's commitment to 'the advancement of Indigenous people in a manner that engenders Indigenous values and self-determination' (CAS 1997a).

**Chapter Four: Appropriating Competency Based Education**

Chapter Four examines some of the key issues and the criticisms in the competency-based education (CBE) debate in the context of curriculum and social reform and the implications for Indigenous education. There are well-grounded arguments that reveal that CBE serves an assimilationist corporatist agenda inimical to Indigenous interests. However, I provide examples to show how CAS and ICMDP have appropriated elements of competency-based education to meet both social justice and economic and employment agendas for Indigenous people. I discuss how the outcomes based nature of competency based education provides a vehicle for applying Indigenous defined competencies to support Indigenous interests.

**Chapter Five: Decolonising frameworks and strategies**

Chapter Five looks specifically at the key decolonising frameworks and strategies deployed within the ICMDP. Several aspects of the curriculum are, in combination, decolonising including the goals, political vision and underpinning discourse of Indigenous terms of reference. I suggest, however, that it is the theoretical construct of the particular ICMD practitioner that enables both teachers and students to work productively with notions of agency, identity and subjectivity, which are essential elements of individual and social transformation.
Chapter Six: Negotiating the Interface

Building on the previous argument in Chapter Six I put forward the proposition that a second theoretical construct — the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface — creates the necessary site in which the ICMD practitioner enacts their role. The Interface encompasses the intersection and interactivity of diverse cultural knowledges and politics and processes. It is a site of turbulence, negotiation, integration, appropriation and reproductive and transformative possibility.

Chapter Seven: Responding the Colonialist/Corporatist Assault

In Chapter Seven I examine how economic rationalism, managerialism and corporatism have now emerged/merged as a relatively coherent and pervasive neo-liberalist paradigm on a global level penetrating government, bureaucracy and human service delivery agencies in unexpected and ironic ways. The corporatist discourse is now embedded in higher education, impacting upon Indigenous Centres and programs and penetrating into the lives of students, their work and community contexts. The liberal discourse of multiculturalism is struggling to compete with, or has been subsumed within, the dominant discourse of economic globalisation and the deliberately discrediting tactics of conservative forces. Using specific examples this chapter considers the impact of the 'colonialist/corporatist assault' experienced, and responded to, by the ICMDP since its inception.

Chapter Eight: Transformative Possibilities

This chapter reviews the transformative and decolonising possibilities of emancipatory education for Indigenous Australians in the context of contemporary politics of postcolonial Australia. While cognisant of earlier discussions regarding the pervasive ambivalence, tensions, dilemmas and contradictions of Indigenous education from a broader political perspective my position remains hopeful. This chapter suggests that the intersections of Indigenous terms of reference, ICMDP discourse with reconstituted ideals of liberalism at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface offer transformative possibilities. These possibilities encompass an 'ethical' commitment to the notion of individual and collective diversity to achieve the particular interests of Indigenous peoples and the interrelated goals of reconciliation, recognition of Indigenous rights and self-determination critical for a genuinely multicultural Australia.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have mapped the theoretical and analytical terrain that will be covered in this thesis highlighting the different strands of argument and seemingly diverse aspects of
investigation. The themes weaving through and connecting these strands are variously ontological, epistemological, and methodological in nature. I have also identified the internal/external and micro/macro aspects that will be discussed within this thesis. Each endeavour to further identify and define the research and to sharpen the focus of the thesis has raised additional questions and pushed the boundaries further, highlighting the enormity and complexity of the theoretical and analytical tasks ahead. I will begin this task by locating this thesis within the broader political and policy contexts in contemporary Australia.
Chapter Two

Contextualising (Post) Colonial Indigenous Education

Real change in Aboriginal education, culture and power has remained elusive, despite many changes on the surface (Keeffe 1992, p. ix).

Should we ask ourselves if we are agents of educational institutions which are instruments of injustice? Can we follow knowledge tracks in the 'landscape' relevant to us as Indigenous people? Can we contest to bring about change? (Arbon 1998, p. 70).

Current political and policy debate

The need to register ‘real change’ in Indigenous education and in the social circumstances of Indigenous peoples is a driving force for both government and Indigenous stakeholders in the policy process. Any number of reports and research findings testify to the disproportionate levels of disadvantage experienced on all wellbeing indicators by Indigenous Australians compared with other Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1996; Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett 2000; Johnston 1991; Walker, Ballard & Taylor 2001a; Zubrick 2000). Underpinning these imperatives is a debate as to what constitutes the goals, strategies and barriers to achieve, and measures of, ‘real change’ in Indigenous higher education. This policy debate is influenced by different ideas about social justice, equality and equity and difference.

This chapter draws upon the theoretical frameworks of policy analysis, transformation and postcolonialism. Analysed from within an ‘action/response’ policy framework (Barrett & Fudge 1981) — which suggests each government decision to address a specific issue engenders a range of responses by all those directly or indirectly affected by the decision which in turn necessitates another response in order to balance oppositional forces — it is possible to view the emergence of the ICMDP as an ongoing action/response to the raft of often competing policies and the underlying assumptions that impact upon or are developed to improve Indigenous higher education. The ICMDP provides a useful case study in which to explore some of the main issues and underlying assumptions influencing the policy and political debate surrounding Indigenous higher education within the social, political and historical context to suggest why ‘real change’ remains elusive.
Far from working towards partnership and equality several writers (Folds 1987, 1993; Lanhupuy 1987; Welch 1996) claim that the Australian government’s approach to Indigenous education still serves an assimilationist agenda. There is still a struggle over the recognition and legitimation of Indigenous knowledge, values and interests within curriculum and everyday practice in the classroom. While much of the debate and rhetoric surrounding Indigenous education is based on principles of and individual rights to equality, the formulation, implementation and measurement of government policies, processes and practices are far more pragmatic and political.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge within this broader context that there have been major achievements by Indigenous peoples across the whole spectrum of courses and course levels in higher education as the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) (previously the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET), and Department of Education, Employment and Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA)) performance indicators for the period 1989–2000 reveal (DEST 2002). There have also been major changes within Universities. By 1997 some 16 of the 35 Universities offered specific programs for Indigenous people, many have Indigenous Units or Centres responsible for the development and delivery of support programs, academic courses and contribute to University decision-making and core business (Anderson, Singh, Stebhens & Ryerson 1998; Walker 2000). While an improvement these figures show that less than half the universities have recognised a distinctive place for Indigenous education.

Over a decade ago Indigenous educator, Lila Watson (1988b) identified the inability or unwillingness — the unreflexiveness — of mainstream Australia to acknowledge its history and recognise the rightful place of Indigenous Australians as a major barrier to change. She stated ‘... little progress is likely until white Australia owns its colonial history, the persisting colonial relationship with Aboriginal people, and the obstacles to dialogue.’ Watson concluded that the university needs to ‘own its own history as a colonial and colonizing institution’, and ‘come to grips with the colonial structures, practices and attitudes which persist today’ (op.cit, p. 13). This argument is still being put forward with as much force and relevance today.

Many academic studies and policy documents confirm the need for educators, policymakers and politicians to acknowledge the effects of Australia’s colonial legacy upon Indigenous peoples (Nelson 2002; Kemmis 1997a; Walker 2000). Recent reports continue
to highlight the need for governments and universities to create the necessary structural mechanisms to acknowledge and genuinely facilitate the equal participation of Indigenous educators and managers in higher education decision-making. Indeed over the last decade successive reviews have recommended recognition of Indigenous self-determination and genuine partnership in higher education. Several studies (Anderson et al. 1998; Ham 1996; Walker 2000) have identified the need for further policy reforms and stronger government and university commitment to enact the principles of equal partnership and Indigenous self-determination and the recommendations outlined in the Recommendations into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), (Johnston 1991) to achieve the education goals of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP). Recommendations to support these same principles were reiterated in the Higher Education Council Review of Institutional Use of Commonwealth Higher Education Funding for Indigenous Australian Students (National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) 1997). These reports affirm that improvements in Indigenous education and social wellbeing are dependent upon the recognition of Indigenous rights, aspirations and specific needs, and a greater understanding of, and regard for, the pervasiveness of the legacy of Australia's colonial history upon the contemporary circumstances of Indigenous peoples. This will require key stakeholders to engage at both a philosophical or operational level with the principles and frameworks for partnership and self-determination that have state and federal government endorsement (Ham 1996; NBEET 1997).

It is apparent that there is still a lack of understanding regarding these issues and a lack of commitment to change. Much of the contemporary debate is still underpinned by issues pertaining to the attainment of social justice and equal opportunity for Indigenous Australians (Jayasuriya 1987; Jennett 1987). Underlying the debate are competing and contradictory discourses about issues of power relations and knowledge, residual racism and an ambivalence towards the contemporary postcolonial relations, and a high level of uncertainty surrounding the most appropriate approaches to address these issues (Markus 1994, 1996). According to Groome (1994, p. 140) behind existing educational practices,

... lies the colonising attitude described by Mulvaney (1989) as a mixture of contempt, fear, total lack of understanding, and guilt. The product of this is a suffocation of conscience which has made the history of Aboriginal education, as much as that of the nation, one of indifference.
This has resulted in a corresponding lack of change in practices, processes and outcomes in Indigenous education.

**A postcolonial framework**

It is worth taking a moment to discuss the highly contested, multi-perspectival nature of the broader policy context in which the ICMDP is located to understand the limitations and possibilities for transformation. Given the contemporary situation some Indigenous writers are critical of the suggestion that Australia can be described as postcolonial (see Linda Smith 1999, p. 24). They question whether Australia has or can rid itself of the shackles of colonialism. Even if we accept that Australia is postcolonial, postcolonialism is not the same as decolonisation. Postcolonialism incorporates and reflects all contemporary cultures and cultural tendencies as they have influenced and been influenced by colonisation throughout the historical process.

It is useful to draw upon Hartz' transformative model adapted by Hodge and Mishra (1991) together with the policy ‘action/response’ model (Barrett & Fudge 1981) to understand the policy process and the contemporary postcolonial context. While the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is in the business of maintaining its history, working from its formative base, it also has to respond creatively to bring onside oppositional and resistant responses to avoid the excesses of the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). Although there are some instances in Australia where the police and the media have performed this role particularly where Indigenous interests appear to be contrary to the national interest. Examples of this can be found in relation to Indigenous interests at Noonkanbah in 1980 (Hawke & Gallagher 1989) and the more recent disbanding of the Tent Embassy in 2001.

The framework of analysis developed by Hodge and Mishra is highly relevant and useful for the policy discussion here (1991, p. xi). The framework encompasses both oppositional and complicit postcolonialisms. They define 'postcolonialism' as the period that follows the stage of colonisation and suggest that it is not necessarily subversive, and in most cases it incorporates much from its colonial past (op.cit, p. xi). Acknowledging the existence of both oppositional and complicit postcolonialisms deepens our understanding of the complex, and at times, ambiguous nature of the contemporary cultural politics, and the ambivalence and contestations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders operating within the Indigenous education policy arena. Acknowledging the existence of these dual postcolonialisms avoids having to accept an either/or situation for individuals and groups. Rather, it supports the idea that individuals and groups can hold both oppositional and complicit standpoints in a constant state of tension, acting upon both
simultaneously as they negotiate their own interests and aspirations. This duality creates
the ambiguous nature of people's lives trying to walk the tightrope between the political
and cultural possibilities and constraints inherent in their situation. In part, the
development of the dualistic tendencies of oppositional and complicit postcolonialism is a
consequence of, and response to, the multiple complexities of the policy context in
contemporary Australia and its connections to its colonial history. It is to these
connections and influences that I shall now turn.

Colonial barriers to real policy change

Several writers (Kemmis 1997a; McConaghy 2000; Sherwood 1981, 1982; Welch 1996)
have traced a correspondence over the past two hundred years between the dominant
beliefs, assumptions and values of Government and the relations with Indigenous people,
the social policies of the time, and educational approaches and pedagogical practices
adopted. McConaghy, for example suggests that various forms of culturalism have
underpinned each successive period (2000).

Shifts in education policy have occurred at various points in history when the 'crisis in
Indigenous education' has become a major focus around which stakeholder groups with
widely accepted political and social beliefs, values and assumptions have influenced both
government and educational institutions. While most of these changes have been well
intentioned few policy changes have fully considered the range of Indigenous
perspectives, nor have they been able to adequately incorporate the diversity of
Indigenous needs, priorities and aspirations. Indeed, ironically NATSIEP and its
supporting programs and mechanisms have generally served to contain the diversity of
Indigenous interests (McConaghany 1997).

For example there was little debate prior to the introduction of the National Aboriginal
Education Policy (NAEP) and a broader policy of Indigenous Self-determination in the
1970s (McConnachie 1982). Until the late 1970s Aboriginal people were seldom involved
in the formulation and implementation of education policy and practice. This saw the
emergence and sustained implementation of cultural deprivation models that had currency
at the time to influence government policies with far reaching consequences for

Although Indigenous education policy goals have been reviewed and revised several
times during the past twenty years, very little appears to have changed in Indigenous
education (Anderson et al. 1998; Keeffe 1992; Schwab 1995; Walker 2000). In part this is
because both long-standing and emerging issues regarding Indigenous input into and control over the direction of Indigenous education are still being ignored (Bourke, Bourke & Edwards 1994; Luke, Nakata, Garbutcheon Singh & Smith 1993; Morgan 1992). The government is still trying to mainstream elements of Indigenous education even while Indigenous academics are still arguing for Indigenous education policy development and implementation to occur within a framework of Indigenous self-determination.

**Liberal contradictions**

Several writers (McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2000b) claim that the continuing issues in Indigenous education are in part a function of the contradictions of existing liberal assumptions that underpin the broader policy context. Implicit assumptions of colonial liberalism still influence the decisions of policy-makers, academics and administrators within the dominant society. Several writers have revealed how the ideology of liberalism, itself is fraught with contradictions, has supported the most incomprehensible actions and decisions to occur in Indigenous education under the banner of social justice. In spite of the rhetoric of equality and social justice the contradictions and their implications for Indigenous education have remained largely unexamined in the debate. It is possible to see that Indigenous education policies and corresponding programs and mechanisms have been reformulated at various times in response to the imperative of reconciling different strands of liberalism and not on any clear foundations of equality and social justice.

In addition, some of the most pervasive concepts regarding the individual, society and civilisation and progress — which historically gave form and substance to the structures, language and processes of liberal democracy and the role of education within it — have been incorporated into contemporary discourses of social and human capital (Hunter 1994; Schwab 1995). These discourses infused with economic rationalism and corporatism create another dimension in the debate and pose new threats to Indigenous higher education (see Chapter Seven).

**The pervasive legacy of the colonial imperative**

The pervasiveness of ‘the colonial imperative’ underscored by liberal ideologies has severely circumscribed and delayed the nature of change in Indigenous education despite persistent challenges to the colonial mindset. A brief overview of the history of colonisation reveals how Indigenous and non-Indigenous postcolonial relations both influence and are influenced by Indigenous education policy decisions and the contemporary social and political situation of Indigenous Australians. In particular, it
highlights the ambivalent place accorded Indigenous peoples in education and Australian society generally. At the same time it suggests how the assimilationist imperative continues to impact on transformative education strategies at an institutional and program level.

McConnochie (1982, p. 29) argues that since colonisation all policies and practices relating to Indigenous education have developed in an ahistorical context and without any substantive political framework. McConnochie claims that policies have been based on expediency and conventional wisdom, and underscored by dominant cultural values and beliefs of policy-makers (loc.cit). Central to this argument is the fact that Indigenous education has been built on an implicit set of assumptions embedded within an ideological base that has not been adequately acknowledged by non-Indigenous stakeholders. As a consequence the changes that have occurred are more a testimony to Indigenous resilience, creative response and determination than appropriate substantive changes in policy. Increasingly Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics (Arbon 1998; Beresford 2003; McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2000b) are beginning to reveal and define the ideological base that has historically limited Indigenous education.

A consistent theme in the history and politics of Indigenous education in Australia since colonisation is the correspondence between government social policies and education practices towards Indigenous people (Rowley 1970; Sherwood 1982). The history of education tends to be categorised according to five main periods that have been characterised by quite distinct government policies, programs, resources and practices for Indigenous people. These phases have been identified as: Invasion/colonisation 1860s, Protection (and separation) 1860s-1940s, Assimilation 1940s-60s (Rowley, 1970, p. 19) Integration 1960s-1970s and Indigenous self-determination and self-management 1975-1990s (Saunders 1982) followed by a decade of reconciliation and contestation. There are contending and emergent elements and ideologies operating in each of these successive policy phases which resulted in definite shifts in Indigenous education practices over time. However, as McConaghy’s work reveals, a pervasive culturalism underpins and connects each of these phases. Since early colonisation culturalist assumptions and constructs have portrayed and represented Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as two distinctly ‘immutable and oppositional’ cultures (McConaghy 2000, p. 8). According to McConaghy an obsessive emphasis on ‘cultural differences’ has influenced representations of Indigenous people and legitimated non-Indigenous policy decisions and actions. Yet unable to understand, reconcile or live with ‘cultural differences’, colonial policy-makers have at times attempted to ignore Indigenous people,
obliterate them and finally, when these strategies have been unsuccessful, to tolerate them without arriving at any easy co-existence. Ongoing attempts by Indigenous people to influence education were isolated or marginal and hence unable to generate sustained change.

The legacy of the various impacts of each successive period upon Indigenous people is now widely documented and therefore only briefly covered here (Collard, Walker & Dudgeon 1999; Hunter 1994; Kemmis 1997a; McConaghy 2000; Rowley 1970). Each of these phases has ignored the specific and diverse needs and aspirations Indigenous people. Each phase attempts to ‘civilise’ and educate for employment to meet mainstream agendas. The policy of assimilation reflecting a humanist intent was only marginally better. Several writers including Arbon (1998) and Watson (1988) have argued that the assimilation policy, presented as an ‘equality of sameness’, masked yet another attempt to eliminate Aboriginal cultural difference. The policy of integration that followed recognised the right of Aboriginal people to retain their distinctive heritage and culture. However, as Watson (1988) observed, while the policy of integration was an improvement it involved no structural changes, and asked nothing of the white community but tolerance. Moreover, it located Indigenous people, and their knowledge, under the umbrella of ‘multiculturalism’. For Watson these policy changes were yet another attempt ‘to mask our status as the indigenous [sic] people of this country, to belittle our unique relationship with the land, and to give the facade of legitimacy to colonization’ (1988b, p. 3).

Between the 1960s and 1970s, educational reforms for Indigenous people were based on the deficit models of compensatory education underscored by theories of cultural deprivation that had widespread legitimacy at the time (McConnochie 1982; Nakata 1995a). During this period interventionist ‘person change’ programs, remedial education and language enrichment programs flourished. Beliefs about the nature of cultural difference within Indigenous society and the idea of ‘the Aboriginal problem’ resulted in programs designed to overcome the ‘inadequacies’ assumed to reside with the Indigenous people. As Nakata states ‘If the experts have named it, then we lack it. We have at various times, lacked intellect, language and education’ (1995a, p. 68). These beliefs and values were so pervasive that they were reflected in the main social policy areas, particularly in the sphere of education (McConnochie 1982, p. 28; Nakata, loc.cit). These prevailing disciplines, discourses, and social practices of educators and psychologists to achieve individual self-realisation were largely influenced by the dominant underlying political ideology of classic (individualistic) liberalism (Hunter 1994; McConaghy 2000). Many of the programs developed now still involve interventionist ‘person change'
programs; remedial education and language enrichment, reclamation and maintenance programs which arguably border on the assimilationist reforms of the past. As the next Chapter highlights, the ICMRP is precariously placed in relation to many of the conundrums identified here.

**Multiculturalism and cultural pluralism**

The emergence of multiculturalism from the 1970s onwards has generated its own problematics, initiating a raft of policies under the rubric of cultural pluralism. These policies embody elements of each of these earlier periods together with the cumulative responses to ameliorate the 'mis)takes' (O'Regan 1993) of the previous policies. These elements include both the unquestioned dominant beliefs and assumptions about the rightness of colonialism and ambivalence towards the resultant legacies. As Taylor (1997) notes when Indigenous people missed 'taking' up these policy opportunities it was often perceived as their 'failing' or the result of their particular social and economic circumstances unconnected to the legacies of colonial history. Taylor's argument shows how these legacies involve both mainstream social constructions of Indigenous people and an intolerance and denial of cultural difference and rights to cultural autonomy and self-determination. Similarly, Dodson (1994a) suggests that the persistence of textual misrepresentations and constructions of Aboriginality by the dominant society have both justified policies to determine, manage and control Indigenous priorities and held together contradictory assumptions regarding the superior values and beliefs and practices of the dominant culture which in turn have rationalised and justified racism. Dodson writes ‘[w]ithout an understanding of the basis of the pervasive desire to define Aboriginality and control representations of Indigenous identity, the tenacity of such definitions makes little sense’ (1994a, p. 7).

On the one hand both Taylor and Dodson’s work attests to the links between the denial of the cultural difference and the writing out of Indigenous control. On the other hand McConaghy’s work highlights the dilemmas and contradictions where ironically the focus is primarily on culture and race, suggesting that culturalism has played a central role in the reproduction of the legitimation strategies of Australian colonialism (McConaghy 2000, p. 254) a concern shared by Nakata (2000a, 2002a). He makes the point that ‘when it comes to curriculum and learning, our problems are definitely schematised and understood in cultural terms (2002a, p.8). As Nakata explains this culturalist approach generates tensions with respect to ‘upholding and maintaining cultural difference and identity… and producing equal outcomes to make us competitive in the mainstream…’ (loc.cit). McConaghy highlights the need to move beyond the limitations and legacies of
culturalism, to adopt or forge a postculturalist position in our work towards decolonisation (2000, p. 8). Such a position attempts to problematise and consider issues of culture, identity and diversity in education within a broader social and political framework. Postculturalism here is ‘post’ in that it challenges the notion of culture as the key or only organising principle for policy, curriculum and pedagogy in Indigenous education. However, postculturalism should not be read as a new justification to overlook the distinctive needs, interests and priorities of Indigenous people. There are still overtones of a neo-assimilationism in current Indigenous education policy documents, highlighting the complexity of focusing on essentialising elements of culture and identity. Recent government policy documents talk of being at the ‘crossroads’ (Nelson 2002). Given the complex relations at the Cultural Interface (Nakata 2002b) there is a need to remain alert to the potential possibilities and pitfalls that lie ahead.

Many of the historical accounts of Indigenous education referred to earlier in this Chapter conclude that regardless of how well meaning the policy intent, or how dramatic the ideological shifts, Indigenous education policies have continued to assimilate and marginalize Indigenous people, and exclude and devalue Indigenous culture. According to some writers, generally ‘successful’ programs have been largely assimilationist (Oxenham & Stringer 1993; McTaggart 1988). Developing and implementing Indigenous education programs and policies in cross-cultural contexts is a highly complex area, and one which generates issues and tensions which constitute the core dilemma of any genuinely culturally inclusive or transformative project (see Nakata 2002a).

It is evident that governments, infused with the ‘civilising imperatives of liberalism' and ‘pastoral welfarism' still see the role of education as a responsibility to modify the values and behaviours of Indigenous people to ‘remake them in the image of the capable white self' to fit into Australian mainstream society (McConaghy 2000, p. 149). The ongoing development of such assimilationist programs and practices overlooks the fact that the specific skills, knowledges and values required to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities are not antagonistic to those of mainstream society. Whereas, on the other hand, simply offering programs to meet the needs of mainstream society can definitely be counter to the priorities and interests of some groups within the Indigenous community, unless an emphasis is placed on valuing existing language and skills whilst integrating new literacy skills (Gee 1996). The need to negotiate this area is critical and complex (see Nakata 2001b). As Oxenham and Stringer (1993, p. 3) point out the students ‘who have been most successful have tended to be those who, socially and culturally, fit most closely the cultural profile of the Australian middle-class.’
observation highlights the fact that most courses still do not adequately cater for cultural
difference in an inclusive way, rather, such courses actually promote and reward
sameness. These outcomes can have an adverse effect on Indigenous community
wellbeing in the broadest sense as Oxenham and Stringer explain:

The Aboriginal community has been unable to benefit from the high levels of skill
and knowledge available to the broader Australian community through the higher
education system. Aboriginal people had minimal access to the high levels of
education and training to enable them to deal with the highly complex problems
which faced them in their family and community lives (1993, pp. 3-4).

Their argument highlights how Indigenous education policies encompass the unresolved
dilemmas surrounding individual versus community rights and values that underpin
classical liberalism. Traditionally, the dilemma in liberalism regarding the right of
individuals to have choice is resolved through the belief that individual self-interest will
inevitably contribute to the greater good of the community. Given the effects of the drain
on community resources and sustainability identified by Oxenham and Stringer (1993)
there is a risk that adherence to the goals of individualistic liberalism can be inimical to
Indigenous groups whose survival is still dependent upon an adherence to some degree
to communal values and contribution to long term futures. At the same time others argue
that it is essential that individuals are able to exercise rights to make their lifestyle and
course choices (McConaghy 2000). The complexity of the debate resides in the dangers
of running the argument of individual choice conceptualized only on mainstream terms,
where it will further marginalise already disadvantaged groups who are unable to access
mainstream options or may find these options irrelevant to their individual or collective
needs and interests (Macedo 1994). The issues involved highlight the importance of
maintaining block release programs and online education for Indigenous communities
designed to meet the needs, interests and priorities of Indigenous Australians, particularly
in rural and remote areas (Boughton & Durnan 1997).

However, social justice policies in education still place an emphasis on Indigenous access
to the same economic opportunities and outcomes rather than on equality and equity of
opportunity as fairness and rights. This rendering of social justice effectively excludes
calls for Indigenous control over education outside both economic rationalist and liberalist
arguments of social justice and allows it to be constrained by the latter (Heitmeyer, Nilan
As a consequence, policy discourses and strategies to achieve ‘equality of opportunity’ in education have been perceived by many Indigenous stakeholders as little more than further attempts to assimilate and control. This perception has resulted in widespread criticism of Indigenous education policies and in some instances passive resistance to government initiatives among Indigenous communities (Cowlishaw 1987, 1988). However, as this thesis attests Indigenous academics (Arbon 1998; Nakata 2000c, Oxenham 1999, Rigney 1998) and their allies (Foley & Flowers 1990, 1992; McConaghy 2000) have adopted a more proactive stance. Critical of existing policy limitations, yet aware of the productive possibilities that inhere in discourses of self-determination and rights they are engaging in decolonising projects which include deconstructing, reconstructing and transforming policies and practices that have dominated, marginalized and disadvantaged Indigenous peoples.

**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy**

NATSIEP, launched by the Commonwealth in 1989, was intended to bring about substantial improvements in Aboriginal education. The long-term goals of NATSIEP include: the involvement of Indigenous people in educational decision-making; equality of access to educational services; and, equitable and appropriate outcomes. The objectives in the Joint Policy Statement for NATSIEP require universities to develop education strategies to encourage greater Indigenous participation and success; establish mechanisms for Indigenous participation in institutional decision-making on Indigenous education matters; and institutional monitoring of outcomes (DEET 1989, p. 12).

There are a range of perspectives regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the NATSIEP goals and strategies in achieving Indigenous education outcomes. While several writers (Luke et al. 1993; Nakata 1995a, 2002a) acknowledge that NATSIEP and subsequent policy refinements (eg A National Strategy for the Education of Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1996-2002 (MCEETYA 1995) have improved the situation of Indigenous education they are also aware of their limitations. For instance, Nakata acknowledges that although considerable gains have been made under NATSIEP, he is critical of the limitations that occur ‘because it is constituted ... in terms of what we “lack” culturally’ (1995a, p. 70). He also reveals the problematics that reside in the almost insoluble tension between cultural maintenance and equality of opportunity in mainstream Australia (Nakata 2002a).

Groome points out several Indigenous education stakeholder groups ‘have rejected the policy as not being representative of their concerns’ because of the limited consultation
Chapter Two: Contextualising (Post) Colonial Indigenous Education

(1994, p. 153). The existing policy framework, underscored by persisting assumptions and the practice of defining Indigenous people in terms of the ‘colonising culture’ (Dodson 1994a, p. 8), tends to obscure the pervasive problems of liberal colonialism, assimilation and racism. As many writers have shown, these assumptions, which have underpinned Indigenous education over the past 200 years, have proved to be misguided, inappropriate and inadequate in addressing Indigenous issues and priorities. However, others have been more optimistic about the potential to achieve the dual policy goals on the basis of a particular conception of recognition of difference.

Social justice, equality and difference

It is evident that the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce chaired by Paul Hughes in 1988 intended that social justice would entail equity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In stating that ‘Education must be available to Aboriginal people regardless of where they live and in a manner that is appropriate to their diverse cultural and social situations’ (Hughes 1988), the Taskforce clearly recognised Indigenous peoples’ rights to have access to an education both relevant and congruent with their diverse lifestyles and aspirations. As Arbon writes:

Clearly, Hughes reflecting Indigenous thought, viewed equality and difference as being inter-connected and saw a possibility of developing links between rights and mechanisms to maintain difference. The focus is therefore on processes that recognise, accommodate, respect and support cultural diversity while moving to an equal outcome, for example a Degree in Teaching (1998, p. 76).

However, there is a body of criticism regarding the way in which notions of social justice and equality and difference have been interpreted. A number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics have now identified the slippage in interpretation of social justice and equality and difference (Roman & Eyre 1998). Despite the initial policy intent several academics claim that the policy implementation runs counter to Indigenous interests because of the particular liberal conception of equality and standpoint towards difference (Arbon 1998; Luke et al. 1993).

There are a number of divergent lines of argument. As Nakata has pointed out the recognition of difference alongside goals of equal opportunity creates many of the tensions that underpin the NATSIEP (2002a, pp. 7-15) particularly in terms of culturally appropriate education. Several Indigenous writers are critical of the disciplinary
knowledges and liberal and culturalist discourses that underpin Indigenous policy which attribute the poor education outcomes to cultural difference. As Nakata writes:

…when it comes to curriculum and learning, our problems are definitely schematised and understood in cultural terms. The organising principle of this schema is our ‘difference’ — interpreted as cultural and linguistic difference. This interpretation gives rise to the dilemma that is clearly enunciated in policies, which is attended to in research, and which faces everyone, with all its tensions and contradictions on a daily basis. The tensions exist between upholding and maintaining cultural difference and identity on one hand and producing equal outcomes to make us competitive in the mainstream on the other hand (2002a, p. 8).

Nakata (2002a) highlights how both the discourses of human rights and anthropology have been brought together to provide both a justification for moving beyond previous practices and a solution for working with the competing goals of cultural difference and equal opportunities in the mainstream. Whereas cultural difference had been explained in terms of Indigenous inferiority in the past it could now be explained in terms of cultural difference with minimal acceptance by government of the overwhelming extent to which the colonial legacy had impacted upon Indigenous education.

Veronica Arbon is critical of how liberal assumptions pertaining to equality focus on sameness of input and outcome. She states: ‘Equality of sameness and equality of difference are overlaid contesting narratives that flow across our land’ (1998, p. 76). She claims there is a need to acknowledge difference to achieve social justice. As with other Indigenous academics she emphasises the importance of acknowledging cultural difference and the emergence of culturally specific programs. Arbon argues that the failure of governments to acknowledge difference in Indigenous ‘calls for equality’ results in ‘the violation of body, mind and spirit’ (op.cit, p. 76). Implicit here is the fact that the recognition of difference requires the incorporation and legitimation of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being within dominant discourses. Marion Young (1990, p. 61) also points out that in recent struggles culturally oppressed groups have begun to define themselves and assert a positive sense of group difference. She claims that ‘[J]ustice requires us to make a political space for such difference’ (Young quoted in Kemmis 1997b, p. 8).
However, government responses in the media and policy reveal a complete reluctance even refusal to create such a political space. Some writers suggest that the reluctance on the part of the dominant society to embrace difference suggests an unwillingness to concede Indigenous rights to self-determination, autonomy and knowledge. Dodson for example writes:

In fact far from being recognised in our difference, in our own terms, we are always defined in terms of the colonising or defining culture. One could well ask, what is it about genuine difference which is so threatening that it must always be translated and sanitised into more of the same? One answer may be that our difference and our independence would threaten the boundaries of identity, knowledge and absolute truth, which give the subject a sense of power and control (1994a, pp. 8-9).

Arguments by Indigenous academics including Arbon (1998) and Morgan (1992) highlight the critical importance of revisiting the notions of equality, difference and rights in order to achieve social justice and self-determination for Indigenous Australians through the development of more appropriate and just policy and resource allocations and mechanisms, and more ‘culturally appropriate’ curriculum and pedagogy. Furthermore, such discussions are crucial to inform the differing and contested interpretations of what ‘culturally appropriate’ education means in policy implementation terms between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.

**Social Justice as equal rights**

The notion of social justice employed by both Young (1990) and Kemmis (1997b) incorporates principles of equal access, appropriate mechanisms to ensure participation in decision-making, and a fair distribution of resources. The realisation of these social justice principles entails: firstly, a recognition that all individuals have the right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives; secondly, a proactive approach to achieving equal access to basic entitlements such as education, health and housing to ensure individual and community wellbeing; and, thirdly a redistribution of resources to achieve this. One of the main difficulties inherent in instituting and implementing these social justice principles is that policymakers make program and funding decisions on the assumption that there is a 'level playing field' to start with, and that negotiations between groups with competing interests and/or needs will be on equal terms according to equal standards towards the same ends (see Mouffe 1993).

Several Indigenous writers point out that Indigenous peoples have historically been marginalised from this position. Morgan emphasises the importance of acknowledging
Indigenous sovereignty and giving equal recognition to Indigenous groups to come to the table on equal terms ‘rather than as guests at the white man’s table’ (1992, p.47). However, the government is reluctant to concede Indigenous sovereignty as a basis for social justice and equity. Moreover, it is evident that policymakers and the wider population adhere to the dominant liberal view of equality articulated in unity and one nation discourses which emphasise the notion of sameness rather than notions of equivalence and difference (not necessarily anchored to culture).

Some claim that it is also necessary to understand and recognise the various categories of differences that exist and how they are tied in with issues of power and empowerment for groups and individuals. An understanding and acknowledgement of this relationship is important within the broader social and political arena so that we can move beyond the manifestations of ‘cultural pluralism’ in education and curriculum development which have created serious implications for Indigenous people (Cowlishaw 1987; Keeffe 1992).

**Institutional responses to Indigenous rights**

Other problematics in the effective implementation of NATSIEP reside in the degree of institutional will to recognise and facilitate Indigenous self-determination. In some ways it was difficult to gauge because issues of social justice and equal opportunity were linked to other policy developments occurring around the same time. For example while NATSIEP had begun to make an impact across some universities on an *ad hoc* basis between 1989 and 1992 the goals of equity and social justice had become part of a wider university discourse under the *Fair Chance for All* policy in which Indigenous people were regarded as just one of six specified equity groups.

While there were benefits associated with institutionalising a discourse of social justice and equity it allowed universities to develop institutional policies and strategies for all equity groups without having to seriously address issues related to Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty inherent in their first nation status (Watson 1988a). In other words, in the early 1990s universities were able to embrace the ideals of social justice in a diluted, sanitised and normalising form without having to confront the negative and marginalising effects of either extant dominant discourses or the legacies of colonial history. The persistence of this dominant standpoint has remained an area of contestation through to the present.

Over the last decade several Indigenous leaders and academics Dodson, M. (1996, 1997); Dodson, P. (1995); Morgan (1992); and Nakata (2001b) have argued for a
commitment by governments and universities to a major transformation of perspective in Indigenous education at a national level. Indigenous Centres throughout Australia have reinforced this commitment at an institutional level through their internal committee mechanisms (for example the Aboriginal Education Policy Implementation Committee (AEPIC) at Curtin 1999-2003) as well as through countless submissions to major reviews such as the West Review (1998) and the Australian Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Review of Abstudy Changes (1999) (see for example CAS 1997a; Jolly 1997; Jumbunna 1997). The issues and challenges facing the University sector and the strategies necessary to achieve social justice and equity for Indigenous peoples within the university are well documented (Anderson et al. 1998; Kemmis 1997b). There is continuing call for universities to acknowledge how their work has contributed to the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples, and identify strategies to overcome the different forms that exist in universities, the professions and the wider society (Kemmis 1997b; Watson 1988a).

Repercussions of past and present practices are still evident everywhere although the ways and extent to which Indigenous peoples have been/are still being marginalised in cultural, economic and political terms can differ depending on their history, location and level of involvement with other Australians. Kemmis (1997b) emphasises the need for academics to explore the implications of these diverse historical, social and political realities in their teaching so that all Australians can understand and contribute in positive ways to change the situation. This broader recognition by Australians is fundamental to genuine positive change for Indigenous peoples in the future. The CAS makes a similar argument for mainstream courses at Curtin and as later chapters show undertakes an equivalent pedagogy within the ICMDP.

Several writers (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000) suggest that one of the main reasons for the lack of real change in the substance and outcomes of Indigenous higher education lies with the continuing failure within the wider system to recognise the rights and interests and distinctive and diverse needs and priorities of Indigenous Australians. There is still a need for greater responsiveness and respect for Indigenous culture, values and knowledge and greater involvement of Indigenous peoples in decision-making in educational institutions at all levels (Anderson et al. 1998). The most recent review of Indigenous education acknowledges these same issues as key priority areas and reiterates the need to incorporate Indigenous terms of reference, values, standards, aspirations and priorities into education (Nelson 2002). Several other writers including myself have concluded that there is an urgent need to reframe the issues at all levels in

**External influences on policy goals**

There are a number of other factors that militate against the realisation of Indigenous education policy goals and social justice and equity principles. In particular, given the vast size of and cultural diversity within Australia, the attainment of goals generated on the basis of the principle of equal access to education is exacerbated by complex issues emerging within the geographic, environmental and cultural realities. These factors include: distance from services and/or lack of relevant information about existing services and opportunities, language barriers and or cultural differences, and limited availability of high quality culturally appropriate resources. Findings by Schwab (1995) confirm the urgent need to take these geographic and historic factors into account in education policy development. Recent statistics show that more than 64% of Indigenous communities and 57% of Indigenous people reside over 100 kilometres from the nearest town with services, including tertiary education (DEST 2002). Yet even when there appears to be a well-intentioned desire to address these issues there is still considerable uncertainty about the most appropriate and effective interventions. Despite well-reasoned arguments and considered research to the contrary (Schwab 1995, 1996; Walker 2000), the main direction and discussion regarding Indigenous education is still based on using mainstream benchmarks to define, measure and evaluate policy solutions. This can lead to both inappropriate solutions and conclusions.

Furthermore, while Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders share concerns about the need for changes across the whole spectrum of Indigenous education there is a fundamental schism in perceptions about what those changes should entail (McDaniel & Flowers 1995; MCEETYA 1995; McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2000c, 2001a). As writers such as McConaghy and Nakata show the lack of understanding and different standpoints allows assimilationist practices at an institutional and curriculum level to continue to undermine real advances in the Indigenous education policy arena. There is growing recognition that contemporary education systems are inadequate to deal with the current complexion of issues in order to overcome the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. Juxtaposed alongside concerns about assimilation are concerns by senior Indigenous academics and managers about the urgent need to recognise and incorporate Indigenous knowledges and ideas into academic courses (Anderson et al. 1998; Collard et al. 1998) and the simultaneous risk of their commodification along language and culture lines by dominant groups within the academy. At the same time
writers including McConaghy (2000) and Nakata (2002a) reveal the problematics and risks of pursuing a policy direction built on culturalist assumptions.

**Indigenous education outcomes**

Despite the shortcomings of the NATSIEP 1993-1995, outlined above there has been substantial increase in Indigenous participation rates in higher education since 1989. Between 1989 and 1999 the number of Indigenous student university enrolments and award course completions increased significantly. Overall trends confirm the initial successes of the NATSIEP policy strategies in achieving the goals of equity in Indigenous participation and access within the higher education sector (DETYA 1999; Encel 2000). Even so, as Nakata observes the current policy initiatives 'to overcome our appalling situation are very recent indeed, and yet the current political climate feeds the perception that indigenous people have received too much, for too long, and for too little in terms of outcomes (2002a, p. 8). Since the late 1990s this has resulted in a wider political response with several policy amendments to improve Indigenous outcomes in accordance with mainstream outcomes.

From a policy perspective despite the significant improvements in Indigenous access, participation, retention and success in relative terms and on a national level registered over the last decade (DEST 2002) there has been a noticeable drop or levelling out of access since these policy changes to ABSTUDY in 1997. A Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) report released in 2003 states, ‘It is an indictment of current education policy that there was a large decline in the Indigenous to non-Indigenous ratio between 1996 and 2001’ (the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC), 23 October 2003). There is also evidence that suggests that these policy changes have impacted negatively upon Indigenous students, Indigenous programs such as the ICMDP and Indigenous Centres/Units (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000). Indigenous academics and managers have expressed their concerns at the Government’s policy response in light of the difficulties experienced by many Indigenous Australians in mainstream education as well as the different goals and expectations towards education (Walker 2000). While lower student outcomes (retention and completion rates) are sometimes represented as student resistance (Keeffe 1988, 1992) or ambivalence (Widders & Noble 1993), recent research (Cranney & Edwards 1998; Schwab 1996) suggests that Indigenous students are seeking education opportunities and outcomes which have relevance, enable them to stay in their own communities and support their community goals and aspirations to participate effectively (on Indigenous terms) at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. The fact remains that
Indigenous Centres need to have input into the solutions necessary to achieve as well as measure Indigenous interests.

There is widespread concern among Indigenous staff at Indigenous Units and Centres about the appropriateness of the criteria and benchmarks being applied to monitor and evaluate the success of Indigenous education programs (Walker 2000). Some Indigenous stakeholders have argued that given the mechanisms of surveillance linking academic outcomes and Indigenous funding there is a need to question whose standards and interests are being met with regard to the prevailing and contradictory logics of government policy.

**Indigenous control and partnership**

Despite the substantial increase in Indigenous participation rates in higher education, Indigenous stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding the efficacy of the shifts in Indigenous education policy goals and implementation processes, in relation to the policy of Indigenous self-determination and the subsequent policy of self-management (House of Representative Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (HRSCAA) 1990; Ham 1996; Morgan 1992). A detailed analysis the scope and level of genuine Indigenous control and partnership operating within the university sector nationally is far from satisfactory (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000).

In *A Review of Institutional Use of Commonwealth Higher Education Funding for Indigenous Australian Students*, the Higher Education Council identified a range of indicators that shift the gaze from Indigenous performance to examine institutional accountability and responsibility (NBEET 1997). This involves the development of indicators to monitor the extent to which universities recognise Indigenous knowledge and values (through courses and Indigenous units), and the establishment and implementation of mechanisms and strategies to support the principles of partnership and Indigenous self-determination. The study by Anderson et al. (1998) audits these indicators across all universities to reveal only a limited compliance with recommendations proposed by Johnston (1991) NBEET (1997), MCEETYA (1995) and the NATSIEP Task Force Review (Yunupingu 1995).

Several studies show that most universities now provide Indigenous people with culturally inclusive or culturally specific professional and para-professional courses such as health, law, media, management and teacher training. The fact that Indigenous Units, Faculties and Centres in many universities are controlled by, or working in conjunction with,
Indigenous management committees representative of the communities they service, also signifies an important area of improvement. Some institutions offer courses specifically for Indigenous students, while others provide Indigenous Studies units as electives (sometimes compulsory) to courses offered to non-Indigenous students within different disciplines and schools across the university. These courses are intended to provide non-Indigenous students in a range of professions with a greater understanding of Indigenous history, culture and contemporary issues to combat racism in the university, and ultimately impact positively on relationships between Indigenous people and the wider Australian society.

Such initiatives have the support of the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) and the extent of institutional compliance with respect to the different levels of engagement within Indigenous education (that is self-determination, control and partnership) is monitored through the university education profile reports. Importantly, while there are no financial sanctions for non-compliance (by either government or university management) the growing number of universities making public statements of commitment to Indigenous education suggests there is an unstated ethics regulating the social technologies of the academy. Nevertheless it remains an ethical commitment veiled by a postcolonial ambivalence and reluctance within the institutional state apparatus towards connecting moral recognition of First Nation rights with economic sanction for university non-compliance for fear of reactions of 'special treatment' within the wider public domain.

The notions of Indigenous self-determination and control and partnership remain highly charged for both Indigenous people and the wider public. McConaghy argues that, despite the rhetoric of self-management and self-determination and reconciliation assimilationism continues to be a very significant aspect of Australian social and political force as evident in the National Training reform agenda and even paradoxically the Review of NATSIEP (2000, p. 154).

As McConaghy states ‘the fundamental assumptions, goals and discursive practices of assimilation have remained resilient and continued to find expression in many aspects of social and political life, including Indigenous education’ (McConaghy op.cit, p. 155). Others, such as Folds (1993) and McTaggart (1988) show how assimilationism finds expression in both policies and pedagogical practices. As the discussion so far confirms the civilising and reproductive aims of education persist in contemporary policy.
discourses. In particular, the renewed emphasis on citizenship, together with notions of self-governance, self-reliance and empowerment can be seen in social capital and human capital discourses which attempt to encompass economic rationalism, social justice and notions of the civic community (Cox 1995; McConaghy 2000; McPhee & Walker 2001).

McConaghy (2000) suggests the risks associated with running complex dualistic culturalist arguments are really untenable in the longer term. The following chapters consider some of the ways Indigenous peoples are interacting with these discourses, particularly as they attempt to work with the various, often contradictory, policy trajectories at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. In particular it looks at the various ways CAS and ICMDP have effectively worked with these issues and discourses in policy, pedagogy and practice.

Culturally appropriate education

The importance of developing courses with culturally appropriate content, processes and outcomes is an area of contention within the Indigenous education policy context and among Indigenous course providers. Increasingly, the ill-defined and tenuous link between 'culturally appropriate' education and Indigenous self-determination appears to have been weakened and the conception of 'culturally appropriate' education is linked with, and subsequently critiqued under the banner of liberal cultural humanism and multiculturalism. The notion of 'culturally appropriate' education has become an area of conceptual confusion that tends to reinforce the ambivalence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics towards a distinctive Indigenous education. Several academics have expressed concerns that 'culturally appropriate education' is an excuse to deliver second rate, 'mickey mouse' programs, which can exclude Indigenous people from 'real programs' and mainstream opportunities (McDaniel & Flowers 1995, p. 239). As mentioned earlier, others have argued that some culturally appropriate programs designed for Indigenous people still serve an assimilationist and re-colonising function (McTaggart 1988; Lanhupuy 1987).

While it is important to be aware of the possible misuses of separate programs based on cultural appropriateness (Nakata 2002a) there is a danger that an overly dismissive and cynical critique of cultural appropriateness will erode the justification for maintaining culturally specific programs designed to meet diverse Indigenous interests and aspirations. This would be equally harmful to Indigenous interests given research that confirms that such programs can be highly effective in meeting these aims (Walker 2000).
One of the propositions of this thesis is that CAS programs, such as the ICMDP, are culturally appropriate precisely because they are developed in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference. These programs recognise Indigenous knowledge and values, and provide context specific content and delivery that takes into account the diverse geographic, educational and cultural backgrounds and future aspirations, priorities and interests of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia. Several ICMDP Indigenous and non-Indigenous academic staff (Greville 2000; Oxenham 1999; Scougall 1997; Wilson 2001) have undertaken research to avoid uncritical assimilation into dominant values and practices (leading to the maintenance of existing injustices) and at the same to create new cultural and political formations and positions from which to challenge injustice (Greville 2000, p. 14).

**Self-Determination, self-management and empowerment**

Both the formulation of NATSIEP and the policies of self-determination and self-management derive their justification on the basis of liberal notions of social justice, equality and equity. According to Oxenham and Stringer (1993), NATSIEP had failed as a vehicle to fulfil the goals of Self-Determination and Self-Management due to the lack of culturally specific programs for Indigenous people to acquire the necessary skills to become effectively self-determining and self-managing at individual and collective levels (p. 4). In state wide community-based research in 1985 Stringer and Satour identified the need to develop courses and training programs that would enable the goals of self-management and self-determination to be achieved within the 'community'. With regard to the existing education and training opportunities available for Aboriginal communities they concluded that:

> they fail to provide for the coherent and comprehensive development of skills at a level which will enable self-management and self-determination. Training programmes tend to be ad hoc, situational, and unstructured; to lack systematic development, and to fail to provide the means for ongoing recording or evaluation of programme outcomes. They fail to make adequate provision for the future needs of the community, and fail to capitalize on the real potential and capabilities of people in the community (Stringer & Satour 1985, p. 4).

These findings were later echoed in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs Report *Our Future Ourselves* (HRSCAA 1990) highlighting the need for courses that simultaneously provide both self-determining direction and assimilationist means to achieve them — bringing a range of dilemmas into focus. There is an obvious
irony that Indigenous governance requires the same skills audits and training agendas to meet Indigenous community needs and aspirations as those that serve as mechanisms of control and assimilation (Kemmis 1994; Kirkby 1993; Rowse 1992). However, it depends on whose interests and agendas are served by such mechanisms and strategies as to how they will be read in the future. A recent concept study into Indigenous leadership development identified the need for education and training to enable Indigenous people to take up leadership positions in a range of areas (Cranney & Edwards 1998). In addition Nakata emphasises the importance of providing education programs to enable students to ‘cut a better deal’ (1995c). What sets these education and training agendas apart from government imperatives is the fact that they are developed by and intended to meet Indigenous needs and interests and take account of Indigenous social realities and future aspirations.

However the competing and contradictory agendas have intensified over the last twenty years as the Federal Government has attempted to respond to the emergence of multiculturalism and Indigenous rights, while simultaneously maintaining its own civilising and training agendas — still evident in the development of citizenship programs and the increased level of funding redirected to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector (Marginson 1997; McConaghy 2000).

**Colonial liberalism and Indigenous education**

An understanding and appreciation of the persuasiveness, persistence and ever-changing nature of liberalism and its impact on Indigenous education is central to this thesis. In order to accommodate the social and cultural changes in Australia at least two parallel but potentially contradictory threads of liberalism continue to influence education. These different strands of colonial liberalism still underpin the dialectic potential of the promise and pitfalls of postcolonial education for Indigenous Australians. One strand encompasses individualism and economic rationalism and the other hybrid strand moves beyond individualist notions of rights to build on communitarian ideals. The spaces in between have seen a growing emphasis on the politics of cultural, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual differences. Both of these strands have influenced the current situation in higher education in Australia, as well as impacted significantly upon Indigenous education. For the past twenty years, both strands of liberalism have served different needs of government and bureaucracy and hence, shared a relatively uneasy and unexamined coexistence.
Writers such as McConaghy (2000) reveal how liberal individualistic beliefs and assumptions have led to many of the current inadequacies in Indigenous education theories and outcomes and inappropriate processes and practices. Research by Oxenham and Stringer highlights the inadequacy of these practices. They claim that prior to 1990 the majority of programs in Western Australia have ‘failed to provide Aboriginal people with the resources which could be effective in enhancing the lives of their communities’ (op.cit 1993, p. 4).

In an attempt to address these inadequacies CAS programs are oriented towards effecting positive social change for Indigenous communities as well as fulfilling individual aspirations. It is this ‘transformative’ community based orientation that has the potential to both provide new possibilities and impose new limitations which is one of the primary contradictions explored in this research thesis. In many ways this contradiction is held in tension because Indigenous students and academics often connect the political and collective concept of Indigenous self-determination with their individual education and employment goals. Relevant research findings (Walker 2000 p. 11) found that approximately 90% of Indigenous students indicate that their key motivation for studying is to contribute to Indigenous community wellbeing in contrast to the career oriented motivation identified among mainstream groups (James & McInnis 1995). Oxenham and Stringer (1993) emphasise the importance of courses that both improve skills and life chances at an individual level, and enhance community lives. This discourse links personal and professional development with Indigenous aspirations and needs and the importance accorded the role of social change agents, people capable of realising the goals of self-determination and self-management — concepts that are generally absent in mainstream courses.

In contrast, Indigenous education policy discourses link the political concept of Indigenous self-determination with the realisation of individual education and employment opportunities. In doing so this tactic subtly bypasses the links between social justice and self-determination shifting the concept of individual responsibility to the notion of being good citizens. For example, discussions about programs to achieve the goals of self-determination and self-management can also be seen to be about assuming responsibility for taking charge, managing and being accountable for ‘tax-payer dollars’ which merges with the discourse of governance. ‘Minority’ or marginalised groups are expected to make the social changes necessary to achieve the democratic ideals of social justice, equality of opportunity, and a fair distribution of resources.
Despite the rhetoric of self-determination Indigenous groups have been expected to negotiate on mainstream terms and without recognition of Indigenous terms or reference. This is evident in comments by prominent conservative and member of the Australian Education Council (AEC), Lauchlan Chipman. He rejects the notion Indigenous rights as a distinctive entity with both common and diverse aspirations and unashamedly insists that all groups should be assimilated into ‘the cultural hegemony of the mainstream’ (cited in Marginson 1997, p. 136).

Such conservative assumptions still perpetuate notions of assimilation and are currently reflected in the Liberal government’s leadership. Commenting on Hanson’s attacks on multiculturalism and distinctive Indigenous programs during 1996 Marginson notes that Howard was ‘most comfortable with the notion of a single national identity and an assimilationist policy’ (op.cit, p. 256). It is often the benign tolerance for, and lack of critical self-reflectivity of, those who adhere to assimilationist and modernist values — as displayed by Howard towards Hanson and her supporters — that engenders and sustains ethnocentric/phobic paternalism in policies, decisions and discursive practices.

Additionally, Indigenous responses to policies reflect both oppositional and complicit post colonialism (Hodge & Mishra 1991) with respect to policies, decisions and discursive practices, highlighting some of the contradictory meanings and problematic in undertaking policy analysis in a field where there are both divergent and competing dominant views and Indigenous views. Even so, as the research shows, generally those dominant beliefs prevail which are in accord with the wider economic agenda (Marginson 1997). Conversely, Indigenous education and employment programs are often misrepresented by media as counter-productive to Australia’s economic reforms (Mickler 1998). Widespread public resentment is exacerbated if not deliberately orchestrated by articles highlighting the millions of dollars ‘given’ to Indigenous people versus the academic poor outcomes, empty camps, broken down Toyotas and so on. This has resulted in campaigns against the millions ‘wasted’ and renewed calls for mainstreaming Indigenous education and other affirmative action programs.

Mickler (1998) illustrates how media coverage of affirmative action programs has fostered notions of Aboriginal privilege. This process deceives the public from realising that culturally specific/appropriate programs are actually belated attempts to address a historical legacy of social disadvantage in areas health, housing, employment and education, and a denial of rights to traditional land and cultural maintenance. Citing from a Sunday Times editorial (22 August 1993, p. 2), Mickler notes that ‘various areas of
“Aboriginal privilege”, including university placements, college expenses, government employment schemes, land rights and “sit down money” (dole), are listed as “classic products” of “…what white advisers call the self-determination culture — a system history will condemn with greater scorn that it now condemns earlier white policies applied to Aborigines” (Mickler 1998, p. 211).

This is, however, a doubly double-deceitful move. Firstly, it allows the editor to denounce non-Indigenous allies as misguided and hence neutralizes potential contestations within the dominant domain. Secondly, by comparing contemporary affirmative action policies with past policies and practices it undermines and denies their efficacy and the recognition of their potential within the public conscience. Next, it denies the recognition of the distinctive rights and social justice embodied in the notions of self-determination (to be implemented in the policy and practice). And then, it denies the memory of past paternalistic and colonial policies of protection and assimilation and their impact upon contemporary Indigenous social disadvantage. Each of these deceits is legitimised by recourse to dominant economic and political logics ‘of waste’ within the public domain that obscure fundamental social and moral imperatives in the formulation and exercise of Indigenous policy.

In education this notion of waste is aligned with criticisms about the ‘second rate’, ‘mickey mouse’ nature of culturally specific programs. An understanding of how these discursive formations impact upon the policy context is crucial to interrupt the pervasiveness of existing discourses and to bring about social change. It is equally important to understand how these policies and attendant political processes infiltrate into all levels and in all spheres of personal and public life. The above discussion reveals how policy changes (or lack of changes) are deeply connected to and intersect with wider social discourses and discursive formations and practices around gender, race and class.

The political nature of Indigenous education policy decisions was particularly evident in 1999 when Indigenous and opposition challenges to ABSTUDY and other Indigenous education policies changes were met by a media campaign mounted by the Liberals and supported by Senator Heron the Minister for Indigenous Affairs which was designed to historicise and discredit the ideals of social justice and their relevance to Indigenous people by reference to ‘leftist ideologies’, ‘Labour left-overs’, ‘relics of the past’ and claims that Indigenous leaders such as Peter Yu and Pat Dodson are out of touch with Indigenous interests (7.30 Report ABC, 21 October 1999). A claim clearly at odds with
key Indigenous intellectuals and academics as Nakata reveals in his commentary on cross-cultural education in Australia (2001b).

**Education and Reconciliation**

Much of the recent policy discourse has moved away from Indigenous self-determination to reconciliation. The government’s recent reconciliation discourses has perpetuated and legitimated new moves towards mainstreaming Indigenous education to achieve equitable outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Part of the struggle for Indigenous Australians is the failure of the state to recognise their sovereign right to ‘come to the table on equal terms’ (Morgan 1992, p. 47). This is made worse by the fact that the Howard government has refused to recognise the suffering perpetuated against and endured by Indigenous Australians for over two hundred years for fear of economic payback by the Indigenous community and a corresponding electoral backlash by the wider community. The government has remained unreflexive in its outright refusal to recognise and listen to the complex and interlocking issues at stake in the contemporary debate from an Indigenous Australian perspective. This is apparent in the stance taken publicly by both the Prime Minister and Ministers for Indigenous Affairs and Social Security. Such a political standpoint lacks compassion, understanding and knowledge concerning the impact of colonial history on Indigenous Australians, damaging reconciliation and laying the ground for a third wave of colonialism.

Alongside this, there has been a resurgence of anti-assimilationist discourses and calls for more critical and decolonising approaches to Indigenous education that recognise Indigenous ways, values and standards, aspirations and priorities and standpoints (Arbon 1998; Anderson et al. 1998; Nakata 1997a; Walker, 2000). There is a growing body of writing that recognises that any vision for the future of Australian society must hold a distinctive place for Indigenous Australians. Many writers (for example, Coombs 1994; Dodson 1993; Mickler 1998; Ross 2001) claim it is essential that such a vision involve two sovereign peoples entering into a dialogue together. Anything less risks collapsing into ‘one nation’ speak — a rhetorical position that can effectively silence Indigenous people.

As mentioned earlier locating this research within the wider contemporary socio-political situation in Australia, is a highly complex task spanning both macro/public and micro/individual/collective components. A certain ambiguity exists within the policies and discursive practices within the broader bureaucratic domain of government and other institutional apparatus. On the one hand policy statements abound with the big E’s of economic rationalism: effectiveness, efficiency and evaluation, but on the other hand,
these same policies and programs are also replete with the little e's of equality and equity in which the language of cross-cultural acceptance veils the eurocentricism underpinning Indigenous policies. At times the competing policies and standpoints appear schizophrenic and ambiguous — because both characteristics are embodied within the same policy or program frame and can be contradictory, even antagonistic. These competing policies require us to develop a capacity to accept and work with the competing goals and indeterminacy with a clear purpose and ethical commitment to make a difference on the ground. At the same time, writers such as McConaghy (2000) and Nakata (2000a) point to the dangers of lapsing into culturalist arguments to address contemporary education problems that do not serve Indigenous long-term interests.

Conclusion

This Chapter has described the policy context and examined key policies in which the ICMDP emerged. The initial Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force Report (Hughes 1988), HRSCAA (1990) policy findings and subsequent NATSIEP review (DEET 1995) all pointed to the need for culturally specific courses to fulfil Indigenous priorities and interests. This sentiment is also evident in the MCEETYA recommendations. However, the contradictions and problematics of measuring all academic courses and subsequent academic outcomes with mainstream benchmarks and standards are yet to be addressed by university administrators and government policymakers. This creates real dilemmas for program staff. Well-intentioned course coordinators and teachers attempt to straddle the schisms created in their public discourses and reports while simultaneously navigating the cracks and crevices in between to achieve context and culturally specific outcomes.

It is apparent that the Government’s continued failure to examine the philosophical and epistemological assumptions underpinning existing Indigenous policies results in continued negative consequences despite the stated intentions of ongoing changes to policies. What began under the unquestioned banner of colonial control has continued as a progression of ‘ameliorative’ policies, with each subsequent policy change designed to redress the mistakes of the previous one. However, the uptake and cross-weaving of contradictory liberal strands simultaneously operating throughout each period and the persisting postcolonial ambivalence held by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people contribute to the complexity of the contemporary situation.

It is against this complex and ambiguous historical landscape of indifference and ambivalence towards the place of Indigenous people that anti-assimilationist/decolonisation discourses have gathered momentum, generating an array
of transformative projects in Indigenous higher education. Indigenous academics such as Arbon (1998) urge Indigenous education stakeholders to utilise the opportunities present in this postcolonial ambivalence to galvanise the potential (if somewhat ambiguous) within existing State and National Indigenous Education Policies to bring about positive change and social justice.

Drawing on the ICMDP as a case study the following chapters attempt to give substance to what it means to ‘work with the ambivalence’, ‘navigate the spaces’ and attempt to find solutions to seemingly insoluble problems. The continued level of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians within the contemporary social and political context creates an urgent challenge to Australian society and higher education. It also delineates the nature and scope of the theoretical and methodological framework needed to question what has been taken for granted in teaching practices, curriculum and policy at the local level and to develop strategies to effect genuine change in education and in the cultural and power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The various elements selected in each of the chapters reveal how discourses and discursive practices intersect in complex ways to influence the processes of valuing and legitimating certain knowledges, social and cultural practices at the exclusion of others at all levels of policy and practice. Often the contradictory elements and disjunctures provide opportunities for transformation. The remainder of this thesis explores how the Centre has worked with the interplay of these elements to achieve the goals of Indigenous self-determination, social justice and social change in partnership with the University at an institutional level.
Chapter Three

Defining Moments - Transforming Curriculum

Teachers create curricula (circles of learning and teaching) through constantly creating models and applying them to actual teaching situations. Ideally, teachers constantly adjust their models to fit the students and the changing realities of educating. Through such constant and creative adjustment, teachers and students engage in a symbiotic relationship and form feedback loops around what is being learned. In this way teachers are always creating their stories even as they are telling them (Cajete 1994, p.17).

Chapter Overview

Developing a critical transformative curriculum at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains raises a number of issues, many of which were outlined in the introduction. As this and the following chapters reveal these issues are a constant source of tension and dilemma for program staff. The ongoing efforts within the ICMDP to create and sustain an empowering and emancipatory project have generated a number of dilemmas and problematics as well as the impetus to look for solutions. Several external and internal factors and defining moments have influenced curriculum decisions and actions and my own thinking and actions throughout this process. As one of my colleagues noted the ongoing development and delivery of the ICMDP is ‘an educative enterprise, as a decolonising process, and as a personal experience of change and awareness for students and staff’ (Greville 1997, p. 1).

Tracking the defining moments reveals the ongoing ambivalence, paradox and complexity surrounding many of the issues that have emerged at particular points in the program’s development, and the ever-present tensions that create their own momentum for continuous program review. The defining moments at a program level revolve around concerns regarding particular aspects of the curriculum in achieving the broad course aims of Indigenous self-determination and social transformation.

In effect, on one level at least, the process represents an ongoing attempt to devise a curriculum that is culturally appropriate, politically and socially effective and has relevance and recognition within the Indigenous community and mainstream institutions. This curriculum is an attempt to achieve the dual aims of maintaining a distinctive Indigenous
identity and at the same time enjoying the full rights and opportunities as other Australians. The aims create a number of problematics for curriculum development. These reside in questions regarding the cultural appropriateness and political effectiveness and relevance for whom and the failure of the dominant society to recognise the legitimacy of Indigenous aspirations, interests and values or to interpret them through an unconscious veil of racism or well-meaning intent of cultural humanism.

In many respects the ICMDP curriculum and pedagogy challenge existing education paradigms. By transforming processes and practices in the university the ICMDP provides an opportunity to achieve changes at other sites of social and cultural possibility.

Staff research findings and articles are evidence of a widely held commitment among the majority of staff members to attempt to integrate theory and practice and incorporate the ICMDP principles in their teaching and curriculum development (Greville 2000; McKeich 1999; Osborne & Dick 1995; Oxenham 1999; Scougall 1997; Wilson 1999, 2001). This commitment has also been borne out in the sorts of questions consistently raised in end of year reviews and professional development workshops, and in the reflective, agonising and sometimes overly self-critical doubts expressed ‘on the run’. It was and still is often in the more informal spheres of discussion and reflection that the ambivalence of staff was/is most evident. Colleagues have consistently professed a strong desire to provide students with an empowering, ‘useful and purposeful’ educational process to work within contemporary reality without participating in practices or decisions that could be oppressive, disempowering, or assimilationist.

For many of us, especially those of us positioned as white middle-class academics, knowing just what kinds of strategies would be most effective and appropriate to meet the course aims while not ‘selling students short’ or ‘compromising standards’ or participating in the most conservatist elements of cultural humanism has remained an ongoing dilemma. Many Indigenous staff have travelled an equally difficult road, simultaneously challenging ‘their own mob’ and challenging dominant standards while also not wishing to ‘sell students short’ or ‘compromise standards’ by participating in an assimilationist agenda. For all of us the difficulties amid the students’ diverse needs and aspirations were often about knowing just what or whose academic standards and broader goals we believed we were compromising or selling short. At times, overwhelmed by doubt in searching for the ‘right way’, or locked in differing value positions program staff have all too quickly resorted to reductionist, binary oppositional positions. At such uneasy times it
has been very tempting to want to return to the mythical transparency of a traditional subject/content centred program and the safety of dominant education ideals.

One of the recurring dilemmas is whether the curriculum adequately recognises and incorporates Indigenous knowledge and experience while still providing students with broad disciplinary knowledge, skills, and techniques to participate equally and competitively within mainstream society. Of course there are problems with allowing this discussion to collapse into either/or positions. The legitimacy of Indigenous knowledges of contexts, life worlds and lived experience is generally overlooked in the process of meaning making within the parameters of dominant knowledge systems. This means there is a constant failure to give legitimacy and equal status to ideas and understandings that fall outside these accepted systems (Mooney 1998). As Nakata points out these systems often represent ‘a lack’ in Indigenous contexts, and although increasingly that ‘lack’ is seen as residing in the external exigencies of government the solutions can still be restrictive (1995a, 2001b). However, throughout this thesis I suggest that there is a critical need for any culturally specific/inclusive program to both incorporate Indigenous knowledge and provide students with the necessary understandings, skills and academic outcomes expected of all university graduates in order to have equal access to a broad range of opportunities. Precisely how to do this in a transformative and decolonising way has been a recurring issue for the ICMDP, made more difficult to resolve given the diversity of geographic, employment and education backgrounds and needs, aspirations, interests and priorities of students enrolled in the program.

Some educationalists, in their search for relevance and cultural appropriateness in Indigenous education, have looked to traditional forms of education that were practised by Indigenous peoples in Australia prior to colonisation (Coombs, Brandl & Snowdon 1983; Harris 1988). This process has resulted in the conception of ‘two way learning’ (Harris 1988, 1989), a model of teaching and learning that proposes that Indigenous people can operate in both domains, or more particularly more effectively access the white domain by incorporating Indigenous learning styles. While ‘two-way’ enjoyed widespread acceptance amongst many academics in Indigenous contexts in the mid 1980s it has been subsequently critiqued for its reification (McTaggart 1988) and lack of relevance for Indigenous students in urban contexts (McConaghy 2000; Mooney 1998; Nicholls, Crowley & Watts 1996, 1998).

Other academics have defined curriculum development as a metaphorical journey. Arbon (1998) for example draws on the metaphor of territory; Marika, Ngurruwutthun and White
(1992) suggest that ‘ganma’ — which represents the point where the salt water and fresh water meet — may provide a useful metaphorical conception to describe the complex, cultural interactivity of Indigenous education. This notion moves away from the limitations of difference and the imposition of assimilationist models to encompass the interaction of cultures. Kemmis (1997b) refers to ganma in his discussion of social justice in universities and Greville (2000) draws on the metaphor of ‘ganma’ in her research about the ICMDP. As Greville notes with respect to the ICMDP, this metaphor overcomes some of the problems and issues identified in the ‘two-way learning’ model with respect to the intersection between cultures; allowing both the turbulence and the ‘mixing it up’ of cultural knowledges and practices to create new possibilities whilst simultaneously avoiding assimilationist and colonialist tendencies. This conception fits well with the ideas discussed throughout this thesis as I recount some of the key defining moments from the beginning through to the present.

**Challenges and dilemmas**

There were a number of reasons for the difficulties experienced in the early years of the ICMDP. These included: a relatively high staff turnover; few staff members experienced in competency-based education (CBE); a large increase in student numbers; two student intakes each academic year; the legacy of a highly flexible, individualised teaching/learning program for existing students; a student population with highly diverse educational backgrounds and literacy levels; and the need to simultaneously develop and teach the revised program for new students. Although many other issues have influenced the curriculum development I have highlighted some of the tensions and contradictions related to staffing, structural impediments, curriculum and issues of course credibility and legitimacy.

In addition to these practical issues and challenges, the ICMDP has also experienced a number of theoretical and philosophical dilemmas around the political and social hopes and aspirations of ‘social change’; the principles and processes of ‘community development’; and the various constraints imposed on these by bureaucratic and academic requirements, institutionalised language and economic imperatives. The policy and bureaucratic constraints that occur within the university often reflect broader paradigmatic and cultural value differences within the wider social-political context.

A major focus throughout the program’s development and implementation has been to explore and in many instances create the possibilities within these institutional and ideological constraints in which to offer fully accredited associate diploma and degree
courses which achieve Indigenous self-determination and social, political and economic empowerment. The ICMDP curriculum development has taken place in the midst of internal difficulties and external threats. These external threats, which create many of internal difficulties, reflect a paradoxical and discursive tug of war between liberalism’s colonial and corporatist imperatives which have influenced Indigenous education policy and practice and the fundamental rights and principles which underpin both Indigenous terms of reference and social justice.

**The ICMDP — 'a quiet revolution' in Indigenous higher education**

Both the Indigenous Community Management and Development (ICMD) and the Indigenous Community Health (ICH) programs grew out of the Centre’s commitment to provide courses which are empowering for Indigenous students and the community groups they are working for, and with, in a manner sensitive to and consistent with Indigenous values, control and needs. The term Aboriginal was used in most early documents and is only retained here to reflect the historical developments in the program; it is not intended to exclude Torres Strait Islander people. Since 1996 an increasing number of students from the Torres Strait Islands have enrolled in the ICMDP, and the term ‘Aboriginal’ has been replaced with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or Indigenous Australians in the all course documents, discourse and curriculum content. The thesis reflects these changes and in most cases the Indigenous has been substituted for Aboriginal for consistency for the reader, except in the Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

Both the ICH and ICMDP programs were devised as a result of community oriented participatory action-research processes and developed using competency-based education approaches. At the time they were described as highly innovative and culturally appropriate. In fact, as the title of a conference paper by the then program coordinators, Glenys Grogan and Darlene Oxenham, suggests these courses represented ‘a quiet revolution’ in Indigenous higher education (Grogan & Oxenham 1992). In many respects they still do. While this research focuses primarily on the development of the ICMDP the ideas often have relevance for the ICH Program. Both programs were initially developed in accordance with the guiding principles endorsed by the Centre for Aboriginal Studies 1989 Planning Review Committee:

- The recognition that Indigenous heritage, culture and identity are central to Indigenous wellbeing.
- The achievement of self-determination and empowerment of Indigenous people through higher education.
The pursuit of academic and professional excellence according to Indigenous terms of reference.

The process of Aboriginalisation, whereby Indigenous people have major input and control of issues relating to the current and future directions of Indigenous education (CAS 1989).

The idea for ICMDP came about in early 1986 on the basis of extensive Aboriginal community consultation throughout Western Australia. The idea of culturally specific, community-based degree course in community management and community development grew out of the findings of participatory action research undertaken at workshops throughout the mid to late 1980s by Darryl Kickett, Trevor Satour and Ernie Stringer, of the Centre’s Community Services Unit (CSU) later the Aboriginal Community Research and Development Unit. They identified key areas where existing training programs were deficient and developed a summary of needs incorporating a range of Aboriginal community perspectives (Stringer & Satour 1985). These findings led to the development of the initial proposal for an integrated training programme for Aboriginal community leaders, managers, administrators and supervisors (Kickett, McCauley, Satour & Stringer 1986) and the base for program’s development (Stringer 1987). The report by Stringer (1987) summarised the outcomes of the community-based needs analysis and outlined the necessary conditions to provide an effective program for Indigenous people and the basis for the development of the ICMD curriculum content and delivery.

Commenting on these initial findings Oxenham and Stringer (1993) point out that: ‘a fundamental condition was that the program take into account and accommodate a number of specific features of Indigenous social and cultural life’ (p. 5). These features encompassed cultural, historical and geographical diversity and the social realities of community life. They also delineated some of the basic characteristics required for Aboriginal training programmes. These included:

- Practical, situationally specific learning activities.
- Direct and specific relevance of learning activities to the individual’s work and community life, and to problems and issues in those settings.
- Definition of specific community issues and problems through extensive and effective consultation with the trainee and his/her community.
- Integration of specific skills training into a broader developmental program of learning.
The development of high levels of skill and understanding to deal with complex issues and problems experienced in work and community contexts.

Credentials which have status and marketability, within both the Aboriginal and the broader community.

Compatibility with the ongoing realities of Aboriginal social and cultural life (Oxenham & Stringer 1993, p. 6).

Although the emphasis shifted from training (and trainee) to encompass adult education (and students/practitioners) these characteristics underscored the development of the ICMDP. The program was developed and accredited in 1988 and offered to Indigenous people throughout Western Australia for the first time in 1989. When the program commenced there were 25 students selected from the Perth metropolitan and Pilbara and Kimberley regions. A further 19 students enrolled in the second semester. At the official launch it was heralded as an important step forward in Indigenous self-determination and self-management (ICMDP File Notes 1989).

Since then staff, students and other key stakeholders have been involved in the program’s ongoing development to ensure the courses remain culturally appropriate as well as industry and community relevant and responsive to changes in the contemporary social and policy context (CAS 1990). In recent times these terms have been named as antithetical — one determined by Indigenous people, and the other managed an agenda set by government. Historically, the ICMDP emerged within the social, political and economic policy context of Indigenous self-determination and self-management outlined in Chapter Two with its attendant assumptions many of which have since been shown to be contradictory or at best problematic to implement. The late 1980s to early 1990s were heady, high-spirited times as Indigenous organisations including land councils and medical and legal services began to gather political and cultural momentum around the state. Informal and formal discussions and review processes in the ICMDP at that time reveal a program-wide commitment and concern to ensure that the curriculum content, structure and delivery processes effectively realise the goals of Indigenous self-determination, self-management and empowerment (ICMD File Notes 1989). Staff were also concerned that the courses have academic recognition and mainstream currency without compromising Indigenous cultural values, knowledge, needs and aspirations.

The ICMDP is premised on the belief that cultural and political competence agency is core to any truly transformative non-assimilationist curriculum. The dilemmas this poses for ICMD practitioners are held as tensions between cultural and political competence and
technical and professional competencies within the program elements. Although the crucial nature of these tensions has been acknowledged and articulated throughout the curriculum development process (Greville 2000; Walker 1995) the difficulty of translating these tensions into practice has sometimes been underestimated. Initially most of us did not completely understand that these tensions would remain an inherently productive (as well as potentially destructive) element — in a Foucauldian sense — within the course. There has always been a desire among staff to obtain a lasting resolution to these issues, and a tendency to be overly self-critical when we fail to do so. Greville highlights the dilemmas for teachers of ‘working at the cultural interface’ and the difficulties of trying to provide an education that offered equal opportunities and cultural transmission due to the dynamic and context specific nature of our engagement (2000, p. 95). She reflects on her own experience and of ‘clutching for familiar certainties which turn out to be more burdensome baggage’ (op.cit, p. 96).

Nevertheless since its inception the ICMDP principles, philosophy and aims have provided the impetus and guideposts to inform the curriculum content, practice and development processes. The main aims have always been to facilitate the attainment of competence by students to work to achieve Indigenous self-determination and self-management within their community and work contexts; and, at the same time, to have recognition and legitimation within mainstream contexts. The program also operationalised the Centre’s commitment to: ‘establish and maintain Aboriginal self-determination and management of Indigenous courses to achieve equity and social justice within the university and society’ (CAS 1989, p. 3). The focus has been on developing course content, methods and processes that are culturally appropriate, contemporary, meaningful and achievable and which contribute to student's empowerment and self-directed and life-long learning. Furthermore ICMDP staff have been required to both engage in and teach about participatory, developmental processes which support Indigenous knowledge production, cultural recognition and positive social change. In other words academic staff have had to adopt the role of cultural brokers as well as teachers and facilitators of student’s individual and social transformation.

In practice it has remained a highly complex act to attain and sustain these ideals at a course level amid the competing ideologies underpinning the discourses and policy shifts at an institutional and wider political level. These issues have influenced the curriculum development review process and continually challenged program staff to consider the limitations as well as the transformative possibilities of our critical practice and aims. At
times it has been difficult to maintain the ICMDP principles in order to achieve the program aims.

**ICMDP– forging new boundaries in new territories**

Since the program’s inception a number of factors have contributed to the uniqueness of the course development, curriculum and pedagogy. The ICMDP has embraced a broad inclusive notion of curriculum development that incorporates the study of social, political, economic, historical and cultural factors that shape the learning experience. It recognises that curriculum development in Indigenous higher education must take into account concepts of knowledge, culture and power and how they intersect and locate students in their daily lives. This fits with the assertion by Keeffe (1992, p. 7) that ‘curriculum is much more than a set course of study, or the texts that students use. It is also the site of social action’. It is also reminiscent of the meaning of liberal education suggested by Dewey (1916/1966) that education should prepare people to be effective in every aspect of their lives, not just a profession.

Since the initial development of the ICMDP most of us were conscious of the dangers of assimilationist or colonising tendencies inherent in any curriculum development process. We were equally concerned with the dangers of taking a radical approach. Much of the program discourse grew out of looking for ways to resist the temptation, in the face of uncertainty, to teach the ‘conventional wisdom’, to simply transpose mainstream management curriculum into an Indigenous context, or appoint a ‘curriculum expert’ to underwrite the curriculum. To avoid these pitfalls and maintain an open and reflexive curriculum all ICMD staff members have always been encouraged to contribute to the curriculum development and review process. This has brought its own costs and benefits with respect to the different perspectives, understandings and cultural politics which occur when Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff work together in developing curriculum specifically for Indigenous students (an observation confirmed by Greville 2000).

Throughout the program’s implementation each of our ideas, experiences, prejudices, value positions and ideological assumptions have influenced our contributions to and evaluative assessments of the program. We have had to recognise the very real and constant risk, however inadvertent or unintentional, of imposing colonising/assimilationist values and practices upon the program regardless of the approach adopted, but especially when fusing variant strands of liberal/social democratic humanism with critical postmodernism. In theory, although not necessarily, the risks of this occurring are countered to a large extent through Aboriginalising key positions in the program and
through a program-wide adoption of critical discourse and practices underpinned by Indigenous terms of reference. There is also a strong emphasis in the program discourse on critically reflexivity by staff and students in relation to the program's principles and goals curriculum and their own practice (Walker, McPhee & Osborne 2000).

While most of us were willing to acknowledge that as teachers we take our own assumptions and prejudices into the classroom, some staff have been reluctant to critique the values, assumptions and biases underpinning the specialisations and disciplines in which they were trained. This has exacerbated the struggle at times. It has been necessary to accept that all knowledges are constructed and partial — limiting the truth claims of any discipline. It has also been necessary to question whether our own standpoints, informed by specific discipline rules and Western knowledge systems conserve the ideas and values which have widespread legitimacy and almost unshakeable, although not uncontested, dominance within the mainstream domain. These have remained critical issues at the heart of the struggle and contestation experienced throughout the development of the ICMDP program. At times these issues have caused considerable discomfort and uncertainty for staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) committed to decolonisation and transformation, but aware we are still caught in our own cultural, professional and disciplinary blind spots. Nevertheless this very uneasiness generates productive possibilities forcing us to draw out the positive elements that inhere in traditional approaches.

To a large extent, at a meta-level, the curriculum development is an ongoing action research process that attempts to reflect the principles, theory and practice of the ICMDP. In this sense academic staff have had to seriously and continuously consider questions such as: how do we foster genuine empowerment through education, as opposed to assimilation? Are adult learning principles of ‘equality’, partnership and negotiation really possible in the classroom? What do we mean by culturally appropriate? How do we give recognition to cultural diversity and commonality of experience? What are the expected outcomes from the course? Why choose a competency based education approach? Can we provide a course that effectively encompasses the dualistic goals of Indigenous identity and mainstream opportunity? These questions have formed the basis of research among staff and underpin this thesis.

Since the course commenced different answers to these questions by different stakeholders at particular moments have influenced changes to the curriculum content, processes, structure and delivery. Other broader theoretical and political issues
concerned with improving the way we teach and how students learn have also influenced the program's development (Greville 2000; Oxenham 1999; Wilson 1999). Curriculum decisions have been underpinned by a commitment to cultural diversity and inclusivity. This has required constant scrutiny so that teaching and assessment processes, content and course delivery structure do not inadvertently and unjustly exclude Indigenous people from participating in the program because their geographical location, community and familial obligations and relationships differ from those of dominant culture or even within the Indigenous student population, or, conversely, that these differences are not used to let us off the hook in terms of what and how we teach (Nakata 2000b). How do we enable students to ‘cut a better deal’ (Nakata 1995c) or navigate new waters without ‘sink[ing] in the mainstream’? (Crawshaw 1993). These issues remain a highly complex area within the course — especially since the program’s outreach has encompassed Indigenous groups across Australia including Torres Strait Islander peoples — made more difficult at times because of the various policy changes which have impacted upon Indigenous education.

Assumptions underpinning the ICMDP

Several key assumptions underpin the curriculum development process and the ICMDP. They include the recognition that Indigenous people have: experienced a long history of social injustice, marginalisation and poverty within Australian society; and been denied equal access to the resources, power, knowledge, information and skills necessary to manage their own affairs and enhance and sustain their wellbeing. It is also recognised that there has been a long-standing disregard by the dominant society for Indigenous people’s knowledges, values, beliefs, skills and overall competence and capacity in managing their own affairs, determining their own futures and positively influencing the future of Australia society. Consequently, there is an urgent need to transform this situation (ICMDP File Notes 1991). While these assumptions encompass the commitment and transformative impetus held by many staff in devising the ICMDP curriculum, they have also been objects of contestation within the process of doing so.

This understanding of the contemporary reality of Indigenous people in turn led to a further set of shared assumptions which underpinned the development of curriculum content and processes. These include the belief that: students need to understand the social and political theories which both describe and circumscribe the broader social and political context in which they operate in order to engage effectively in a discourse for social change; Community Development principles and processes are consistent with, and conducive to the achievement of the goals of Indigenous self-determination and self-
management; and Indigenous self-determination requires the recognition of Indigenous terms of reference, in all aspects of community management and development that students are engaged in, and by the key service providers of programs which impact upon Indigenous people.

These assumptions have, at one and the same time, driven the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ agendas of the program. They have simultaneously justified the transformative and decolonising intent of the project and informed the content and processes of the program. Such assumptions, which are consistent with the initial research findings by the CSU throughout 1985-1987 (Oxenham & Stringer 1993), still inform the program’s development and implementation as evident in recent program review documents (ICMD File Notes 1998; ICMDP 2000).

As the 1989 program accreditation document prepared by Sue Howard attests, a competency-based education approach was chosen because it allowed the integration of Indigenous knowledges, skills and values within the teaching and learning process (ICMDP 1989, p. 10). Howard argued that among its strengths' the design ensures that Indigenous students/people can bring their cultural knowledge, understandings and practices to bear on the subject matter and teaching and learning methods of the course. This is particularly appropriate in areas of practice such as management and community development where the underlying assumptions, values and ways of working may compete or conflict with Indigenous values and ways of working. At the same time it is imperative that such courses teach Indigenous people the politics of engaging with non-Indigenous domain (Howard n.d.).

**Yanchep – 1990 (Re)Visions for the future**

In January 1990, a two-day workshop was held in an old hotel at Yanchep National Park. to review our first year of progress. It was a space to reflect on where we had been and to dialogue about where we needed to go. Over the two days the workshop explored the following questions:

- What has worked well? What hasn't worked well?
- What are the issues?
- What kind of graduate do we want?
- What should they be able to do when they exit each of the respective courses —the associate diploma or degree?
- How will we know they can do it?
- What are our roles?
Chapter Three: Defining Moments - Transforming Curriculum

- Do we have the resources to attain our goals and aspirations?
- What needs to change?
- What do we need to do next? (ICMDP 1990 File Notes).

The answers to these questions were informed by our experiences and understanding of student’s diverse geographic, community and work contexts over the previous year, and student and employer feedback. They were to provide the blueprint for the future. Our different values, disciplines backgrounds and ideas about the purpose of the program made for lively, impassioned and at times very tense discussions. One staff member recalling the experience said they had felt so overwhelmed and frustrated about what was happening among the different ‘key players’ that they had cried both nights (ICMD 1990 File Notes).

Many of the subterranean tensions which surfaced at really critical points during the workshop revealed philosophical and paradigmatic differences about what should be in the course; what graduates should be able to do; and whether the emphasis on graduate outcomes ought to meet the expectations and standards of the academy, the Indigenous community or encompass both.

There were also strong unspoken cultural politics at work that were not addressed to everyone’s satisfaction although there were clearly issues that needed to be resolved at some level. Some non-Indigenous staff at the workshop confided later that they felt ‘gagged from contributing in a meaningful way’, and others were reluctant to be seen as ‘inappropriate and dominant white males’ influencing the agenda. Conversely some of the Indigenous staff felt frustrated and ‘on the spot’ that they were expected to have all the answers in what was an entirely alien academic environment. One person was critical that non-Indigenous staff were not openly ‘sharing their knowledge’ but just ‘sitting back and judging’ and therefore fundamentally dishonest. For a while it seemed that as a program we had retreated to an impossible, irreconcilable place. While on the surface we ate meals together and talked and joked it took enormous trust and courage for all of us to begin to listen to each other. By the end of the workshop there was a greater level of honesty, willingness to dialogue and acceptance that we needed to work as a program towards a shared educational and political end.

By the end of the Yanchep workshop we had arrived at a more or less shared agreement on at least four interrelated points. First, that we needed to place a greater emphasis on the role of the graduate as a social change agent to achieve Indigenous self-
determination, empowerment and wellbeing of the Indigenous community. Second, given the political nature of this role, there was a need for graduates to understand and engage in policy processes at all levels in their work and community. Third, students also needed to understand and take into account the issues, priorities and aspirations of the Indigenous groups they were working with to engage in a process to ensure that Indigenous values, ideas, priorities were identified, negotiated and consciously acted upon in a range of contexts to bring about these changes (ICMDP 1990 File Notes). This meant that students needed to know more about Indigenous history and culture, in order to understand themselves and their own and other’s location in society; the multiplicity and transformative potential of this and the implications for their role taking into account ‘Indigenous terms of reference’. Fourth, discussions centred on the need to distinguish between the academic requirements for different levels of award (ie an Associate Degree and Bachelor of Applied Science) as well as identify the academic standards and expectations for different types of award (ie Arts and Applied Science awards). There was very little conscious recognition of the legitimacy of the more applied and practical emphasis of the latter in contrast to the more abstract theoretical endeavour of an Arts degree within the Humanities.

It was agreed that the emphasis ought be on meeting Indigenous community expectations as well as those of the academy. While most staff recognised that students had the right and need to have qualifications that have transportability and articulation with other academic courses there was strong concern too that course outcomes needed to have relevance and efficacy within a range of Indigenous contexts. However, there was still considerable disagreement about the way to resolve these issues. It was agreed that we needed to negotiate ‘equivalent standards’ with both the university and students to reflect their specific community or organisational contexts. Some staff believed that it was more important to meet Indigenous community needs and priorities, which could clearly conflict with those of the mainstream academy.

The workshop discussions emphasised the need to acknowledge students as both ‘learners and ‘knowers’, as already ‘being’ as well as ‘becoming’ practitioners. These discussions also recognised the importance of also extending and challenging student’s existing knowledge to increase their capacity to transform their social realities in an ethical, developmental and sustainable manner. These ideas, which are fundamental to emancipatory practice, were given effect through Darlene Oxenham’s insistence on introducing the notion of ‘conscious enactment’. This notion proved crucial to integrating both a language of agency and embedding the idea of critical reflection into the course.
competencies and discourse. Students were now required to demonstrate/provide evidence to show how they had consciously engaged in their learning and workplace practice. In effect the emphasis on conscious enactment forged the link between ‘action learning, critical reflection and ethical practice which underpins the ICMDP’ (Walker, McPhee & Osborne 2000, p. 311).

Darlene Oxenham also argued that we needed to encompass a more developed conceptual framework within the program that could effect real social change for Indigenous people on Indigenous terms. She suggested that Indigenous terms of reference — a term first used by Lilla Watson in 1985 — (Watson 1985) was both a concept and process that would allow for the identification, incorporation, reproduction and negotiation of the diverse ideas and understandings of Indigenous groups, organisations and communities to be integrated and enacted within the curriculum content (ICMDP File Notes 1990/1). The wide acceptance of this Indigenous standpoint generated a significant shift in the program locating and centering Indigenous students as knowing subjects with agency, identifying, producing and justifying ideas within their contemporary cultural context.

The incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference was the beginning of making decolonisation a central (but still implicit) aim of the program. Until then the existing ‘Aboriginal Development’ stream drawn largely from Anthropology had focused on the need for students to know about their history and contemporary situation without necessarily harnessing the productive elements. However, it was agreed that as the existing competency statements stood, there was still potential for the objectification of Indigenous communities and their histories. Moreover, it became evident that the title of the unit, ‘Aboriginal Development’ was also highly problematic, conveying all of the connotations of progressive liberalism and neo-colonialism (which it was argued were racist or assimilationist). As a consequence it was agreed that Indigenous terms of reference (i.e. Indigenous knowledges, values, practices and interests) should be included in all streams/units of the program as well as become an area or stream of competence in its own right to redefine the boundaries of existing disciplines in accordance with Indigenous values, understandings and interests.

In 1990, as the course came into its second year, the concept of Indigenous terms of reference was incorporated as a fundamental principle to the ICMDP development and the Centre for Indigenous Studies operations. As Darlene Oxenham states in a
Discussion Paper ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’: The Concept at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies’,

The Indigenous Community Management and Development Program (ICMDP) at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies adopted ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ in 1990 as the title of an area of competence in the degree and associate degree courses. Thereby incorporating ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ into the course curricula. This inclusion was a definitive commitment to teaching and learning in culturally appropriate ways, and to the creation of space that recognised and validated Aboriginal knowledge (Oxenham 1999, p. 5).

While working in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference is one of the core principles that strongly influenced the early phases of curriculum development it has not always been easy to retain its centrality amid staff confusion about its application alongside competing disciplinary discourses. As Oxenham goes on to say:

From 1990 to this present day staff have grappled with the meaning, intent and significance of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’. ICMDP staff, of which I was one, have re-analysed, refined and redrafted course materials on ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ over a number of years’ (loc.cit).

The incorporation of ‘Indigenous terms of reference’ remains a crucial strategy, which is both transformative and decolonising. It has required incredible insightfulness on the part of Indigenous leadership and equally incredible willingness and creativity on the part of staff and students to navigate through this difficult terrain. The incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference has also required a commitment to explore many of the cultural issues head on, and to challenge just as equally any unexamined recourse to dominant standpoints or inappropriate application of ‘culturally appropriate’ tags. Finally, it has required a commitment and willingness to dialogue, to engage with and commit to Indigenous terms of reference in our everyday practice that began back at Yanchep.

Competency-based versus traditional education approaches
Another major area of discussion at Yanchep related to the competency-based nature of the curriculum. There were a number of issues raised, although two dominated the discussion. The first of these was philosophical and political and involved the obvious debate about whether the course ought to be content-centred or competency-based. The second was more practical and related to the structural impediments of trying to
implement a competency-based education (CBE) approach, with its attendant philosophical aims, within the existing institutional requirements.

It was apparent that some of the team remained unconvinced by the arguments regarding the advantages and strengths of adopting a CBE approach. Despite the general agreement and outcomes reached at Yanchep not everyone walked away from the workshop fully committed to the idea of maintaining a CBE approach. In a really tense moment there were comments that the arch critics of CBE were so 'stuck in their own mud' that they would not hear the possible benefits of the approach; the critics in turn responded privately that the workshop was a 'sham' and a 'done deal' — giving the guise of discussion without any serious commitment to acknowledge the flaws of CBE and definitely no intention of reconsidering the benefits of reverting to traditional education (ICMDP 1990 File Notes).

These major differences over such a fundamental aspect of the course meant that we were to revisit the main assumptions and rationale for CBE several times over the following twelve months and then again over the following years to work through the implications for the ICMD courses. The difficulties of gaining widespread understanding and acceptance of a CBE approach have continued due to ongoing staff, institutional and educational policy changes. Various innovations and appropriations to overcome staff and student concerns and harness the transformative potential of CBE are discussed in the next chapter in relation to the broader national debate.

**From 'community development' to 'determining future directions'**

Consistent with the explicit recognition of Indigenous terms of reference another key area of change to come out of Yanchep was a shift in the disciplinary discourses from community development with its liberal progressive connotations and strategic planning with its corporatist overtones to a discourse that captured the idea of working towards Indigenous interests and aspirations. While there was a widespread commitment to the idea of incorporating strategic thinking and action into course competencies to achieve Indigenous community visions most staff were critical of the overtly mainstream management oriented competency statements. Some argued that because of the focus on meeting government employer agendas the existing competencies were culturally inappropriate or irrelevant and counter to the stated aims of the program. At the same time there was also some contention as to whether the courses were really about 'doing community development' and having the skills to manage the outcomes emanating from the developmental processes (underpinned by communitarian ideals), or whether they
were about ‘doing management in a community development way’ underscored by individualism. Others believed the adherence to community development weakened the political potential of the program. There was also considerable debate over whether in specifying the competencies we ought to be process or product driven or both (ICMDP 1990 File Notes, Yanchep workshop, January).

While some of these staff concerns reflected different assumptions about the Community Development stream, others were focused on the implications of the outcomes focused nature of the course for student assessment. There were questions regarding the feasibility and desirability of trying to assess student outcomes in contexts where the attainment of a product (such as the completion of a project) was clearly outside the control of students and failure to complete a project may have no bearing on their competence. In the end it was agreed that the course needed to provide students with understandings, techniques and processes to assist others to make decisions and determine their own future outcomes. The assessment of outcomes would require that students demonstrate how they had taken Indigenous terms of reference into account in their decisions and actions. In other words they had to demonstrate how their actions were justifiable and defensible in terms of their specific work and community contexts and in accordance with sound management and development principles and processes (ICMDP 1990 File Notes).

The revised competency statements reflected an attempt to address all of these concerns without comprising the integrity of academic and discipline standards. This was a difficult task that was achieved by incorporating Community Development and the medium and long-term components of Management together into a new stream called Determining Directions (see Appendix 3).

The renaming of the competency area from ‘Community Development’ to ‘Determining Directions’ was a conscious attempt to redefine and reframe the discipline of community development to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, aspirations, needs and priorities in determining futures in a strategic, developmental and culturally appropriate way. It was also an attempt to reach a compromise to address staff concerns regarding the potential capacity of community development and management theories, techniques and processes to be really effective in Indigenous contexts. Some staff members openly devalued Community development as that ‘touchy-feely, liberal humanist stuff’. They were concerned that it was too ‘soft’, lacking the political commitment and power to deliver, while others saw management as too ‘hard nosed’ and bound by rationalistic
thinking and unable to take account of Indigenous interests (ICMDP 1990 File Notes). This remained an area of discussion and debate with respect to how to serve Indigenous interests raising similar dilemmas as identified in *Our Future Our Selves* (HRSCAA 1990). In contrast, others adopting a more critical standpoint, argued that participatory Community Development was essential to access and harness the redistribution of power and resources and acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills on Indigenous terms.

The decision to rename the stream ‘Determining Indigenous Directions’ was an attempt to reconfigure the disciplines, incorporating Indigenous interests and terms of reference with community development theories and principles. This decision was to bring its own positive and negative consequences and meant that we were to revisit the issue as to whether there should be a distinct community development competency stream on many occasions over the years.

Another of the major outcomes of the Yanchep workshop was the shift from three discipline areas — Community Management, Community Development and Aboriginal Development, with corresponding goals statements providing the basis for the curriculum — to five. These five areas consisted of the revision and renaming of the existing streams as described above, and the inclusion of two new ones, Policy Processes and Evaluation (Degree level only) with corresponding goal statements that recognise the existing social policy context which has influenced, and been influenced by, Indigenous people’s lives.

By the end of the Yanchep workshop the revised 1990 Curriculum Document comprised a complex competency tree (Appendix 3), incorporating the following goals overarching each of the discipline areas:

• *Aboriginal terms of reference*
  Consciously enacts Aboriginal terms of reference (ATR) in a variety of settings.

• *Evaluation*
  Evaluates the effectiveness of the processes and outcomes of managing projects, directions and policy in combination and how this contributes to Aboriginal terms of reference.

• *Determining directions*
  Contributes consciously to process of Aboriginal people determining their own direction in various settings.
• **Policy processes**
  Participates consciously in the processes related to determining and implementing policies in various settings.

• **Managing projects**
  Contributes to the effective management of specified activities using appropriate Indigenous Ways.

These five new course goal statements have influenced the program’s evolving theory and practice ever since, although there have been further changes in 1994, 1997 and 2000. From 1992 these revised goal statements represented a very deliberate shift away from the original management oriented goal statements to more a transformative intent which facilitated the roles of students/graduates working to achieve positive social change in a range of different contexts. These new statements recognised that degree to which policy influences and can be influenced by individuals. In a sense they represented a substantial paradigm shift in the course development direction. The goals reflect different discipline streams that tend to situate management and development firmly in the critical social sciences. We were trying to ensure a culturally relevant, effective and ethical practice (along the lines envisioned by Freire 1973, 1985, 1986) and to influence and achieve equity and social justice on Indigenous terms (Howard nd). Ironically, these goal statements can in many respects be labelled as part of a modernity project, combined with radical structural and humanist paradigms. The new curriculum framework generated its own sets of ironies and tensions. Greville’s research captures the agonised position of the ICMDP towards print versus oral literacies. For example, she states:

> that the Program was already situated (albeit sometimes uncomfortably) inside the administrative domain of community management and community development whose values are precisely those named by Graff (1987, p.2): “the maintenance of social order and the persistence of integration and cohesion”. In other words the Program was inhabiting a contradiction (Greville 2000, p. 29).

While the development of the five new goal statements did not really overcome the difficulties of incorporating literacies — in fact Greville’s research suggests it heightened and defined the nature of the literacies dilemma — at the time, in their combined form, they represented an attempt to deal with the tensions surrounding the contradictory discourses of management and community development as well as the political and cultural contradictions within the administrative domain. In other words the *policy stream*
provided an avenue to make changes to repressive policies. The *evaluation stream* provided a means to gauge ‘the goodness of fit’ of various policies, programs, projects and practices in their work and community contexts in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference and attempts to make changes if necessary. Together it was believed they would be able to interrupt/prevent/remake those elements of practice which were contrary to Indigenous future directions. Indigenous directions were to be derived through participatory consultative practices and the changes were to be negotiated and strategic.

**After Yanchep — Coordinating and facilitating change**

Midway through Semester Two 1990 we were still trying to manage the changes. It was agreed to establish an academic coordination team to overcome some of the difficulties in compiling and incorporating the curriculum changes and to adequately record and monitor student progress amid these changes. One of our primary roles was to establish processes to articulate the curriculum framework and to provide a rationale and coherence within the competency based approach.

For the next eighteen months, with minimal technical support and limited human resources, we attempted to develop the necessary infrastructure and administrative systems to monitor student progress and coordinate the implementation of such a complex and radical innovative program. During that period an extensive recording system and database was developed which enabled us to comprehensively map student progress and outcomes for individuals and cohorts. This system was a major accomplishment giving the program a new level of clarity and academic integrity for staff and students alike.

**Struggling to ‘name it up’**

The outcomes of the Yanchep workshop, especially the more radicalised and emancipatory commitment to Indigenous self-determination, self-management and social change represented a critical moment in the program’s development. Yanchep saw the introduction of Indigenous terms of reference, and a more decolonising and transformative element to the curriculum goals. Nevertheless the program continued to operate on the basis of a ‘competency tree’ that consisted of a set of competency statements with a range of inter-connections identified and interwoven across discipline areas and across various aspects of competence. The competency tree covered five discipline areas with approximately five statements in each. There were two versions of the competency tree, the complex one for academic staff which enabled staff to link theory and method with
context and the plain English version in recognition that many students spoke English as a second language or third language (Appendix 3).

Two years down the track we were still struggling to ‘name it up’. It was extremely difficult for newly appointed specialist academic staff to ‘get a handle on it’ in order to teach these course competencies. It is useful and important to contextualise this. To give an example of how blindly we were treading at the time, the ‘plain English’ statement was:

works out all the things needed to make project work properly.

The original statements had attempted to capture the multiplicity of possible configurations of student work and community realities with combinations such as:

works on project/activity with group/community/organisation in order to…. 

These statements were intended to operate at multiple levels, to enable students to recognise how they are influenced by, and can influence policies, processes, practices and situations at local, state, national and global levels. However, attempts to make the statements inclusive and flexible were often clumsy and awkward and did not always gain the support of the team.

Many new staff members, unfamiliar with competence-based education, were faced with making leaps of faith and understanding to make sense of the course content. They were trying to make these plain English statements more meaningful for themselves and for students. The task in front of us required working out what each statement really entailed in terms of skills, knowledge and content about project management as well as identifying what needed to be covered in the study blocks, and assessment strategies resources to achieve them. These plain English statements were intended to demystify and de-jargonise academic language for Indigenous people from widely diverse geographic and cultural contexts working within different occupations and community and organisational settings ranging from high level policy positions in government to liaison officers in remote community settings. However, there was so much ‘hidden’ behind such simplified statements that they were really deceptively simple. Students complained about the uncertainty of the requirements, some became angry about the mixed messages inherent in the program. Some students felt ‘duped’ because so much of what was expected of them was hidden in such seemingly ‘do-able’ statements. Moreover, many felt that course
requirements seemed to depend largely on individual staff interpretations of the standards. In a sense they were right. As one student wrote:

‘We don’t know where we are going, you’ve got the map, we don’t get to see it’ (ICMDP 1992 File Notes).

For many staff and students the overwhelming desire was to return to the safety, familiarity and supposed transparency of a content/subject centred course. Although Docking (1991) has argued that the perception of transparency of traditional education is a myth. Because of our own experience in traditional education we tend to suspend questioning the links between student outcomes and competence and the process of writing essays on selected topics to achieve these outcomes. In reality the connection is not clear.

**Structural impediments to an alternative approach**

The debate over different approaches to education involved considerable discussion about the problematics of attempting to teach and assess a competency-based program. This was another aspect of the program reviewed at Yanchep. There was general agreement and concern that despite the claims of being highly innovative and flexible the program was still constrained by, and structured to meet, traditional academic expectations. In order to meet university requirements the program had been artificially carved up into subjects and separate and at times competing discipline areas of community development and community management that did not necessarily match with the professional roles required in Indigenous contexts.

This artificial division meant that the course was unable to effectively fulfil the teaching, learning and assessment opportunities inherent in the fact that students could demonstrate or required broad skills and knowledge their everyday community/work realities that crossed all of these disciplines. There was relatively shared agreement that to resolve these issues we needed to capture the flexibility of broad generic competencies essential for ‘good practice’ (for example culturally relevant, ethical, empowering and effective) and common to both management and community development disciplines. As a consequence a 100-credit unit structure was established encompassing all the elements of competence needed so that students could negotiate their completion as they became relevant to their community and work contexts. At the time we believed by developing a 100 credit units similar to the School of Social Work practicum units at Curtin University.
that we had found a solution which would enable students to negotiate an integrated learning program relevant to their particular work contexts.

Both the shift to a 100 credit unit structure in 1990 and back again to four 25 credit units in 1995 brought us into the complex and contested realm of teaching/learning assessment theories; testing the program’s commitment to the principles of negotiated learning and assessment in practice. From the beginning ICMDP staff were influenced by, and committed to, the ideals of adult learning theorists who advocated negotiated, individualised learning (Knowles 1980; Stevenson 1989). This involved starting where the students ‘were at’ educationally and contextually (Freire 1985). In the early stages of the course development there was still an idealistic notion that we could undertake individualised learning contracts with students to ensure that they had control over their learning (Boak 1991; O’Neill & Roberts 1995; O’Neill 1996). Equally important a number of academic staff challenged traditional teacher/student power relations to ensure Indigenous knowledge and experience were recognised by encouraging students to negotiate the teaching/learning act (Greville 2000). It was of course far easier to adhere to these principles when there were 25 to 45 students, rather than 90 to 135 (the DEETYA targets established for student enrolments in the course by 1993).

**Responding to changing course realities**

The number of students enrolled in the program had grown from 22 in semester one 1989 to 90 by semester two 1992. There were also some 36 different workshop topics across six broad areas developed and being offered on the basis of ‘identified need’ determined by both learning requirements and the context to accommodate diverse student’ needs. Two week on campus study blocks and ‘tailor-made’ workshops were planned on the basis of current issues or policy changes experienced by students, including for example the establishment of ATSIC, amendments to the Incorporations Act, Native Title legislation, and the *Report into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendations* (Johnston 1991). This dynamic, ‘smorgasbord’ curriculum exemplified the very best elements of adult and cross-cultural learning — flexibility, context specificity, contemporary relevance and cultural appropriateness — but it was a nightmare to implement and impossible to sustain within the existing resource limitations. Moreover, these resources were already being stretched as the staff and student ratio began to increase alongside intensifying institutional demands to monitor and report on quality outcomes (namely increased course participation, retention and completions) and the pressures to reach new ‘growth targets’ each year in response to the emphasis upon Indigenous education at a national level.
By the end of 1992 it was obvious under these conditions that there was an urgent need to undertake another major review. It was agreed that we needed to re-examine our assumptions regarding our commitment to CBE and provide a possible way forward in light of the difficulties being experienced. Looking back on my notes and program documentation I can still feel the overwhelming sense of urgency, confusion, frustration and ambivalence that often underpinned our decisions and actions. Within the situational constraints described above we were attempting to address a number of development and implementation issues simultaneously. These included: clarification of program assumptions, identification of implementation issues, the development of theoretical and policy frameworks, and the establishment of student progress monitoring systems. Most importantly the program was focused on defining competencies and formulating competency standards in Indigenous Community Management and Development around the newly agreed upon construct of the ICMD practitioner, an aspect of the program discussed briefly below and explored in the next chapter.

Throughout this same period the ideological schism between community management and community development also seemed to be widening amongst staff. On a developmental level we were attempting to bring the various, potentially competing discipline strands of the program together, and to provide a coherent theoretical basis for students to attain the critical and self-determining agency reflected in the goal statements of the program. While most of the readings on competence-based education postulated relatively instrumental, behaviourist approaches, a few writers had revealed the ‘transformative possibilities’ of CBE (Grant et al. 1979; Hall & Jones 1976). For me, the potential of CBE for achieving the ICMDP goals grew out of the statement that competency-based education:

\[
\text{tends to be a form of education that derives a curriculum from an analysis of a prospective or actual role in modern society and that attempts to certify student progress on the basis of demonstrated performance in some or all aspects of that role (Grant et al. 1979, p. 6).}
\]

The idea that the curriculum derives ‘from an analysis of a ‘prospective’ role in modern society’ held great promise and possibility. For me the notion of a prospective role held promise to envision and create a decolonising and emancipatory space. It provided the opportunity to identify and construct an ideal of an Indigenous graduate and their relationship to the wider society as it had been envisaged, but not fully articulated, since
Yanchep. Equally importantly, the notion of a prospective role created the space for multiple Indigenous role constructs (and identities) with multiple interpretations and negotiations in diverse work and community contexts that student’s existing experiences and narratives revealed.

In 1992, after extensive discussion with Darlene Oxenham, I circulated a draft paper to generate discussion regarding the educational value and transformative potential of integrating the theoretical construct of the ICMD practitioner role/s into the curriculum (ICMDP 1992 File Notes). There was widespread support, enthusiasm and commitment for the idea. Most staff agreed that creating the role construct of the ICMD practitioner would provide a useful theory and practice framework to draw the curriculum around, and provide a catalyst and language of agency for students. Student and employer input was sought in developing the concept of the ICMD practitioner. The negotiable potential to define different aspects of the role, together with the fact that students could be deemed competent independent of institutional input, also held promise for recognising and legitimating competence according to Indigenous standards (Oxenham 1999; Linda Smith 1999; Watson 1989).

Students also embraced the concept of the ICMD practitioner role construct, naming ‘agents of social change’ as one of the primary roles of the ICMD practitioner (File notes from block planning and review January and February 1992). The concept allowed students the freedom and agency to step out of the bureaucratic and cultural constraints of their actual work/community roles, and to consciously consider the possibilities within their multiple roles undertaken in family, community and work. The recognition and acceptance of the concept also allowed students to embody the ICMD theory, in an ethical, critically reflective and effective way and to consciously enact the Indigenous terms of reference principles. The concept was introduced simultaneously across all three years of the course. In the third year of the course an exploration of the ICMD practitioner became a way to synthesise the three years learning into a critically reflective practice framework.

The second half of 1992 was to represent a new stage in the program development. The notion of the ICMD practitioner allowed for new possibilities in our thinking about roles, subjects, agency and language. On the basis of our new reading of competency based education we organised curriculum working parties in each of the competency areas, which while broadly representative of discipline areas, were to focus on the interdisciplinary links as well as the ways in which the disciplines contradicted or
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complemented each other. The development of an interdisciplinary framework seemed a way to hold the tensions and possible contradictions of the various strands together. It also provided the space to recognise and build the complexities into the competencies to reflect the dilemmas students face as they operate across the various domains in their work and community lives. By 1993 the ICMD practitioner construct was fully integrated into the curriculum.

Establishing credibility across cultural contexts

At the same time that we were revising the curriculum framework we were still struggling to establish our credibility in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains. In April 1992, the first 20 ICMD students graduated from the course — significantly increasing Indigenous academic outcomes on a national level. This inaugural graduation was a great historical moment as the press clippings attest (see Appendix 4). The late Rob Riley (the Chair of the CAS Aboriginal Advisory Committee and prominent Aboriginal leader) gave the keynote speech at the Centre's inaugural graduation dinner prior to the official ceremony at the Perth Concert Hall. In a powerful charge to the students Rob Riley stressed the historical, social and political importance of the program, referring to students as 'warriors in the fight for justice' (ICMDP 1992 File 2).

However, theorising about and acknowledging that we were, and are, working in a site of struggle and contestation is one thing; 'living it out' within the program and at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains is/was/has always been another. One of the struggles experienced was the reluctance of some senior Indigenous and non-Indigenous employers to give legitimacy to the program. Some students and staff believed that these employers were caught up in their own cultural baggage, critical of affirmative action strategies and hence reluctant to acknowledge the competence of graduates. Several students reported instances where non-Indigenous staff employed in Indigenous organisations and government agencies to train Aboriginal people into their positions were threatened now that the likelihood of this occurring was imminent. Some non-Indigenous employees in the organisations in which students worked were openly hostile at the 'unfairness' that the course was not available to them, others were sceptical that students could 'catch up' all the traditional mainstream education they had missed or acquire the necessary competencies and levels of literacy.

Several students, in their final year of study, employed by the same government department in different towns around Western Australia (WA) were placed on performance review for various questionable reasons. In one instance for giving a
community member a lift back to their community, in another for suddenly becoming 'incompetent' against their regular staff appraisal, and in another for reporting that they owed money for using the corporate petrol card for personal reasons. At least three of these students appealed their situations. Several students reported instances where initial levels of employer support and encouragement were subsumed by greater levels of scrutiny and control. All of these students believed their experiences were because their increasing levels of competence were threatening the status quo in their work contexts. For ICMDP staff the situation was scandalous. We found our academic field support roles expanding to advise students of their rights; it was pastoral care with a political edge. These student/employer incidents also highlighted the multiple forms of institutional racism that still exist. These issues are important, pervasive and continue to influence Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations at the interface.

The celebrations surrounding the first graduate outcomes were hardly over when we began to hear rumours in the Indigenous community that the course was ‘mickey mouse’ and degree awards were being handed out of a ‘Weatie packet’. By December 1992 it was clear that we would have to work hard to forestall yet another crisis of confidence among students, staff and employers. Ironically and problematically, we found ourselves in the position of having to defend this innovative and emancipatory program by comparing its similarities to the very traditional educational standards and practices whose inappropriateness and shortcomings for Indigenous Australians we were attempting to overcome.

Prioritising the many issues and concerns being raised within the program was difficult at that time. We believed strongly that unless we could gain and maintain widespread legitimacy of the award it would be both immoral and demoralising for graduates and spell the end for the program. It was necessary to gain recognition and validation of the degree by, and for, students. We began to challenge individual criticisms and 'market' the program on a wide but very directed scale. Wherever possible I accompanied academic staff on field visits to meet employers and stakeholders to discuss their concerns and we began to develop the more marketable employer packages, glossy course information materials and promotions under the legitimation of Curtin’s logo.

When the program first registered a substantial fail rate among students in 1992 it was hailed by some staff as evidence that we had finally established ‘real academic’ standards within the program. There may have been some degree of truth to these claims as the program was improving all the time and assessment criteria were becoming more explicit.
However, I believe this response by some staff, which ignored other possible explanations, also unmasked colonial values and expectations — the assessment standards and criteria that were being articulated and documented were after all derived from the standards already being applied by each of us. Underpinning the discourse of ‘academic standards’ was an implicit expectation that if students were succeeding the course was obviously too easy, and therefore ‘not up’ to mainstream level; conversely, the main reason students failed the course was because they after all were ‘not up’ to mainstream standards. Considerable effort was necessary to persuade some staff that context specific competencies, tasks and knowledges were equally complex, legitimate and important to students and equivalent to and often integrating mainstream knowledges.

Staff, students and community responses at different times to student’s ‘success’ and ‘failure’ in the program beg questions as to whether an alternative ‘epistemological frame of education’ (Chalmers 1997, p. 67) which locates problems as possibly residing in the curriculum and pedagogy rather than in the failure of individual students is really achievable (Freire 1985). Despite our commitment to an emancipatory and decolonising curriculum at times it was tempting for us to resort to individual ‘psychologized’ explanations of the difficulties being experienced at particular moments in the program (Chalmers 1997). Often the program’s implementation difficulties have been framed as being the student’s problem: ‘their lack of motivation’, ‘their lack of ability’, ‘their confused priorities’, or ‘their abuse or manipulation of cultural values’ (ICMDP 1993 Course Review Notes). While these reasons may count for some of the difficulties experienced at times many of us recognised that the imposition of our own, often unexamined liberal assumptions and traditional education backgrounds may have also contributed.

At this point we began to fully understand and experience the complexities entailed in developing and sustaining a program which could provide students with: ‘high levels of skill and understanding to deal with complex issues and problems experienced in work and community contexts’; and awards which have ‘status and marketability, within both the Aboriginal and the broader community’ (Stringer 1987, p3). It was becoming increasingly necessary to acknowledge and seriously grapple with the logistics of providing the necessary academic, pastoral, economic and political support for students with highly diverse backgrounds achieving these outcomes within the existing constraints of the university context. This situation was made more difficult because as Oxenham and Stringer noted, the course was intended for people:

...whose levels of literacy were on the average, lower than those of most tertiary students, mandating an approach to education which was not based primarily on
essay/written examination processes common in most university programs (1993, p. 4).

Literacy is another area fraught with dilemmas where the issues have re-emerged again and again generating a range of responses among staff, students and other stakeholders. Heath Greville (2000) examines the complexities of teaching literacy in the ICMDP in *Walking a Fine Line: Transforming Literacies for Social Change*.

**Staffing**

Staffing is one of the key yet most problematic, unpredictable and uncontrollable areas of the program. The program commenced in 1989 with fourteen of us involved, nine non-Indigenous staff and five Indigenous staff. Len Barnett was the program coordinator with Darlene Oxenham as Associate Coordinator; Sue Howard was the curriculum facilitator and management lecturer. There were another three lecturers in management, including one with an accountancy background, two lecturers in community development and two in Aboriginal development. Indigenous trainee lecturers were appointed in each of the discipline areas. In addition there were two field support coordinators. I was located in the Pilbara and covered the entire North West; another staff member covered the metropolitan area, South West and Goldfields. Finally, there were two people working on materials development and administrative support.

By June 1992 seven of these staff members had left, including the Coordinator and three Indigenous trainee lecturers. A similar number of new staff were appointed but the significant turnover at such a crucial developmental stage created significant difficulties from an organisational and curriculum development perspective as well as a severe blow to the intended empowerment of the Centre’s Aboriginalisation process (Dudgeon & Stringer 1993). Most academic staff were appointed primarily on the basis of their subject specialisation or discipline background, which brought its own challenges. It became increasingly apparent that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on a commitment to critical emancipatory education, Indigenous self-determination and positive social change in the selection of new staff.

Looking back, the particular configuration of program staff at that time was particularly problematic. Only a few staff members had knowledge about competency-based education, nearly all Indigenous staff members had entered the program in traineeships, most did not have the necessary experience to undertake assessment or workplace support, everyone had to ‘hit the ground running’, irrespective of their prior experience in
teaching in adult education contexts. At the time the situation seemed untenable for staff, students and the future of the program. At its worst, one or two of the staff appointed came in with, and maintained, a high degree of scepticism; their resistance often veiled and legitimated by expressing concerns about the need to provide students with 'a high quality' course and 'not selling students short'. This is not to suggest that these points were not, nor are never valid. Staff members highly enthusiastic and committed to the project held similar concerns. However, these instances highlight the fact that the course was developed amid a high level of scepticism and ambivalence that precipitated a perpetual state of crisis within the program. This was not necessarily a bad thing rather it generated much of the productive, creative energy which has shaped the distinctive decolonising and transformative elements within the program that are part of a more complex discussion developed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

1993 – Redefining ICMDP Vision and Goal Statements

The introduction of the ICMDP practitioner resulted in the need to further redefine the ICMDP curriculum. The development of these new goal statements at the beginning of 1993 was an important transformative strategy in the program. They were as follows:

**Aboriginal Terms of Reference**
Demonstrates conscious understanding of Aboriginal society and culture and its broader social and political contexts, and its implications for ways of working as Indigenous Community Management and Development practitioner towards positive social change and Aboriginal self-determination.

**Community Development Principles and Practice**
Consciously contribute to the empowerment of Aboriginal people to determine future direction for positive social change using community development principles and practices.

**Policy Processes**
Consciously contributes to the empowerment of Aboriginal people through participation in policy processes, so as to achieve positive social change.

**Community Management**
Consciously contributes to the effective management and control of specified projects or activities using appropriate Indigenous Ways to bring about positive social change and improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal people.
Evaluation
Consciously evaluates how well processes and outcomes of policies, programs and projects fit together and contributes to Aboriginal self-determination and positive social change (ICMDP 1994 Goal Statements).

As the Academic Coordinator, my role was to assist Darlene Oxenham in coordinating the development of a revised set of integrated competency statements and elements to enable students as ICMD practitioners to demonstrate how they had achieved these ICMDP goals. The competency statements were informed once again by an analysis of duty statements for Indigenous managers, project officers and liaison officers working in public service positions (levels two to eight) and a range Indigenous community organisations including Land Councils, Resource Agencies and Incorporated community groups (ICMDP 1993 File Notes).

A literature search also helped to identify the competencies for community management and development workers, particularly in Indigenous contexts (Crawford 1989; Kelly & Sewell 1989; Korten 1986) and to inform the multi-disciplinary framework. Texts included Our Future Ourselves (HRSCAA 1990) and A Chance for the Future (HRSCAA 1989); as well as recommendations from relevant policy reviews and CAS research findings (Howard 1988; Stringer 1987). These ideas were considered in light of the newly introduced national competency framework and Australian Standards Framework (ASF) (National Training Board (NTB) 1991). Competencies were also informed and validated by student block, workshop and field support evaluations, informal employer feedback and verbal and written reports from field support, tutors and mentors working with students in their work and community settings (ICMDP 1993 File Notes). Together these various sources informed the program development over the next twelve months as we attempted to make ‘more explicit the critical and transformative strategies in the program together with the necessary skills and values and attributes to be an effective, conscious and ethical practitioner’ (loc.cit).

In each of the discipline areas we attempted to identify the knowledge, understandings, attributes, values and skills underpinning the particular area of competence and to integrate and hold the tensions of the competing elements across the different discipline areas. What we were also trying to do, but had not sufficiently theorised and articulated prior to that time, was develop the competencies and elements so that students were competent at working across competing disciplines. Nevertheless, even without a fully articulated discourse it became apparent that the ability to recognise and work with the tensions and contradictions of the different disciplines was a competence required by
students. These tensions have since been held in the ICMD curriculum. They were/are reflected in the development of the revised competency statements and elements which were referred to by many students, and later some staff, as the ‘little blue bible’ (ICMDP 1994b). The very process of navigating through the competencies and making sense of the statements that actually encompassed a complex theoretical framework was to prove a powerful learning strategy. The skills and capacity to recognise and work with these tensions in making decisions, in implementing program services, in planning projects and activities and in building visions of the future at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface are emphasised and incorporated in the teaching and assessment in the program.

**ICMD Principles and Processes of Learning**

Each successive attempt to address existing curriculum issues would inevitably lead to the emergence of new ones. The widespread acceptance of curriculum changes in March 1993 precipitated the need to revisit our understandings and assumptions about different learning theories and the nature of the learning process and their relevance and appropriateness to meet the particular learning needs, aspirations and priorities of such a culturally diverse student body. The outcomes of this review process also raised questions as to how we were going to implement the new course developments in accordance with existing program principles. I circulated a very Draft Discussion Paper, outlining some of the principles and questions regarding learning and assessment which guided the ongoing development of the ICMDP (ICMDP 29/3/93). These principles encompassed adult and self-directed learning; recognition and respect for the knowledge and understanding required to be an effective practitioner working at the cultural interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts; and a belief that learning is more effective when it is relevant to the student’s own workplace and community reality. Principles of individual and group empowerment and positive social change also provided ‘the basis for both the design and delivery of the course, the roles carried out by staff, and the teaching and assessment approaches used in the ongoing development of the course’ (ICMD 1993; Appendix 5).

Nevertheless, despite this shared commitment to create a decolonising curriculum not all academic staff were in agreement about the roles and responsibilities of teachers within that process. The discussions taking place when we were trying to rewrite the elements of competence revealed disagreement among staff as to whether teachers ought to focus upon the cognitive, affective or experiential aspects of student learning or a combination of all three. Some staff emphasised the importance of teaching students specific content knowledge (the cognitive domain); others were more preoccupied with engaging students
in process oriented learning (the affective domain); while others focused primarily on encouraging students to reflect on their own experience (the experiential domain). Most of us came to believe that an effective and emancipatory curriculum needs a range of teaching/learning approaches to take account of all of these domains.

Different ideas or assumptions underlying different theoretical paradigms (critical, traditional liberal/humanist and instrumental) about the nature of education and learning have influenced aspects of the design, structure and teaching within the ICMDP courses. Throughout emphasis has been given to incorporating specific theoretical frameworks and teaching/learning processes as a means to confront the cultural politics operating within the academy; to avoid the imposition of dominant cultural values upon Indigenous Australians; and, to facilitate processes that enable students to make decisions about the most appropriate theories and practices to incorporate in their contexts to ensure Indigenous interests. The ICMDP teaching/learning processes allow students to theorise about their own and others values, beliefs, attitudes and experiences; and, to enact, evaluate, and if necessary reframe their ideas and decisions in an ongoing action-reflection cycle.

While students needed space to negotiate their own specific learning needs and relate these to their specific work/local contexts, they also needed a coherent theoretical framework and clearly explicated set of goals in which to situate and give meaning to their learning. Students often resisted the idea and promises of self-directed learning (Mezirow 1985). They were sometimes really confused, uncertain or angry with us for urging them to be self-directed while still retaining control over the criteria by which they were ultimately going to be judged. However, we did find that it is possible ‘to be creative in introducing elements of self-directedness into needs assessment, curriculum development, educational process, and evaluation’ (Brookfield 1986, p. 3). Over time we introduced a number of elements related to ‘learning to learn’, ‘facilitating learning’ and ‘action learning’ into the course curriculum. By making these self-directed aspects of learning explicit in the competencies students were able to understand how learning theories and processes contributed to Indigenous self-determination and empowerment, agency and control. Some strategies were introduced to enhance student Indigenous self-determination as well as provide students with a demonstrated agency and control over their learning. One of the strategies, Professional Development Groups (PDGs) was identified as best practice in supporting student learning in 1994 and 1995. Attempts were made to create flexible structures, together with consistent, creative interpretations of institutional policies regarding entry, advanced standing, recognition of prior learning, and
the use of supplementary and deferral assessment. Examples of these program level policies were outlined in the *ICMDP Student Handbook* (ICMDP 1994c) and the guidelines for Board of Examiners (ICMDP 1994 File Notes).

**Reviewing the ICMDP Curriculum Design**

In a sense the curriculum development process was an ongoing attempt to work creatively within the existing university structures, and unforeseen difficulties down the track. The 1994 ICMD curriculum review was developed around questions such as: How can we facilitate a process to enhance the ability of Indigenous students to work from within the constraints of the mainstream institutional framework in order to effect changes within the wider social and political system which will benefit Indigenous people? Can the ICMDP provide a relevant curriculum that will facilitate student competence and capacity to make the system responsive to the needs of people who have historically been forced to the margins? Can this happen without them/us becoming inscribed within the system at the expense of the transformative goals? What are the costs of imposing a normative position? Are we setting students up with unrealistic expectations? Are existing course processes, practices and expectations fair or just? (ICMDP 1994 File Notes).

By 1995, a coherent and culturally relevant curriculum framework was largely in place. The program had sketched the concepts, skills, and attributes of the ICMD practitioner and competencies across the three years of the course and the different learning and assessment sites had been identified. This second restructure represented another important point of change in the program. The following extract from the 1994 re-accreditation document describes the curriculum design as follows:

**Curriculum Design**

Both the Associate Diploma and Bachelor of Applied Science (Indigenous Community Management & Development) courses have adopted a competency-based education approach in curriculum design and delivery. This approach has been chosen to meet the diverse educational needs of Indigenous people from a range of community and organisational settings who seek to obtain the necessary skills and knowledge to more effectively operate in community management and development contexts. Special features in the structure and design of the course include:

(i) The course is operated on a block release basis which maximises the time spent by students in their workplace and community settings and minimises disruption to family, community, and work.
(ii) A competency-based design which takes into account cultural appropriateness in content and process (and professional and academic standards).

(iii) Designed to meet the broad occupational needs of a wide range of employer groups.

(iv) Designed to meet the needs of geographically and culturally diverse student groups.

In summary the program design, content and delivery are highly innovative, flexible, individualised and culturally appropriate. The program provides opportunities for students to integrate their own knowledge, understanding and experiences with newly learned skills and knowledge within an interdisciplinary framework of community management and community development. The process provides an opportunity for students to gain new understandings, formulate their own grounded theories, and establish a practice framework (which includes a code of ethics, principles and practices), to assist people working in community management and development in Indigenous community and organisational settings.

The courses cover four main areas of study considered essential for Indigenous Community Management and Development practitioners. These include management theories and practices, community development processes, and policy development and implementation issues. They also cover an analysis of the main historical, social, political and economic factors and the ways in which they have influenced contemporary Indigenous society.

In the final year of the Bachelor of Applied Science the students engage in an evaluative research project(s) using relevant approaches and criteria to further improve existing practice, processes and outcomes of policies, programs and projects developed and implemented in Indigenous settings (Re-accreditation Document, ICMDP 1994a).

The ICMDP philosophy, principles and aims

The ICMDP philosophy, principles and aims, while foundational to the program's development, have also generated some of the major dilemmas and decisions that have emerged in program's implementation. Even though the program has continued to evolve the core principles and aims are still relevant. The excerpt below prepared for the
Indigenous Community Management and Development Re-accreditation 1994, outlines the program philosophy, principles and aims as follows:

**Philosophy and Principles of ICMDP**

The ongoing development of the ICMDP has been guided by a recognition and respect for:

- individual and group empowerment to bring about positive social change;
- adult and self-directed learning styles;
- cross-cultural knowledge and understanding required to be an effective practitioner;
- the belief that learning is more effective when it is relevant to the student’s own reality (i.e. workplace and community);
- competency-based education design as an appropriate means to achieve the above.

**Program Aims**

Both courses in Indigenous Community Management & Development Program aim to:

1. Recognise and credit the knowledge, skills and understandings Indigenous people bring to the course which are relevant to, and enhance their competence within the discipline areas studied.

2. Further develop the knowledge and competence required by Indigenous people to assume roles in Indigenous organisations and communities and other sectors to bring about a more effective, culturally appropriate and just distribution of services to Indigenous people.

3. Enable people working in management, administrative, leadership and community development positions to increase their knowledge and skills and self-understanding to more effectively contribute to Indigenous self-determination and self-management in all areas in which they work.

**Program Objectives**

Upon successful completion of the Associate Diploma in Indigenous Community Management and Development the Indigenous Community Management and Development practitioner will:
• Demonstrate a commitment to the principles and ethics of Indigenous Community Management and Development practice in community and organisational contexts;

• Apply relevant management theories and practices, community development and policy development and implementation processes in order to improve existing practice, processes and outcomes in Indigenous settings;

• Understand and analyse the main social, political and cultural factors which have impacted on and influenced contemporary Indigenous society and which affect their potential for future development and wellbeing.

Upon successful completion of the Bachelor of Applied Science (Ab'I Comm Mgt & Dev't); in addition to demonstrating the above aims to degree standard, the Indigenous Community Management and Development practitioner will:

• Evaluate the appropriateness of management theories and practices, community development and policy development and implementation processes in order to improve existing practice, processes and outcomes in Indigenous settings (ICMDP 1994a).

1994–95 Producing a Transformative Discourse

By 1994/95 a distinctive transformative discourse, which challenged dominant discourses and practices, was being produced and shared within the ICMDP. Encompassing community management and development discourses within a framework of Indigenous terms of reference had produced a unique counter discourse simultaneously offering a critique of dominant society, and a challenge to enact ideals of justice, equality and rights inherent in the rhetoric of liberal/social democracy. This is outlined in the Course re-accreditation document, which states:

The curriculum framework encourages students to explore many of the management and development issues confronting them in their work within a social action research framework. Students are provided with opportunities to understand and critique existing ideas within the relevant disciplines on the basis of their own experiences and reality. This ensures Indigenous Terms of Reference are taken into account to assist them to overcome some of the difficulties experienced within the wider social and political context and at the same time encourage them to build their own theories (ICMDP 1994a).
This position is based on the belief that people need to understand how the social and political theories both describe and circumscribe the broader social and political context in which they operate in order to more effectively engage in a discursive practice for social change.

As well as forming the basis of the ICMD curriculum this theoretical framework and transformative discourse was increasingly reflected and espoused externally highlighting both the programs and Centre’s commitment to engage in dialogue to influence areas where Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests intersect. This is evident in course materials, conference papers, and formal documents such as the Curtin Quality Audits and Annual Reports for 1993, 1994 and 1995 (Curtin 1993, 1994,1995). An analysis of these documents reveals how the program discourses challenge the limitations of dominant paradigms (Grogan & Walker 1995) and simultaneously embrace the ideals of equality and social justice that are also part of the dominant discourse an idea that is returned to in Chapter Six.

In 1995 the course submission to make changes to the program curriculum and structure was endorsed by the Centre’s Board of Study and approved by the University Academic Council. The program rationale and strategies confirms a sense of the transformative discourse in the ICMDP’s philosophy, principles, aims, objectives and design. The following excerpt in the CAS Annual Report 1994-95 is representative of course descriptions through this time:

The ICMD courses are also consistent with the underlying philosophy and principles of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. The Program is committed to meet the challenge of providing equal access and equity to all students from around Australia and to uphold our commitment to the Centres’ core principles. The ICMDP recognises the significance of cultural differences in Indigenous tertiary education and thus offers culturally appropriate ways of learning consistent with Indigenous learning styles, to achieve the goals of Indigenous Self-determination and to bring about positive social change for Indigenous people. The importance of Indigenous values and standards and ways of doing things is reflected in the teaching methods and program design; students are encouraged to build the knowledge, understanding and skills gained in their work and community experiences into their learning process (CAS 1995).
Ironically, both DETYA and Curtin (1993, 1994, 1995) regarded these decolonising and transformative program innovations as models of best practice in curriculum design, delivery and assessment. In 1993, 1994 and 1995 CAS was recognised as an exemplar of best practice for its innovative curriculum design, course delivery and assessment methods in both the ICMD and ICH undergraduate courses. Doubly ironic however, was the fact that the program’s external recognition was met with a level of internal cynicism and criticism. Although all Quality submissions were subjected to an external validation process supported by documentation there was a perception among a few staff members that the courses was being portrayed too positively and uncritically. We had reached a point where it was difficult for some staff to differentiate the texts for external purposes that focused on strengths, from those operating internally, to the point where reports for external use were used back against the program. Concerns that the program had failed to address some of the complex issues generated yet another crisis of confidence in the program by mid 1995.

This combination of requirements and realities has provided the ongoing impetus to devise a critically reflexive, transformative curriculum and pedagogy that ‘gets it right’ in both Indigenous community and mainstream contexts for individuals and communities (who are often the ‘industry’ stakeholder) — one that provides students with the knowledge and capacity to ‘cut a better deal’ (Nakata 1995c) and ‘navigate the waters’ for a new society (Crawshaw 1993). The incorporation of appropriate and relevant cross-cultural multiliteracies and standards has arisen out of the imperative for students to work and negotiate effectively within and at the interface of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts.

The ambivalence and doubt that was evident at times in staff responses highlights the conserving, dysfunctional imperatives underlying our various attempts to institute more empowering policies, practices, procedures and standards. As Chalmers (1997, p. 67) points out ‘ideology and discourse are mobilized to protect both institutional and individual interests’. She argues that the intersection of ideology, narrative and interpretation is a critical site in the production of racial domination and contestation over whose version of events or actions will triumph in a given situation. Chalmer’s argument has relevance in understanding the power relations at work in developing a culturally inclusive and decolonising curriculum in a site (such as a university) in which dominant paradigms prevail in conservative and potentially destructive as well as productive forms (Crawshaw 1993). These responses at both macro and micro levels have potential costs for Indigenous students and communities reinforcing the importance of positioning the
discourse of ICMD principles and practice at the forefront of all curriculum development within the program.

A crisis of confidence

By the 1995 mid-year Review the course came under renewed criticism and attack. There were considerable differences among ICMDP staff regarding academic standards and the level of rigour within the program. A number of recurring concerns and issues gathered momentum. Literacy issues were high on the agenda. There was a growing need to provide students with literacy skills necessary to meet academic requirements and to pursue opportunities within the wider society. Attempts were made to situate discussions about literacy within the University's communication-in-context policy (Latchem, Parker & Weir 1995). Some staff expressed concerns that literacy was being 'over-privileged' at the expense of other crucial aspects of the curriculum, other staff questioned whether literacy should be taught separately or explicitly and some wanted to pursue a functional rather than critical literacy approach. It was difficult to promote an open and collegial discussion about literacy — feelings and tensions ran high for a while and some staff saw any concerns raised about the level of emphasis as 'an attempt to silence a new literacy agenda'. Overall however, the Review process resulted in some positive outcomes for program change including widespread acceptance of the need for literacy to become more explicit in the curriculum. The struggle since then has been how to successfully implement a 'paradigm shift that moves print literacy from a neutral skill and resituates it in a critical and socio-cultural approach' (Greville 2000, p. 96). As the ICMDP Coordinator Ricky Osborne states in the foreword to *Walking a Fine*, it is an approach to literacy 'that gives primacy and legitimacy to holistic Indigenous realities and desired future directions' (2000, p. ii).

Mandurah 1997 – Back to the drawing board

In December 1997 Darlene Oxenham and I, having both left the ICMDP by then, were invited to give an historic overview of the program at the end of year Review held at Mandurah. We travelled much of the same ground covered in this chapter — highlighting the philosophy, principles, and aims of the program, the rationale for some of the key curriculum decisions and multidisciplinary elements (ICMDP 1997 File Notes). We reiterated the notion of the ICMD practitioner as the pivotal point of the curriculum and pedagogy. We emphasised the development of the theoretical construct of the ICMD practitioner and the integration of Indigenous terms of reference as crucial strategies to engage students in a truly conscious practice drawing together and holding in tension the different, at times potentially oppositional, disciplines (ICMDP 1997 File Notes). Ricky
Osborne emphasised the importance of the ICMD practitioner construct, its link to both the aims and purpose of education and its ‘end-use’ to serve Indigenous interests. Importantly, he recapitulated the place of the course, and the role of the graduate as change agents in bringing about social change for Indigenous Australians individually and collectively, personally and publicly.

Ricky Osborne also emphasised the importance of maintaining a critical approach and ‘further developing a discourse regarding an ethical practice leading to principled, developmental outcomes’ (ICMDP Review, ICMDP 1997 File Notes). Although they bring different perspectives to the ICMDP both Darlene Oxenham and Ricky Osborne have emphasised the need for decolonising language and processes of Indigenous terms of reference to be embedded within the curriculum. They both emphasise the importance of creating space for students to engage in transforming their lives, individually and collectively in their communities, workplace and the wider social contexts within the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface (Oxenham 1999).

The 1997 Review validated a programmatic commitment to the ICMD practitioner construct as a critical and transformative strategy drawing together notions of Indigenous identity, subjectivity and agency to achieve positive social and political change in a range of contexts. The discussions consolidated agreement among staff (including new staff) that the ICMD practitioner construct still provided a powerful means for students to identify and implement strategies to enact social change. By the end of the Review several ICMDP staff claimed that the historical overview had ‘heightened their understanding of the transformative possibilities’ and ‘reinvigorated their commitment to engaging in a critical emancipatory approach’ (ICMDP 1997 File Notes).

From my perspective staff responses throughout the Review discussions validated a key claim in my thesis that the ICMD practitioner construct is a kind of meta transformative strategy providing a language of agency, possibility and subjectivity for students ‘to invent new identities as active, cultural agents for social change’ (Friere 1993, p. xii). We need to continue to seek strategies, processes and new languages/discourses that simultaneously counter oppression and generate new possibilities. The development of such strategies have implications for the program content and disciplines, raising questions about what it is we teach as well as how we teach, aspects of which are covered in the following chapters. Overall these strategies, which are part of a broader project of transformation and decolonisation, create an urgent task for the program to articulate a critical and coherent multi-disciplinary framework.
They also demand that we continuously and reflexively consider which disciplines and content, interpreted through which paradigm, provide these new subjectivities with a ‘postcolonial politics of ethics and compassion in a postmodern world in which subjectivity has become unmoored from its former narratives of social justice’ (Freire 1993, p. xii). Questions central to the ongoing program development still reverberate around how to provide students with opportunities to engage as active subjects who are productive and transformative rather than assimilative or resistive. The following chapters explore key strategies in the ICMDP that attempt to articulate this framework and address these issues and questions.

Although the ICMDP aims and goals have remained relatively consistent since the program’s inception some principles, and the means to achieve them, have come under question at various times. Some staff have questioned whether the program principles and aims and delivery are compatible with the universities shift in focus to greater course flexibility and unit articulation and emphasis on technology and globalisation with students (ICMDP 1997 File Notes). They have questioned whether these principles are still relevant or adequate to address broad shifts in government programs and policies. From this standpoint they argue that concepts such as ‘community management’ and ‘self-determination’ should give way to more entrepreneurial goals and the economic efficiency requirements of community, academy, industry/employer, and government stakeholder groups. Indigenous managers agree there is a need to assist students to respond to these competing demands and interests without abandoning the ICMD principles and discourse. I have suggested that the theoretical construction of the ICMD practitioner who is working at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface in their real lives generates a discourse that is responsive to local/global dynamics while still anchored to the ICMD ethics and principles.

The recognition of the diversity within and between Indigenous community groups is reflected in the local and global dimensions of the program’s curriculum content and processes. Students are encouraged to identify, explore and build on their common political issues within the public sphere at a national level; and at the same time, acknowledge, respect and value different priorities, aspirations and realities of other individuals and groups in their local work, family and community contexts. Acknowledging and attending to the issues related to a politics of difference within the pan Indigenous community as well as between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has helped to shape the very unique and dynamic nature of the curriculum and the way the program has
been structured and delivered (see Gunew & Yeatman 1993). Acknowledging the ‘politics of difference’ is a critical element in any program that attends to issues of social, political and economic justice in multicultural society (Giroux 1992; Peters 1995).

The broader political shifts towards corporatism and globalisation have remained a constant threat to the program. In addition the seduction and comfort of competing traditional education discourses — which appear more transparent, certain, familiar and less vulnerable than critical emancipatory discourses — have also proved a persistent challenge to the curriculum and methods for achieving the program’s principles and aims.

Yet despite these continuous internal and external challenges, the ICMDP principles, aims and objectives have remained consistent and contemporaneous with recent national research regarding Indigenous community and leadership needs (Cranney & Edwards 1998; Walker 2000). The importance and relevance of such programmatic goals are still being asserted within the broader Indigenous community a decade later (Anderson et al. 1998). In 1998 Cranney and Edwards interviewed and consulted with key Indigenous people (many of them ICMDP graduates) around Australia to ascertain Indigenous priorities (Cranney & Edwards 1998, pp. 47–65). Their findings affirm the importance of transformative agency as a critical priority for many Indigenous stakeholders who claim there is a need for Indigenous programs:

To empower Indigenous communities to develop leaders from the communities with advanced skills, knowledge and networks who can effectively contribute to shaping the future for their communities and the nation (op.cit 1998, p. 5).

2001 – New Beginnings or Full Circle?

Over the last few years the Centre has had to make significant changes to deal with emergent external policy and financing issues (discussed in Chapter Seven). The most significant and risky of these changes was the decision to amalgamate those elements of the two competency based programs which share common ground. The practitioner role conception has allowed each program to retain the distinctive disciplinary knowledges, skills and attributes intact while offering units that allow students to learn and demonstrate generic competencies. This academic and program restructuring caused considerable unease and resistance among staff deeply committed to the distinctive goals and aims of each of the programs. Dr Bill Genat (who had worked across both programs) was appointed to facilitate the integration of the ICMDP and ICH in accordance with the following principles:
• Respect for Indigenous Terms of Reference and the Indigenous life experience, knowledge and values brought to the courses by Indigenous students:
• Social justice and the rights of Indigenous peoples;
• Educational objectives and strategies that are directly relevant to the student's life experience, community and workplace;
• Educational objectives and strategies that empower Indigenous students to address inequities and contribute to positive social change;
• Educational objectives and strategies that foster solidarities and identities of Indigenous peoples through participatory and emancipatory processes and practices;
• Educational objectives and strategies that foster respect for the diversity of Indigenous peoples (CAS 2001, 2002).

The review process carried out over a two-year period reasserted the strengths and appropriateness of utilising the distinctive hybrid competency-based design and incorporating adult-learning principles emphasising self-directed, reflective experiential learning. A similar assertion was made in a CIRC Discussion Paper that draws on the experiences of an Indigenous colleague and ICMDP graduate to claim that the ICMDP offers a highly integrated, 'hybrid discipline' that recognises and gives space for Indigenous knowledge and methodologies (Collard et al. 1999, p. 16).

Over the last decade critical questions along the lines of those that shaped the 1994 course review, have provided crucial direction (and also caused agonising deliberations) throughout the course development. They are also fundamental to this thesis in theorising about social change for the empowerment and future benefit of Indigenous peoples. At the same time however, an enthusiasm and hope for this transformative, decolonising endeavour does not alleviate some of the other important issues and challenges in trying to achieve such transformative goals nor the need to remain constantly vigilant to the risks of establishing such a project.

For some staff the course appears ‘too complex’, ‘very ambitious’ or ‘pretty weird’ (ICMDP 1996b, Video 2). At times the emotional and theoretical complexity and the practical day-to-day difficulties of ‘trying to get it right’ have left academic staff members feeling inadequate, uncertain and ambivalent. Many ICMDP staff have often felt like throwing their hands in the air and walking away — some do! Others have continued to struggle with the ideas and the everyday practice, stopping once in a while to celebrate those
moments where students confirm that the course ‘has changed their lives’ and ‘opened up new possibilities and hope beyond their expectations’ and ‘made a real difference’ for themselves and within their communities (ICMDP File Notes 1996-2001; Wilson 1998).

As one staff member said:

  Despite its difficulties I believe this is still one of the most important courses happening (Personal communication, July 2002).
Chapter Four

Appropriating Competency Based Education

The CAS courses have diverged in many important respects from the competency models that have currency in Australia. In contrast to mainstream approaches both courses have developed a role construct of a competent professional practitioner who is both skilled and committed to work as an agent of social change for Indigenous people in their work and community contexts (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 3).

Chapter Overview

The above quote is from a conference paper delivered by a colleague and I on behalf of CAS at the Global Competencies Conference in Sydney 1995, sponsored by our key funding body, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). I have chosen this introductory quote because it reveals the studied/strategic positioning that CAS deployed throughout the early 1990s in asserting the right to have control over the curriculum and the competencies to be taught. The quote also alludes to the decolonising intent of the programs as well as legitimating and professionalising the transformative agency of the practitioners.

It is not my intention in the analysis that follows to either establish an oppositional position between traditional education approaches versus competency or outcomes based education approaches, or to suggest that only competency based education (CBE) can serve Indigenous interests and aspirations. Rather it is to chart how the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) has been able to productively exploit particular aspects of CBE to sustain Indigenous terms of reference as the primary determinant driving key curriculum decisions. I show how CAS and the Indigenous Community Management & Development Program (ICMDP) have been able to work transformatively with the gaps and contradictions in the liberal discourses and policies of educational and social reform underscored by the industrial, micro economic agenda deployed by bureaucracy and other state institutions in promoting CBE at the time. By explicating the principles and flawed assumptions and problematics that underpinned narratives of social justice, equality and equity the Centre has been able to rework these in positive ways. As already discussed the ICMDP is one of the programmatic strategies adopted by CAS to meet the diverse needs, aspirations and interests for both Indigenous individuals and communities.
While not without its difficulties, the approach developed by the ICMDP has proved appropriate and highly effective in achieving positive outcomes both in academy and in students’ work and community contexts.

There is no doubt that the introduction of CBE across a range of disciplines and professions impacts on Indigenous students and their communities in both negative and positive ways (Kirkby 1993; Grogan & Walker 1995; Oxenham & Stringer 1993). This reality brings the CBE debate into the domain of cultural politics — as such it requires a critical examination of issues beyond simply defending the assumptions underlying the educational, social and political status quo or blinding assertions of the benefits of CBE.

In Australia as overseas, CBE engenders multiple and interconnected contestations surrounding different discourses and understandings about education and training. These include the roles and responsibilities of the state, the university, and corporate/industry sectors in determining and delivering both, and the qualities, skills and competence of the ideal teacher and graduate. It is not surprising then, that in the fallout surrounding this debate in Australia a number of questions and concerns have emerged regarding the appropriateness of a competency-based approach in Indigenous higher education. I discuss how the ICMDP has addressed these concerns and adapted the CBE approach so that it serves as a transformative strategy despite its bureaucratic, economic rationalist connotations and associated discourses.

As the criticisms by Kemmis (1994) and Kirkby (1993) reveal there are a range of well-grounded reasons for remaining suspicious about CBE particularly those normative and repressive bureaucratising elements that could prove inimical to Indigenous self-determination. I show how the Centre, through the ICH and ICMD programs has developed a hybrid competency-based approach which, combined with a unique on campus/onsite delivery model, has enabled both programs to work with students from some of the most remote areas of the Indigenous community, and for whom the university had previously been an untenable option. Primarily my focus is the ICMDP.

This chapter discusses the standpoint adopted by the Centre, in relation to these issues, to show how we have been able to work with both the positive and negative implications for the distinctive transformative and decolonising aims of the program. As Chapter Three revealed, attempts to avoid the more modernist and colonising aspects of CBE influenced the decisions and actions throughout the program’s development and contributed to the hybrid nature of the competency based approach deployed in the program. Paradoxically,
the emphasis of CBE upon roles, competencies and outcomes has provided opportunities to attend to Indigenous praxis; positive social change in local community and organisational contexts; theorising about Indigenous issues and ways of working and Indigenous education in highly productive ways as opposed to merely reproductive ways. This particular ‘constructivist’ CBE approach to curriculum recognises the student’s active involvement in the deconstructive and reconstructive elements of knowledge production and meaning making in their learning and demonstration of competence (Brooks & Brooks 1993). This critical constructivist approach, which encompasses contextual/situational specific statements and elements, together with the theoretical ICMD practitioner ‘role construct’ — whose engagement with each of the competencies is negotiated in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference discourse — comprise the key transformative strategies within the ICMDP.

**Locating the ICMD within the CBE debate**

Linking CBE with Indigenous self-determination was always going to be a potentially dangerous strategy. McConaghy, for instance claims that competency-based education within Australia’s national reform agenda needs to be read ‘in light of the long history of constructions of ‘Indigenous in/competency’ (2000, p. 178), specifying a range of normalising standards to further assimilate. I have already discussed the ongoing ambivalence and confusion that existed among academic staff within the ICMDP regarding the competency-based nature of the curriculum and concerns about the validity of curriculum and the legitimacy of the learning process within the academy for students, employer and stakeholders (often one and the same group). At the same time, Indigenous academic and management staff, aware of the possibilities of CBE to meet Indigenous interests, were more concerned with the threat to the autonomy of the program in the face of debate about the competency-based movement sweeping Australia (Collins 1993). The issue for the ICMDP then was, whether the strategies devised could avoid the new wave of colonialism and corporatism driving CBE identified by Kemmis (1994), Kirkby (1993) and others.

**External threats**

Within months of the launching of the ICMDP in January 1989, the NTB also launched its competency-based agenda to the Australian employment and education sector. It is useful to consider the implications of the emerging, complex issues of the national fulfil training and education (CBT/E) debate for the ICMDP. The external imposition of standards underpinning the national competence framework could place severe restrictions on the ICMD and Indigenous Community Health (ICH) programs and thus limit
those elements of the programs that located control within an Indigenous domain (Grogan & Walker 1995). At the same time it was an opportunity to negotiate for the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous terms of reference into the governmental framework and mainstream professions. Although a risky business, with potential for the intent to be misinterpreted as furthering the culturalist project, it was a strategy aimed at incorporating and legitimating Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into the dominant policies and program in an attempt to transform those discursive practices that were inimical to, or negating of, Indigenous interests and aspirations and contributing to Indigenous social disadvantage.

Internal threats

While the Centre attempted to navigate the turbulence of the wider CBE debate a deeper current was running through the ICMDP, and indeed across the Centre. While the broader debate illuminated some of the more crucial issues and problematics pertaining to CBE the different readings and responses by staff towards these issues made it difficult to reach any shared understanding or agreement regarding their implications for the ICMDP. By 1993 there was considerable dissatisfaction with what had become a distinctive competency-based, ‘critical constructivist’ and community-oriented outcomes-based program. There was also a growing awareness of the burdensome administrative and surveillance elements required to operate effectively; and concerns as to whether we could really manage the tensions and maintain the transformative and decolonising agenda in the midst of such competing and controlling technical and administrative imperatives.

Questions underpinning the discussion within the program went along the following lines. Does CBE have anything distinctive to offer Indigenous Australians over traditional education programs? In what ways does CBE provide transformative, decolonising potential? What are the implications for practitioners, teachers and other stakeholders associated with the Centre's CBE programs? Can CBE assist in creating a distinctive professional practice for Indigenous practitioners that contributes positively to wider society while remaining non-assimilationist? What is the relationship between critical pedagogy, critical theory and CBE? In what ways does the ICMDP program intersect with/share or move beyond the problems identified within the CBE movement in Australia? Can the experience of ICMDP add positively to the debate on competence? Does the ICMDP counter/address claims that CBE is a new form of colonial assimilation?
The degree of Indigenous control in establishing and negotiating the competencies and standards intersecting/interfacing with the broader community is the key determinate in answering such questions.

**Issues in the CBE debate**

Advocates in the 1970s argued that CBE is ‘a powerful tool to reconceive and reorganize a curriculum’ and a means to develop ‘a new conception of the liberal arts or the professions’ (Gamson 1979, p. 257). However, critics of CBE were then, as now, cynical of the potential for CBE to move beyond a conserving and conservative governmental agenda to enhance their social reform agenda.

Ian Reid in *Higher Education or Education for Hire?* suggests that over the last decade the discourse of economic rationalism has permeated institutional and governmental policies and processes and contributed to a significant transformation and corporatisation in the higher education sector (1996). The debate over CBE is situated within the context of this discourse, policy and institutional and structural change context. And it is also in this site that the ICMDP is situated.

Several writers (Kemmis 1994; Kirkby 1993; Inglis 1989) have presented strong arguments to show that the Federal Government’s justification for the widespread introduction of competency-based education programs within the university sector has been made on predominantly political and economic grounds rather than on the basis of academic or social reform. However, by incorporating a social justice discourse within the reform agenda the government has also introduced moral and philosophical dimensions to justify changes in all education sectors, which both confounds and masks some of the more concerning elements. The governmental discourse of educational reform has generated conflicting responses within universities regarding selection and entry procedures, graduate outcomes and accreditation and articulation with (Training and Further Education) TAFE awards and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Most of the potential for reform was met with scepticism.

As Foley and Morris (1995) point out, the ongoing tensions of the state’s role in both the economy and social justice invariably favour the economy and lead to an ‘increasing professionalisation and bureaucratisation’; a ‘domination of the “soft” humanist framework’; and lack of critical awareness of the field (p. 113). Their assessment is supported and added to by others (for example, McConaghy 2000) highlighting the problematic implications for Indigenous education.
Further, the university sector were concerned at the extent to which the government's micro-economic reform agenda was dictating the higher education agenda. There was concern that university education might be reduced to an atomised array of occupational objectives, reminiscent of the scientific management approach developed by Frederick Taylor in 1911. This Tayloristic approach was adapted by Ford in 1940s, influenced management in the US armed services in the 1970s, was critiqued in 1980s and re-surfaces in Australia in the early 1990s. The Curtin University Academic Board's response to the Finn Report (Australian Education Council Review Committee (AECRC) 1991) on CBE notes '[t]he weight of its sometimes simplistic Taylorist solutions to complex social, educational, and industrial problems should not determine discussion but rather, add dimensions for consideration' (Curtin University of Technology (CUT) 1991, p. 6). By 1994 Curtin was obviously implicated by CBE with several professional bodies linked with the national standards bodies. CAS was invited to participate in developing a professional development handbook on competencies for university staff (Liston, Martins, Philpot & Walker 1993).

There was an ironic twist in this situation given that in 1988 CAS had to argue strongly for the acceptance of fulfil approach in establishing the Indigenous Community Management and Development associate degree and degree course at Curtin, resorting to culturally appropriate learning processes, cultural difference and social justice in order to assert and obtain a distinctive course committed to Indigenous self-determination (ICMDP 1988, 1989). This argument had to be repeated in 1990 with the establishment of the ICH course. Nevertheless the University did approve both programs, and has endorsed their subsequent re-accreditation in 1995, 1997 and 2001; and in doing so, has given mainstream legitimation and recognition to Indigenous ways knowing, being and doing. This is an argument that we have been required to make to industry stakeholders over the years.

This is an important argument because throughout the debate the contestation in the University has been over academic standards and potential for their erosion through the incorporation of CBE. Universities have been criticised as being elitist — lacking accountability to the wider community and conserving the status quo at the cost of a more just and equitable society (Chappell, Gonczi & Hager 1995). Traditional education norms and disciplinary methods have generally been upheld as a standard by which to highlight the deficits of CBE without critically questioning the efficacy of the values, assumptions or outcomes of either educational approach for students and society including Indigenous communities who have historically been disadvantaged and marginalised by them.
From this perspective Curtin University needs to be seen as a forerunner within the university sector in recognising and endorsing Indigenous knowledge production and supporting the goals of Indigenous self-determination. In a sense ICMDP has been able to show that CBE, broadly conceived, can be responsive to the dynamics of the work environment.

**Social justice reform**

In the early 1990s the Federal Government acknowledged the need for educational and social reform on the basis that some student groups were being excluded or negatively affected by existing institutional policies, processes and practices. Research (Finn 1991; Mayer 1992) had shown that traditional course prerequisites, content and structure and the emphasis on entry levels, time served, and staff qualifications have had a negative influence on access and success rates of particular groups. The *Fair Chance for All* policy (DEET & NBEET 1990) also gave relevance to education and social reform within the CBE debate. Some strands of CBE were posited as a means to enable all Australians to achieve greater access and equity to education and employment opportunities. Kinsman (cited in Chappell et al. 1995, p.182) believes that CBT/E is ‘attractive for those working within the humanist paradigm because of the variety of ways it supports access and equity’. Among these Kinsman includes explicit learning goals, outcomes and assessment criteria, flexible entry and exit points, and recognition of existing competence.

The emphasis on outcomes that enable students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in relation to stated criteria regardless of where they acquired those skills also strengthened the social reform agenda (Ashenden & Hannan 1996). Traditional university mainstream entrance requirements and practices also tend to exclude those Indigenous people whose education background and workplace experiences often differ from the wider society. These same processes also disregard Indigenous knowledges and ways of doing things that may be essential to achieve Indigenous interests and ensure more appropriate and effective outcomes in Indigenous contexts (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000).

For the Centre CBE derives its transformative potential because competencies can be specified so that students can demonstrate knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts, methods and principles considered integral to a professional role. Enmeshing a critical theory perspective with an Indigenous standpoint, the experience of the ICMDP confirms that it is possible to effectively incorporate those particular knowledges, understandings and skills (cultural and contextual) that may be highly valued and tacitly recognised in the workplace (especially in Indigenous contexts) yet not necessarily
defined and/or assessed or given adequate recognition in formal accredited or university courses. This frequently occurs for Indigenous people in identified positions in organisations, agencies and industries that are located at the interface with Indigenous contexts (for example Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), Aboriginal Education Workers (AEWs), Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs), Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs), Aboriginal Police Aides and so on). This lack of recognition can be particularly limiting for Indigenous people, especially because skills currently recognised and valued in the workplace are not defined in a culturally inclusive way that supports diverse Indigenous priorities (Heywood, Gonzi & Hager 1992; McConaghy 2000). Current employment policies, workplace practices and professional standards have an implicit bias in knowledge and skills recognition and a failure to teach the necessary competencies (skills, understandings and knowledge) to perform important roles in society. This can lead to a failure to recognise skills specific to cultural groups as well as failure to acknowledge the importance of teaching cultural competence across all groups. This has serious implications for those professions that require competencies and attributes for working in cross-cultural contexts within multicultural, postcolonial societies (see for example the discussion on the eighth competency in Foley 1995, p. 192).

In many respects most traditional university disciplines/curriculum unintentionally and uncritically contribute to this value bias in the professional and academic arena. This issue is now widely recognised by key stakeholders. In September 2000, Professor Twomey, the Chair of the AVCC (and Vice Chancellor of Curtin University) acknowledged the need for strategies to overcome this problem in professions and industries through the commitment to have all universities incorporate Indigenous Studies across all disciplines (reported in The Western Australian, Saturday, September 16, 2000, p. 8). However, in its attempts to implement this initiative, the Centre has experienced both passive and active resistance often justified across the University on economic and academic grounds. According to CAS staff (Collard et al. 1999) these responses tend to mask a pervasive racism within the academy with devastating consequences for Indigenous educational outcomes (Sonn, Bishop & Humphries 1997; Walker 1998), stalling the possibilities for broader social change.

Most professional occupations attach greater emphasis to skills acquired through formal education rather than through life and work experience. Identifying the attributes, values and capabilities required for a specified role in a particular context can be a way of developing curriculum and assessment processes that enhance the quality of professional practice and overcome existing biases and difficulties. Arguably then, deploying an
Chapter Four: Appropriating Competency Based Education

educational approach that provides the opportunity to redefine capacity and enhance access opportunities can be read as a decolonising strategy in Indigenous contexts. However, it is risky and subject to collapse into the discursive practices of culturalism and radicalism identified by McConaghy (2000).

In both the ICMD and ICH programs social and political understandings, skills and competencies considered to be necessary prerequisites for decolonisation and social change are incorporated into the professional role specification for the ICMD practitioners and Indigenous health practitioners. The competencies and performance criteria require students/practitioners to demonstrate the integration of disciplinary, cultural and contextual knowledges and understandings within an Indigenous terms of reference framework so that real life everyday issues and problems are identified and solutions are implemented, evaluated and reflected upon in accordance with Indigenous principles, processes and priorities. As Chapter Five attests the focus on outcomes can result in highly constructive knowledge production, generation and application in the real world and hence contribute to genuine educational and social reform.

For CAS educational reform around issues of knowledge production, assessment and legitimation is inextricably tied with social justice and cultural politics. The 1989 ICMDP accreditation document states that ‘Competency-based design requires that the performances are actually demonstrated as far as possible in the real world to the standards required and under the conditions required’ (ICMDP 1989, p. 3). The standards and conditions incorporate academic disciplinary knowledge and the cultural, contextual and technical knowledge, skills and attributes required to understand, negotiate and deal effectively and ethically with employer and community dynamics at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface to attain positive outcomes (ICMDP 1989; Greville 2000; McPhee & Walker 2001; Nakata 2002b). Many of the tensions and dilemmas in the ICMDP are about determining how to manage the power relations and cultural politics of this ‘real world’.

These competencies enhance students’ capacity to identify, take into account and transform the multiple, complex and diverse social, cultural, economic, political, historical and contemporary realities of the ‘real worlds’ in which Indigenous people work and live. However, this requires an ongoing dialogue about the standards and conditions of assessment that meet Indigenous interests while simultaneously avoiding both assimilationist and soft cultural pluralist agendas. The issues that arise in trying to maximise student’s skills and understandings to compete for mainstream opportunities
and meet Indigenous individual and collective agendas have remained an ongoing item in course development and implementation.

Although both programs have been able to define and specify competency and appropriate elements of CBE in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference, many of us have been conscious and uneasy that in doing so we are — as Kemmis (1994, p.9.) has observed of Leo Bartlett’s (1992) attempts to redescribe teacher competencies in a more progressive way — still conceding the legitimacy of the discourse and conceptual framework of competencies and system of surveillance and regulation. In adopting elements of CBE the Centre is seeking to maintain control over rather than engage in ‘compromise and appeasement’ (Kemmis 1994, p. 9)) with regulatory bodies determining Indigenous professional practice.

**CBE and competing reform agendas**

The linking of fulfil education and training (CBT/E) with the federal government's economic, political and social reform agenda occurred in the late 1980s in response to findings and recommendations of a number of reports into Australia's education and employment situation (Finn 1991, Mayer 1992). The push for social and micro-economic reforms continued to gather momentum in the early 1990s. Encompassed within the social reform agenda are recommendations for greater access and equity for all groups previously disadvantaged by existing education and employment structures. This included the provision of equal opportunity through the removal of barriers to enable previously disadvantaged groups to participate effectively within the university sector. At the same time, the micro-economic reform embraces the ideals of award restructuring linked to the competence (and hence greater productivity) of the worker, to promote a greater efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace (see Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) 1999).

Interestingly while universities are part of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) CBE was introduced nationally with minimal university involvement in the formulation of the frameworks, policies and institutional mechanisms for the development, implementation, monitoring and review of CBE standards. For example, there was no representation by the universities on the Finn Committee, despite its implications for higher education. Bodies such as the Industry Employment and Training Councils (IETCs) and the National and Overseas Occupational Skills Register (NOOSR) established in 1989 to determine, and possibly perform, various functions such as the development and accreditation of an industry derived standards framework for a wide range of professional and para-
professional occupations were comprised mainly of industry stakeholders (Masters & Curry 1990). NOOSR was established as ‘a significant element in the Government’s National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia’ to develop procedures and encourage professions to develop standards to recognise professional qualifications ‘based on non-discriminatory assessments and national competency standards’ (Preston & Walker 1993, p. 121).

The threat of external influence over university curriculum content, standards and processes resided in NOOSR’s role in overseeing the development of national professional competency standards to give formal recognition to overseas graduates’ skills and awards. Although the National Training Board (NTB) Policy and Guidelines stated that it was between the professions and higher education institutions ‘to discuss and establish the relationship between these standards and the education provided by these institutions’ (NTB 1991, p. 54) it was widely accepted that the establishment of the NTB and NSOOR would have major implications for the university sector. Government reassurances that the role of the IETCs was to determine standards for private training providers and/or TAFE and not universities were received with hesitation by some industry and university stakeholders. The AVCC was equally sceptical that the new bodies would not encroach into the university sector with sound reason (Reid 1996). Some argued that in the longer term, the standards determined by NOOSR would apply to the professions generally and therefore would have implications for universities (Heywood et al. 1992). These concerns were validated by the fact that by 1994 some professional degrees (accountancy, engineering, nursing) required university graduates to be technically competent to certain industry prescribed standards and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding in relevant discipline areas.

As Kemmis points out the establishment of bodies such as the NTB, IETCS and NOOSR in Australia suggests a government machinery being galvanised into action to manage, monitor and control the education sector (1994). In addition the restructuring of education with employment and training (DET to DEET to DEETYA to DEST) has strengthened the links between economic rationalism and education at the micro level (ACIRRT 1999; Crough & Wheelwright; 1982; Pusey 1991; Reid 1996; Soucek 1992). These authors show how government policies and ideological discourses underpinning CBT/E have resulted in the establishment of a range of interrelated mechanisms that have forged a link between CBE and greater governance and control over universities. For example the establishment of Australian Standards Framework (ASF) (now the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)) defines the level of skill required to match various levels
of award from certificates to higher degrees. This has implications for universities with respect to issues of vertical articulation of accreditation, credit transfer and entry. In the triennium 1993 to 1995 DEET Quality Audits required universities to provide evidence to demonstrate their commitment to greater equity and access through RPL mechanisms. Since 1995 DETYA annual auditing procedures require similar evidence. The West Review (1998) Learning for Life, Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, highlights the need for stronger links and articulation between the VET and university sector, greater governance and accountability and a student-centred framework. These mechanisms arguably strengthen the rationale for competency-based training and education within the university sector and constitute an increase in governmental control, a distortion of the purpose and an erosion of the quality of education (Kemmis 1994).

However, as McConaghy (2000) has also observed, while the RPL system has merit it is still linked to the national competency standards. And, because some of the competencies to be credentialled may be irrelevant or inappropriate for the disadvantaged groups intended to benefit, it still ‘suffers from the same flaws as the standardised system to which it has been linked’ (op.cit, p. 180). Importantly, because the Centre is responsible for specifying the competencies to be given RPL it is able to avoid this serious limitation.

**Negotiating ideological and structural limitations**

The fact that both the government policies framework and the theoretical debate about competence based education and training in Australia are ideologically charged has both theoretical and practical implications for the ICMDP. The government's tendency to attempt to solve problems through ideology and rhetoric also creates the capacity for governments '...to absorb oppositional, counter-hegemonic movements' (Wexler 1987 cited in Lather 1991, p. xx). This capacity and tendency is not always intentional, but can simply reflect the machinations of language and discourse as evident in the government’s dealings with CBT/E in Australia. This ideological tendency and absorbent assimilationist capacity of government makes the kinds of strategies in which the Centre is engaged incredibly risky, with the potential to be a negative, erasing and diluting process if they are read only from the culturalist and anthropological standpoints which dominate mainstream discursive formations revealed by McConaghy (2000) and Nakata (2000b).

However, this thesis suggests the incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference and Indigenous standpoints within engagement and negotiations with dominant discourse can also become a positive, decolonising and transformative process. As a strategy it requires the recognition and legitimation of the indissoluble qualities of Indigenous rights
as an essential requisite to achieve productive or transformative outcomes as opposed to simply disrupting or resisting assimilationist elements. Moreover, in putting forward the Centre and ICMDP position Rob McPhee and I have argued that recognition of these rights, grounded in a human rights framework, can help to convey a re-imagined future (McPhee & Walker 2001) rather than reduce such negotiations to the short term gains, resentment and ambivalence which inhabit the various forms of culturalism (McConaghy 2000).

A second related concern for both programs and CAS in deploying CBE as a decolonising strategy concerned the possible structural limitations through the establishment and imposition of the national standards framework. There were serious concerns that the specification of competencies and standards within the health, management and public services professions and community incorporation and organisations could prescribe and circumscribe the nature of both the ICMDP and the ICH practitioner roles. Both roles embody competencies of problem solving, cultural brokerage, community development, policy formulation, implementation, evaluation and research in Indigenous contexts. While the ICMDP competencies are arguably consonant with generic public service competencies without forfeiting Indigenous interests, the ICH has been substantially more constrained by the external imposition of standards by the national, state and territory standards framework for Indigenous Health Workers. These standards developed by representatives of nursing colleges, TAFE, government health departments and industry bodies (ISAs) emphasise clinical competencies (which are crucial) with limited regard for the interpersonal and context specific competencies which support Indigenous interests and issues in changing social realities (The National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Review, CIRC, Centre for Educational Research and Evaluation Consortium (CEREC) & Jojari 1999).

Despite the extensive consultation and negotiation with Indigenous community groups and health organisations in determining the ICH initial competencies, the Health Department and other organisations in Western Australia do not fully recognise the CAS associate degree and degree qualification within their career pathways for health workers because it differs from the national, territory and state competency standards frameworks (Atkinson 2000; Personal communication with CAS staff member).

This situation confirms the risky business in which the Centre is engaged and the power relations and colonial tendencies still operating through exclusionary tactics (Foucault 1980; Mehta 1997) which serve to invalidate Indigenous knowledges and capacities. As
one senior Indigenous staff member observed in response to the WA Health Worker Training Review (Atkinson 2000)

These findings in the report don’t really come to grips with, aren’t really about appropriate competency standards.....
In fact — it confirms for me what we already know — that the Department still hasn’t taken on board the fact that Indigenous health clinics in communities need a different kind of empowered health professional if things are going to change.
Simply adding a few more modules and clinical skills on isn’t what we are about …there are already health worker courses at Marr Mooditj that can do that,
This is a university degree…. we are on about changing policy, managing clinics; being able to work with families holistically…we are on about primary health care...
The report should be challenging the Department why they don’t employ our graduates at higher levels of policy.
There are other politics here....

While there may also be other politics operating within Indigenous contexts it is evident that externally imposed standards and decisions have arguably adversely affected student enrolments and individual student’s career situations. This situation can be read as both revealing the role of Ideological State Apparatus (ISAs) in transformational frameworks (Hodge & Mishra 1991), and as the way colonial discourses and practices work to prescribe/circumscribe legitimacy, epistemic authority and disciplinary capacity (Foucault 1970; 1978; McConaghy 2000).

**CBE - a strategy for Indigenous educational and social transformation**
The ICMD and ICH programs are examples where CBE has been deliberately deployed to achieve educational and social transformation. Despite the many curriculum development and implementation difficulties experienced, CBE has enabled both programs to gain ‘a new conception’ of the respective professions in which student/practitioners work and the roles to work effectively and ethically in very diverse contexts (McPhee & Walker 2001; Walker 1997b). Curriculum development in these programs has moved beyond developing competency outcome statements in community management, community development and community health. Rather it has involved: creating culturally specific
role constructs; analysing the nature (specific knowledge and attitudes) of occupations which contribute to the goals of Indigenous control and self-determination and social wellbeing; and, developing competencies to enhance the transformative potential in policy formulation, implementation, strategic futures, community management and development required to achieve these goals, interests and aspirations individually and collectively. Curriculum development in the ICMDP has also involved identifying skills, attitudes and knowledges that have relevance for Indigenous peoples working in a broad spectrum of positions and occupations at the interface between, within and across Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts.

The discourse of Indigenous terms of reference has informed curriculum decisions and reformed the more suspect, potentially colonising elements of the hybrid CBE approach deployed. The focus has always been about ensuring an Indigenous space. Competencies and performance criteria have been specified to integrate, recognise and value local cultural and contextual knowledge, understandings and practices of the particular groups as valued forms of knowledge contributing to competence in a particular professional area (ICMDP 1994, 1995). The importance of recognising and incorporating Indigenous knowledges within the professions is now widely acknowledged (Cajete 1994; Quiroz 1999; Semali & Kincheloe 1999).

The ICMDP competencies encompass multi-disciplinary and theoretical standpoints. The elements in the ICMDP curriculum framework incorporate relevant aspects of instrumental, humanist and critical theory in the ICMD curriculum that are generally regarded as distinct and contradictory or competing frameworks and corresponding practices (Chappell et al. 1995; Kemmis 1994). Yet taken together, this combination of theoretical positions encompasses a comprehensive range of skills, knowledge and understanding for ICMD practitioners to be competent, effective, ethical and critically reflective in their practice.

The development of curriculum discourses also grows out of what is required of the ICMD practitioner in effecting change in their social, community and work contexts. Both the ICMD curriculum and pedagogy are designed to interrogate and integrate management and community development processes on Indigenous terms of reference. There was widespread agreement among ICMDP staff regarding the importance of acknowledging and maintaining the tensions between the different standpoints and discourses comprising the ICMDP theoretical framework underpinning the curriculum. Heath Greville confirms
the critical positioning as a consequence of the interactivity between the different standpoints and discourses:

…for example the discourse of community development (built on principles of participatory democracy and social justice) provides a position from which to critique management discourse (built on ‘apolitical’ imperatives of efficiency and effectiveness) and public policy discourses (derived from strategic notions of ‘the common good’, amongst others). Each of these discourses is in turn critiqued through the discourse of Indigenous cultural values and protocols. Aspects of this four-way critique are again explicit curriculum competencies. Critical positions thus inform the ‘inclusiveness’ of the curriculum.

Multiple critical positions have enabled the curriculum to avoid the tendency of the ‘politics of liberation’ to operate around a simple cultural politics built on the binary relations between One (oppressor) and Other (oppressed) (McCormack 1991, p. 194) which eclipses the diversity and complex politics within the Indigenous domain itself, and similarly reduces ‘white’ or ‘European’ thinking to a simplified stereotype (Greville 2000, p. 84-85).

The ICMDP transformational framework acknowledges the complexity of the cultural politics of difference, and the need to incorporate processes to problematise, dialogue, and negotiate around this difference within the curriculum in order to initiate genuine change (McPhee & Walker 2001, Oxenham 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Greville 2000).

Competencies have been written so that students are able to demonstrate how they have incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing with relevant discourses as described above. Several other studies in adult education and/or organisational development lend support to our experience that discursive processes (which can in turn be reflected as competencies) can be established to enable students to engage in critical, ‘double looped’ learning (Marsick 1987; Mezirow 1990; Schon 1983; Winter 1990, 1992). These competencies can be stated as performances with ‘behavioural indicators’ or criterion that reflect very complex levels of thinking, such as the synthesis of theoretical information and the evaluation of situations and events in order to perform in a more empowered and proactive way (Howard 1985, 1988; Greville 2000; Walker 1993; Winter

3 Note Gee, Hull and Lankshear’s critique of the incorporation of the language of community development into the discourse of fast capitalism, as new management discourses have incorporated ‘participatory’ and ‘bottom-up’ models (Gee, Hull & Lankshear 1996).
Competencies can also be written so that students are required to demonstrate specific skills as well as particular attributes such as compassion, understanding or ethical reasoning. What is at stake in Indigenous education is the right to determine the competencies required as well as the curriculum content, teaching and learning and assessment processes employed to demonstrate that competence (Grogan & Walker 1995). All of these aspects are crucial because they provide the space to overcome some of the more problematic concerns regarding the over reliance on vocational skills. Nevertheless, these arguments still engender criticisms as to how one can judge compassion, ethics, empathy and so on. In addition as McConaghy points out, CBE also engenders criticisms that it ‘objectifies performance through the separation of the performer from the performance’ (2000, p. 178).

The ICMDP addresses these concerns both in the content and process of specifying and demonstrating competencies in terms of the characteristics and behaviours required of people (in this instance ICMD practitioners) rather than ‘the self-preserving traditional approach of analysing elements of a job’ (Hooghiemstra 1992, p. 27). Rather than objectifying performance the competencies actually provide the space for the students to engage with, embody and negotiate to transform their dynamic social realities. This is consistent with McConaghy’s suggestion that ‘[w]hen identity is grounded in dynamic material realities we are better able to accommodate notions of subjectivity as performative, rather than prescribed’ (2000, p. 122). In a sense it is the incorporation in the competency statements of this notion of dynamic constructed identity always being negotiated that overcomes the reification and objectification of practitioner performance. The next chapter discusses the links between, and transformative potential of, the roles, identities and subjectivities of participants/practitioners/students.

**CBE as a contested site in Indigenous Education**
These concerns have created both a crisis of legitimacy within the program at various points and the impetus to explore solutions. In fact, as this thesis shows each of the competing discourses regarding competency-based, traditional and critical education approaches have influenced the distinctive transformative elements of the ICMDP.

David Kirkby (1993) is critical of the ‘normative and conservative’ imperatives derived from an economic rationalist ideology underpinning CBT/E. He argues that the ideological and structural flaws represent a new form of assimilation that is clearly ‘inimical to the ideal of Aboriginal self-determination’ (p. 1). Citing the initial CBT model developed at Batchelor College in the Northern Territory, Kirkby reveals how the incorporation of narrowly defined
western managerial performance statements and indicators embodies ‘an ideology of control and conformity, which … is unsuited to the needs of Aboriginal people as a minority group dominated by the hegemony of mainstream society, politics and culture’ (1993, p. 7).

Kirkby offers a compelling critique of CBT/E, which together with the raft of criticisms by Kemmis (1994), and Ramsay (1993), reveal the potential for elements within CBE to be culturally inappropriate, assimilating and bureaucratising. These arguments reflect our own concerns and the need to continually adapt and rework those elements that are antithetical to the goals of Indigenous self-determination in order to achieve the aims and goals of the ICMDP. Moreover, although Kirkby’s critique is directed towards CBT, the propensity of government policymakers and education stakeholders to blur the distinction between ‘training’ and ‘education’ in the policy sector begged the question as to whether these tendencies will always and inevitably override the transformative and decolonising potential of the program (Grogan & Walker 1995).

There have been concerns as to whether context and cultural relevance compromised academic rigor, or enhanced the attainment of both as Schon (1983) suggests; or whether a skills oriented, competency approach negates the possibility of a commitment to critical enquiry and ethical practice or communicative actions (Reid 1996). A key program focus has been devising a decolonising curriculum to actualise a diverse range of Indigenous outcomes and interrupt, challenge, and transform the existing colonial situation. At the same time we have needed to remain aware of the potential for these transformative strategies to themselves become assimilationist; to understand how such phenomena can occur; and how we can limit the likelihood of colonist tendencies within our own teaching practices and curricula irrespective of the approach adopted. McConaghy has identified three critical colonising elements that have relevance when reflecting on our practice in Indigenous education. These include the ‘disciplinary capacity’, ‘epistemic authority’ and ‘legitimating conditions’ (McConaghy 2000). I suggest that by appropriating some elements of CBE the Centre and the ICMD and ICH programs have been able to work transformatively with each of these elements.

The ICMDP accreditation documents (1989, 1994, 1996) justify the use of CBE to achieve the program goals because of its ability to recognise and incorporate multiple contexts and cultures in determining ‘competent performance’ within the curriculum process. They highlight the value of being able to specify and assess competencies that take into account complex, diverse and unpredictable dynamics operating within Indigenous
contexts and at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. The potential of a holistic fulfil approach to enhance the acquisition of complex affective and cognitive competencies that can take into account the interaction of cultures (Nowlen 1988 in Preston & Walker 1993, p. 118) as a requirement of a specific professional role is supported by Winter (1990, 1992).

Nevertheless, early program discussions surrounding CBE resulted in considerable confusion and internal criticism regarding notions of the validity of knowledge, competence and judgement of assessment in Indigenous contexts. These are issues that have dogged the program and will continue to because of the inevitable indefinableness of specification and the difficulties of assessment due to the ‘…complex variations in attributes or competencies of the same sort held by different individuals, the degrees of generalisability and specificity, and the infinite variety of possible applications of competencies…’ (Preston & Walker 1993, p. 118). Similarly, Ashworth (1992) and Ramsay (1993) also highlight the problems associated with assessing knowledge competence on the basis of behavioural performance and the ambiguous nature of defining and interpreting standards. However, as one colleague wrote in response to Ramsay’s article:

This article raises some interesting issues. I don’t think, however, that it is as damning of CBE as the writer thinks. After all, the issues in ‘traditional’ education are just as problematic, and I think that we have encountered and tried to overcome some of these criticisms raised here.

Neither do I think that the quest for lack of ambiguity is necessarily valid. Perhaps we can live with, and benefit from, a degree of ambiguity. Constructivism, in fact, encourages multiple perspectives and values ambiguity. What we are looking for isn’t the “right answer”, but answers which are justifiable and defensible within Aboriginal Terms of Reference, Community Development principles, etc. (ICMDP File Note: 17/3/94).

This observation supports the claim that the ICMDP curriculum was able to interrupt the ‘disciplinary capacity’, ‘epistemic authority’ and ‘legitimating conditions’ of colonialism (McConaghy 2000) by incorporating performances and knowledges derived and demonstrated as ‘justifiable and defensible within Indigenous Terms of Reference and Community Development principles’. This inclusion of social constructivist principles coupled with postmodern epistemological perspectives that challenge the notion of
universal or absolute truths have enabled us to circumvent some of the issues and limitations associated with culturalism and assimilationist imperatives ordinarily inherent in CBE (see for example McConaghy 2000, p. 178).

**Social justice and equity in Indigenous contexts**

Both the ICMD and ICH programs were developed by CAS on social justice grounds to extend the equity and access opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in higher education (Grogan & Oxenham 1992; Howard 1985, 1988). This argument was especially pertinent for people living in rural and remote areas, and/or working fulltime who historically have been excluded from education despite the extensive skills, knowledge and experience acquired in a range of contexts. Both programs have been largely successful in achieving these access and equity goals. Over fifty per cent of students are from rural and remote areas from places as remote as Ombulgarri and as far away as the Torres Strait Islands (Walker 2000). The retention and participation rates of these students are significantly higher than for Indigenous students who leave their community to study or attempt distance education and their completion and graduation rates are almost the same as for students from metropolitan areas who have regular access to staff and resources (Walker 2000). These outcomes suggest that the combination of block release delivery (through Indigenous Education Support Initiatives Program (IESIP) funding) and CBE curriculum with its emphasis on negotiated workplace learning and assessment based on Indigenous aspirations, interests and priorities are positive contributing factors for students in achieving these outcomes (Walker 2000). The Centre has also written submissions that attest to the cost effectiveness of the block release program delivery model (CAS 1997a; 1997c).

**Recognising Indigenous knowledge and experience**

Importantly, the emphasis on outcomes demonstration has been invaluable in providing alternative entrance into university on Indigenous terms, which recognise the distinctive knowledge and experience of Indigenous people working in specific contexts. While all universities provide RPL in the form of credit exemptions and advanced standing these mechanisms have traditionally privileged knowledge acquired within other universities or colleges of further education. Traditionally, existing mechanisms and discourses have not recognised knowledge gained through experience, and especially knowledges and experiences acquired and valued in different cultural contexts with no immediately recognisable equivalent within a normalised, dominant context.
From the Centre’s standpoint the introduction of CBE within the academy has provided opportunities to develop a dialogue around these issues. CAS has successfully negotiated with Curtin matriculation and courses development committees and academic boards to recognise Indigenous knowledge and experience for its fulfil programs. In addition, the School of Social Work now provides advanced standing for ICMDP graduates in recognition of the relevance and legitimacy of the competencies (knowledges, skills and attributes) necessary to operate effectively in Indigenous contexts. Furthermore, I suggest that the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous knowledges within the program interrupts existing legitimating conditions of colonialism that allow the injustices around epistemic authority to continue (McConaghy 2000).

**Negotiating bureaucratic limitations**

A consistent theme in CAS reviews, reports and policy impact submissions at institutional and federal level is that the Centre’s fulfill, block release approaches enhance DEETYA and NATSIEP policy goals to increase Indigenous access, participation and success at university in a cost effective, culturally appropriate and socially just manner (CAS 1997a; Walker 1997b, 1997c). As mentioned previously this is risky business given the potentially contradictory aims of NATSIEP policy (Nakata 2002a, Luke, et al. 1993) and its normalising, assimilationist academic measures of success. These mainstream measures are often insufficient to gauge the actual achievements by individuals who ordinarily cannot access traditional course offerings due to geographic or employment circumstances, highlighting yet another of the seemingly benign governmental mechanisms which can serve a colonising function.

ICMDP documents reveal two interrelated arguments in support of the efficacy of CBE in achieving social justice and equity (ICMDP 1997). They include the ability for students to engage in most of their learning in the workplace and the recognition of prior knowledge and experience related to their work. Both of these aspects make CBE a valuable strategy to enhance the access and equal opportunity of Indigenous people often excluded from higher education because of geographic and employment constraints, community obligations or social and educational disadvantage. I suggest that in an important sense the ICMDP outcomes show that deploying a hybrid CBE approach is a viable strategy with the potential to address contradictions evident in NATSIEP access and equal opportunity goals identified by Nakata (2001b) and Luke et al. (1993).

As this thesis shows, the approach developed and deployed in the ICMDP provides the means (through the identification and enactment of professional and contextual and
culturally specific competencies) to overcome the contradictions inherent in the homogenising and normalising tendencies of the Standards Framework and NATSIEP (Luke et al. 1993). Notions of diversity (although still hamstrung by the government’s adherence to an outputs model which effectively normalises measurement) nevertheless provide a discourse to create a curriculum that is neither dictated by the National Standards framework nor diluted to a culturalist agenda of cultural maintenance. The ICMDP has been able to develop a reflexive, transformative curriculum and pedagogy that supports Indigenous interests consonant with wider societal goals.

**Working with dual goals of equity and culture**

At the Global Competence conference referred to at the beginning of this chapter, Glenys Grogan and I argued that ‘fundamental philosophical questions concerned with equity and cultural issues which underpin genuine educational and social reform are often overlooked’ in the ‘debate surrounding the competency movement’ because of the cultural homogeneity assumed within existing dominant discourses and paradigms. These claims are still equally relevant. We argued that

Discussion[s] of cultural issues in the context of post-colonial, multicultural Australia must involve assumptions about the interrelationship between dominant and Indigenous (and/or minority) groups. It raises questions regarding rights, power relations, access to resources, and the extent to which existing practices and institutions manifest assimilationist tendencies; the answers to which depend largely on individual values, ideological stance, respect and recognition of cultural diversity and difference, and conceptions of justice. And, in relation to employment, education and training, ultimately decide who determines and judges the standards of quality, good practice, and competent performance (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 3).

The cultural politics operating in the wider social context also have important implications for the specification and assessment of competence. Both the ICMDP and ICH have developed competencies and standards which recognise and take into account the understandings, skills, and attributes considered necessary to operate at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface as a competent, effective practitioner in complex, diverse multicultural realities. Yet as discussed above mainstream standards and practices in health for example can effectively ignore Indigenous understandings and requirements.
Competency based education and Indigenous self-determination

The rationale and underlying assumptions for utilising a CBE approach are outlined in the initial ICMD Accreditation Document (1988) and submission to the University Academic Board. The Centre adopted a competency-based education approach to foster Indigenous self-determination and self-management in Indigenous contexts quite independently of the government’s push for CBT as the vehicle for its social and economic reform agenda.

These documents encompass the key philosophical, ontological and epistemological issues that underpinned the development of the ICMDP. They argued that CBE was a culturally appropriate and highly suitable approach, consistent with adult education principles, to achieve the goals of Indigenous self-determination (Howard 1988; CAS Correspondence 1990). Equity and access issues were also recognised as important factors in early ICMDP developments. The decisive argument presented to the CAS Course Advisory Committee was that CBE combined with adult education principles was highly appropriate to promote Indigenous self-determination on an individual and collective basis (Howard 1988).

The curriculum as it was initially conceived encouraged students to be involved in negotiating and managing their own learning path at their own pace. It also allowed people to learn in different ways, via learning contracts or modules, workshops, small group learning and individual tutoring (see Appendix 5). Other benefits identified in subsequent ICMDP documents claim that it allows an interdisciplinary curriculum; flexible on-off campus teaching through block release and individualised workplace learning and assessment; positive interaction between program staff and employer and community stakeholders, including negotiated learning outcomes; and recognition of prior learning (Curtin 1994, 1995; ICMDP 1994a, 1996).

From this perspective the emergence of the national fulfil agenda was initially seen as an opportunity, giving wider acceptance of the fulfil language and concepts within the university. Nevertheless, ICMDP differs in many important respects from other competency models that have currency in Australia. The specific interpretation and curriculum design, as it evolved, reflects an attempt to ensure Indigenous standards, values and ways of working are recognised and incorporated in all aspects of the course curricula, as well as in students’ workplace. At the same 1995 conference we stated that
Indigenous’ values, needs, priorities and aspirations, and ways of doing things’ need to be acknowledged by policy-makers, government workers, services to take these differences into account at all points where the two cultures intersect (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 1).

Although recognition of difference remains fundamental to the Centre’s position the various strategies adopted attempt to overcome the limitations of culturalism (McConaghy 2000; Nakata 2000b, 2001b). Nevertheless recognition of this possibility and resultant unease towards treading a simultaneously oppositional and complicit line is evident in CAS and ICMDP discussions (Greville 2000). CAS and ICMDP discourses have evolved or shifted position in response to the changes in discourse, policies, and administrative imperatives in the university and bureaucracy. I suggest these shifts represent attempts to side step some of the difficulties alluded to by McConaghy (2000), Nakata (2000b) and others. Nevertheless, there are enduring goals running through all the Centre’s work. We have continued to develop the argument that the goals of Indigenous self-determination and citizenship can coexist without compromising either (McPhee & Walker 2001).

CBE as a site of contestation in the ICMDP

As Chapter Three attests, since its inception the rationale and assumptions underpinning the ICMDP have been continuously reviewed. Successive attempts to address staff, student and stakeholder concerns have involved changes to statements of competence (outcome statements), performance criteria, and teaching, learning and assessment processes which have been tracked by Bill Genat for the ICMDP and ICH Review (ICMDP 2001). It has also involved a continuous review of the particular expectations upon staff roles (McKeich 1999).

The key assumptions regarding competency-based education that influenced the course development and implementation were drawn from Grant et al. (1979). In 1993 we adopted these assumptions at a programmatic level because we believed they challenge traditional, individualistic concepts of the nature of curriculum and the role of academic staff. An abbreviated list outlined in the 1996 ICMD Course Curriculum Re-Accreditation Document makes it clear that the perceived benefits of adopting a CBE approach, albeit in a hybridised form, resided in its outcomes focus which distinguishes it from, and provides advantages over other models in meeting the ICMDP goals (ICMDP 1996a). A key aim of the program has been to attend to cultural imperatives through the specification of professional and ethical competencies (Eraut 1994; Winter 1992). ICMDP staff revisit program goals regularly to ensure that Indigenous values, aspirations and interests (which
are both grounded in tradition and dynamic) are given primacy in the curriculum review and refinement process.

**Encompassing a multi-disciplinary framework**

The ICMDP curriculum as it has evolved encompasses a critical-humanistic approach overlaid by post-structural, feminist, Indigenous and postcolonial ideas. Ironically, some of the assumptions that underpinned the initial development of the ICMD curriculum could be located more readily into the modernist project. The initial course justifications made it clear that education needs to take account of social, historical, political and economic realities of Indigenous people in order to realise their social and employment potential. It can be argued that paradoxically, the arguments for decolonisation are similar to the classical liberal position espoused by Dewey (1916/1966). While the humanist strand of classical liberalism defies the mechanistic or instrumentalist elements of the economic rationalist strands the dangers of its assimilationist agenda remain.

Initially competency-based education was regarded as highly relevant for developing the ICMDP because it could be responsive to the complex roles required of students in their work, community and family milieu/realities. Furthermore, because 'demonstrations of competence are independent of time served in formal educational settings,' (Grant 1979, p. 6), it was argued that the course would be able to recognise student’s existing knowledge and accommodate the many difficulties they faced in their different work, community and family settings (Howard 1988). This was because CBE enabled the program development to focus on outcomes rather than primarily or exclusively on inputs which do not take account of a student’s context. Focus groups and survey questions undertaken with each of the Centre courses in 1997 confirmed that a far greater percentage of ICMDP & ICH students strongly agreed that the course catered for their needs and were directly relevant to their career aspirations and able to meet their community priorities than students in more content centred courses within traditional disciplinary boundaries. These findings suggested that CBE provided greater opportunity and flexibility in devising a program curriculum that could cater for students’ diverse geographic, academic, work, family and community realities (Walker 1997c).

The program was deployed primarily as a means to recognise and cater for the diversity of needs, interests, aspirations and priorities identified in the initial needs analysis (Stringer 1987) among Indigenous employees working in management and development in community organisations and policy contexts and Indigenous community groups. These needs and priorities included 'knowing the politics' (Howard n.d., p.1) and gaining
the necessary skills to access opportunities and resources to bring about social change (HRSCAA 1989; Theis 1987). So whereas one of the major criticisms of deploying CBE in Indigenous contexts rests on the assumption that the hegemonious narratives/colonist imperatives driving CBE will lead inevitably to the formation of the normative state subject, the ICMDP discourse creates a space for resistant/non-normative/disruptive unruly subject position/s (Miller 1993) as well as simultaneously negotiating the intersections of Indigenous/non-Indigenous interests and values.

While not underestimating the importance of ‘culturally appropriate’ curriculum and pedagogy, ‘cultural appropriateness’ as it is usually defined or deployed in Indigenous higher education settings is often used synonymously with ‘two-way’ (Harris 1988, 1990), which involves drawing upon Indigenous knowledges, values and language to incorporate mainstream knowledges and skills. Culturally appropriate education tends to focus on teaching processes that recognise Indigenous learning styles (for example, teachers are encouraged to avoid eye contact, to teach non-competitively in groups, use oral traditions and so on). While these pedagogical elements may prove effective in certain contexts, I suggest that it is the possibilities that inhere in the elements that comprise the ICMDP’s derivation of CBE — the distinctive specification and interconnectedness of assumptions, goals, roles and outcomes — which make it a highly ‘appropriate’ and appropriated strategic vehicle deployed to achieve Indigenous goals and aspirations including self-determination, leadership and positive social change.

With respect to the ICMDP there is evidence to suggest that the goals of Indigenous self-determination and positive social change are embedded in both the educational processes and outcomes of the program(s) (McPhee, Greville & Wilson 1998; Walker 2000; Wilson 1999). Self-determining and transformative processes and outcomes include individual and collective attempts to bring about changes that are fair, just, equitable, effective, and contribute positively to the overall wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. These changes, examples of which are discussed in some of the case studies documented (see Appendix 6), are examples of decolonisation which occur in a myriad of small incremental ways at various levels in local community and workplace projects through to influencing national policy processes; ultimately contributing to the broader decolonisation project.

The specific CBE elements that have been appropriated into a framework of self-determination include an emphasis on the particular role requirements for Indigenous practitioners and the specification of competencies. These elements entail the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the practitioner role and the social
historical and political context in which they work. One important argument has been that the specification of competencies creates opportunities and space for Indigenous knowledges and practices to be incorporated, produced, reproduced or recreated within a specified sphere of para-professional and professional practice.

There are misconceptions that also need to be addressed. I suggest that the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and practices does not necessarily involve diminishing standards, nor infer a ‘quality compromised’ education as some claim (McDaniel & Flowers 1995, p. 238). Rather as several papers by CAS staff suggest, it demands recognition that existing methods and standards reflecting mainstream values and educational paradigms need to be critically examined, challenged and transformed and where they further Indigenous interests — appropriated (Dudgeon, Oxenham, Scully & Badman 1992; Grogan & Oxenham 1992; Grogan & Philpot 1993; Grogan & Walker 1995; Oxenham & Stringer 1993; Villaflor & O’Neill 1992).

The ICMDP and ICH are examples of this. As Grogan and I argued in the same conference paper, CBE as conceived in the Centre’s programs provides an important means to challenge dominant paradigms:

The development of most mainstream competency-based courses begins with an analysis of the roles and tasks of a competent practitioner according to the assumptions and values within the existing professional paradigms. This approach tends to focus on what constitutes ‘competent’ performance for an individual within a given occupation in specifying competencies and competency standards. Our experience suggests that this approach tends to discriminate against particular groups (eg. Aboriginal people) in obtaining professional qualifications, and just as importantly, against the groups intended to benefit from their services (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 3).

As suggested in the following Chapters, these philosophical and epistemological standpoints do not necessarily and easily translate into our practice. Often staff regarded the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge as an addition to be tacked onto existing knowledges and skills rather than a means to challenge and transform them through processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. Ironically, as a consequence, instead of creating a space in the program for the exploration and integration of Indigenous and Western knowledges the curriculum at times became over-packed with content, techniques and methods unconsciously regarded as essential and immutable.
This situation reveals a highly vulnerable point in the ICMDP that affects the program’s existence, credibility and capacity to maintain Indigenous control of the curriculum. According to Hall and Jones (1976) 'the specification of competencies … is the keystone of CBE, and like any keystone it is the most vulnerable point in the structure' (p. 26). In theory, program competencies and standards are determined by the role requirements of a practitioner and the skills and disciplines necessary to carry out that role. The specification of competencies reflect a particular set of knowledges deemed essential by professional gatekeepers which may or may not be necessary to acquire the relevant affective and cognitive competencies to be effective in that particular professional role.

In contrast a profile of ICMD practitioner roles deemed essential by the Indigenous community was constructed through an ongoing process of discussion with students, community and stakeholders to determine the requirements for a competent, effective practitioner. This process has allowed culturally specific/relevant competencies and standards to be specified and developed that recognise the complexity and diversity of contemporary social, political and economic realities and thus encompass transformative and decolonising elements.

The adoption of the ICMDP practitioner role resulted in a new framework for formulating and teaching competencies in the program (ICMDP Files 1992, 1993). This framework enabled us to shift from teaching content as unconnected sometimes contradictory subject matter to students (who saw themselves as either managers, community workers, policy-makers or government workers) to facilitating understandings and skills to students engaging in multiple roles and able to work with and hold competing disciplinary tensions in an ethical and culturally appropriate way.

I have attempted to demonstrate in this Chapter that the ICMDP has effectively adopted a particular rendering of competency-based education in addressing issues of equity and cultural appropriateness for participants in the learning process. Students are required to meet the relevant professional occupations standards in community management and development in Indigenous contexts. At the same time, students are required to demonstrate a commitment to identify, generate, negotiate and apply Indigenous Terms of Reference with the groups (employers, community and individuals) they are working with to enhance the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (see Chapter Five).
CAS negotiations at the policy interface

By 1995 CAS staff were concerned that the newly established IETCs would have implications for students employed in the health, community and public service industries. Program coordinators were very concerned that these bodies would ‘compromise culturally appropriate standards and processes to incorporate industry derived standards into course curriculum’ (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 9). This seemed particularly likely when several students reported that employers were reluctant to recognise course qualifications that did not mirror externally determined standards. The report on Indigenous health worker training courses in Western Australia confirms the validity of these concerns (Atkinson 2000).

The Centre was also critical of the attempts of the NTB, IETC and other relevant industry and professional bodies (ISAs) to develop competency standards that were merely ‘sensitive’ to culture (Grogan & Walker 1995), a position shared by Phillpot (1995) and Kirkby (1993). The Centre’s position was that these bodies needed to recognise and take ‘Indigenous Terms of Reference’ into account in the process of developing ‘culturally appropriate’ competency standards for industries, service agencies and educational institutions providing programs and services for Indigenous peoples in cross-cultural contexts. Glenys Grogan and I reiterated this position at the Global Competencies Conference when we argued that

the logic of the "outcomes approach" requires genuine negotiation between universities and employer bodies in the development of standards and assessment of competence in the workplace to ensure issues of equity and culture are addressed (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 15).

The Centre also engaged in a number of strategies to gain the support and endorsement of key co-ordinating bodies and employer groups in establishing culturally appropriate standards. The Centre attempted to get the NTB to ‘support and monitor the development and implementation of equitable cultural standards in the workplace, and promote serious negotiation between industry and education bodies’ (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 15). This was a precarious line to urge all stakeholder groups ‘to address equity and cultural issues in employment, education and training’ in order to overcome ‘inequitable and discriminatory consequences for Aboriginal workers’ (loc.cit). On our part, using the Global Competencies Conference as a forum ‘for clarifying and redefining the purpose of the national reform project’ (loc.cit) was unquestionably a risky, double-barrelled strategy — simultaneously endorsing and challenging the government’s role in CBE to ensure that
competency standards achieve genuine social and educational reform to further Indigenous interests. We were seeking a commitment by government to develop processes to ‘bring about a more just and equitable distribution of opportunity and recognition of rights for Indigenous people’ (loc.cit) and acknowledgement that ‘competency standards committed to, and underpinned by, a genuine recognition and respect for cultural differences are essential to achieve equitable participation and access in education and the workplace’ (loc.cit). At the conclusion of our presentation we put forward a recommendation that was endorsed by conference participants and DEET representatives and forwarded to senior policy officials in Canberra (CAS 1995 File Notes). While these DEET officers acknowledged that the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous Terms of Reference was crucial to social transformation in the broader society they were not confident that there was either the necessary moral and political will or potential for extrinsic sanctions to carry through the recommendations (personal communication, CAS 1995 File Notes).

These strategic events provide examples of the limitations upon state institutions to address the discriminatory practices and unacknowledged institutionalised racism and ambivalence at all levels while at the same time revealing the gaps in hegemonic structures that can be positively exploited at the micro level. They are also good examples of the standpoint or position adopted by CAS to have diverse Indigenous needs, issues, interests and aspirations (which could differ between Indigenous groups and from those of mainstream population) recognised in program service provision and implementation. This is not a culturalist argument, although some of the differences alluded to involve the recognition of different values, aspirations and interests as well as differences in background, history and experience. This strategic position acknowledges the discrepancy in levels of disadvantage within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups when services are provided on mainstream terms. Acknowledgement of these differences is essential to negotiate the strategies and resources needed to address the levels of disadvantage currently experienced.

Several Indigenous academics (Arbon 1998; Bin-Sallik 1993; Collard 1999; Langton 1997; Oxenham 1999; Rigney 1998) support for the need to change existing social practices and discourses which continue to impose dominant standards and values upon Indigenous people. These Indigenous intellectuals and practitioners are critical of colonial/liberal practices which allow ‘Dominant Others’ to judge Indigenous performance in education and the workplace from the perspective of ‘cultural deficit’ rather than
'cultural difference’. This is an urgent task given the current situation for, and experience of, Indigenous peoples.

Parallel to the Centre’s attempt to influence policy at the national level, work was being undertaken to influence policy and practice within Western Australia. The development of cultural competencies with the State Employment and Skills Development Authority (SESDA) and the Social and Community Services Council Industry Employment and Training Council (SACSIETC 1994) was another strategic attempt to:

- ensure Indigenous standards, values and ways of working are recognised and incorporated into the curriculum content and delivery, into assessment standards and ultimately into the position statements, award structures and career paths in the many areas of employment in health, [social services], community management in which Aboriginal people are currently working (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 1).

There is ample evidence (Bourke et al. 1996; MCEETYA 1996, Walker et al. 1999) to show that factors including course entry prerequisites, orientation, support services and curriculum content and delivery arrangements impact on Indigenous participation in higher education. Equal opportunity to education and employment requires both the removal of barriers and injustices for effective participation of disadvantaged groups within the university sector. This is easier said than done. Increased educational efficiencies for Indigenous Australians require broad acceptance of decreased economic efficiencies in the higher education sector (Schwab 1997) and the recognition and inclusion of Indigenous viewpoints, expectations and standards (Boughton & Durnan 1997). ICMDP and CAS staff have argued that the issues surrounding equity demand that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in relation to stated, agreed upon criteria which meet Indigenous needs, interests and priorities with respect to improving their material condition and eliminating extant injustices. Clearly, these criteria need to be negotiated at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts.

To a large extent Indigenous peoples have been marginalised in the CBT/E debate at a national level. Despite the government’s commitment to social reform the competency movement still fails to recognise Indigenous people’s skills and knowledges in the workplace. Many human service organisations and government departments continue to designate ‘identified positions’ as para-professional ‘workers’ (for example: education workers, health workers and liaison officers). This practice is contrary to research that
confirms that these workers carry out highly skilled and professional roles in Indigenous contexts (CIRC, CEREC & Jojari 1999; EDWA 1999).

According to Olesen (1979), CBE encompasses three elements which I suggest are consonant with the aims of the ICMDP, the principles of the CAS and the goals of social justice reform of the national competency agenda and which can interrupt colonising elements. These elements include: increased access for groups previously denied a professional education; excellence in professional practice; and transformation of the structure of the profession and the society. There are a number of structural impediments operating which exacerbate the situation for Indigenous people individually and collectively. These impediments include the lack of key representative bodies to act specifically on behalf of Indigenous workers, the failure to recognise existing cultural competencies (knowledge and understandings) for Indigenous workers and the corresponding failure to introduce cultural competencies for non-Indigenous workers despite the endorsement by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) in 1995 of the eighth cultural competency (see the 1994 National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia (NLLIA); Report, Cultural Understanding: Eighth Key Competency and Culture Matters, McIntyre 1996). Recent education reviews continue to make recommendations to address these structural and occupational (professional and vocational) inequities.

The Centre’s experience within this social and political context suggests that in some instances CBE can offer a framework that allows Indigenous education providers (in consultation and on behalf of relevant Indigenous community organisations and groups) to negotiate graduate outcomes and standards with industry stakeholders. The ICMD and ICH programs provide a means for Indigenous peoples to define and acquire skills and knowledge identified as essential for working effectively at the interface within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts. In theory these credentials should enable students to be recognised as professional practitioners in their workplace. In reality, the ICMD and ICH programs have attempted to negotiate with various stakeholders for professional recognition of graduates with varying degrees of success. The work with SESDA suggests that formalised attempts to incorporate Indigenous terms of reference into recognised competence standards are not complete. Recommendations in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Worker Review (CIRC et al. 1999) for the recognition of distinctive cultural competencies of Indigenous health workers have Australia-wide support. These recommendations are yet to be enacted by Government. The lack of action confirms that there is still considerable work to be done to realise the transformative potential of these program strategies within the wider community.
Both the ICMD and ICH programs have worked to 'ensure that the development and application of competency standards does not deliberately or unintentionally discriminate against, further marginalise or assimilate Indigenous people' (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 1). For CAS competencies have to be 'both community driven and relevant to industry sectors' to ensure greater equity for students in the assessment of competency standards in the workplace (op.cit). Both programs have had to remain dynamic to ensure competencies are relevant and anchored by a set of coherent and guiding principles that inform the criteria for making judgements about the development and assessment of them. This approach is much closer to critical and cultural competency approach potential envisaged by Kirkby (1993).

The relevance and efficacy of competencies identified by the Indigenous community, employers and other stakeholders is maintained through a reflexive practice which includes an ongoing analysis of relevant documents such as task force reviews and strategic plans which reflect changes to policies at a macro and organisational level and project briefs and position statements which reflect specific changes at a micro and individual level. It is important to constantly re-situate the task of defining the competencies for Indigenous community management and community development or Indigenous community health within the contemporary social, political and economic context and with regard to the broader hegemonic project underpinned as it is by colonial, corporatist and assimilationist imperatives of neo-liberalism.

CBE reflects similar dilemmas as other aspects of critical education. Indigenous staff and students want to be competent and participate on equal terms 'according to mainstream standards' and at the same time assert the right to incorporate Indigenous cultural knowledge and standards into the curriculum and have these competencies recognised and validated by mainstream stakeholders. The problematics, possibilities, dilemmas, contradictions and ambiguities of teaching, assessing and sustaining this dualistic/dialectic hybrid model are discussed in Chapter Five.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined how CAS has effectively and strategically worked with some of the key issues and concerns regarding the deployment of a CBE approach. This has included some of the complex and highly contentious issues and criticisms surrounding CBE with regard to their relevance or possible implications for the ICMCP, the Centre and the wider community.
The personal, academic and employment outcomes achieved by students in the ICMDP (some examples of which are discussed in Chapters Five and Six and Appendix 6) show that it is possible to engage in a transformative and decolonising practice which take both Indigenous students and employer needs into account within the constraints of existing institutional structures and systems. Nevertheless, the primacy of liberal and economic rationalist discourses which privilege employer interests and disregard Indigenous interests can be disempowering for students and ineffective for Indigenous community organisations tied more directly to the bureaucracy standards (the Review of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training in WA*, by Atkinson (2000) is a case in point).

At the same time, curriculum developed solely with regard to existing discipline boundaries and methods, traditional academic standards and employer requirements can inadvertently re-inscribe Indigenous students in what can be a repressive process of assimilation and deculturation based on institutional and employer's assumptions which can be unintentionally racist and inequitable.

In other words, from both Foucauldian and Althusserian perspectives (Foucault 1972; Althusser 1971), an uncritical adherence to traditional academic/institutional practices runs the risk of privileging the requirements of some stakeholders at the expense of Indigenous individual and community interests and aspirations. Such a process is a form of assimilation. However, a theme that I return to throughout this thesis is that ironically, these same academic/institutional practices, if held to account, give substance to the rhetoric of liberal values and philosophies and provide a moral basis and standard for positive transformation and social justice.

I have also examined some of the problematics, concerns and issues related to CBE as perceived by the CAS surrounding the strategic attempts to ensure Indigenous terms of reference (standards, values and ways of working) are recognised and incorporated into the discourses policies, practices and processes (including curriculum, assessment standards and position statements) both within educational and employer institutions/organisations in which Indigenous people are currently working (Grogan & Walker 1995).

I have argued that the ICMDP differs in some very crucial respects from other competency-based education and training models operating in Australia. These differences are due to the Centre’s deliberate attempts to find solutions to many of the
problems outlined here. As with other decolonising strategies employed this has remained a highly complex area. At times we successfully avoided one theoretical/epistemological/ideological trap only to be ensnared by another. So far the ICMDP has been able to manoeuvre a relatively successful and transformative path through the social and political turbulence. However, attempts to offer a genuinely alternative, transformative program are never fully settled, or agreed upon once and for all. Rather, by their very nature of being outside the familiarity and acceptance of the Dominant they are constantly subjected to scrutiny, questioning, they are plagued by uncertainty and a desire to return to the knowable and doable. They are always at risk of reverting to commonsensical frameworks already discussed, which have resounding acceptance in Australia and which historically have not served Indigenous interests well.
Chapter Five
Decolonising Frameworks and Strategies

Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no ‘postmodern’ for us until we have settled some business of the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice (Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999, p. 34).

Theorising decolonisation

Despite our commitment to the notion of decolonisation, it is difficult to realise in practice — all of us are in a sense trapped in the unfinished business of the modern. Nevertheless, for all the difficulties of taking on decolonisation the ICMD has developed some key transformative strategies that are worth bringing to the research community. For example the conception of the ICMDP practitioner is an effective way of resolving at least some if not all of the difficulties, multiplicities and contradictions in which we engage. Importantly, Indigenous staff and students in the ICMDP have played a crucial role in determining the nature of this constructed practitioner as an ethical, agent of social change. Together staff within the ICMDP (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) have been engaged in developing a curriculum and practice and discourse that allows the formation of students/practitioners who are conscious of and in control of the fundamental complexities and contradictions that necessarily reside in taking up that role. The ICMDP practitioner provides the momentum to work with the seemingly insoluble dilemmas of modernity and colonisation. The strategy is empowering for Indigenous staff and students because they control their own terms of competence, which as I have already argued offer an alternative to reductive competencies, which can be assimilationist and conserving of the status quo.

Several Indigenous writers have asserted that decolonisation is the challenge now facing Indigenous communities (Lanhupuy 1987), Indigenous Centres and the higher education institutions in which they are located (Arbon 1998; Nakata 2000b; Rigney 1998; Watson 1989; Hart & Whatman 1998). In 1988, Lilla Watson, the first Indigenous lecturer in the School of Social Work at the University of Queensland, in her address to the Archibald
Franklin Lecture Series at the University of New England titled *The Meeting of Two Traditions: Aboriginal Studies in the University - A Murri Perspective*, stated that she envisioned a future

> when this University conducts its affairs, owns its history, relates to the Nganyaywana people, and recognizes its status in their land, in such a way that no student will pass through its halls *without being caught up in the process of decolonization* (Watson 1988b, p. 14, emphasis in text).

There is now wide recognition of the need for decolonising strategies and tactics in Indigenous research and education to counter the effects of dominant policies and practices permeating social, organisational and governmental contexts. However, there is still considerable uncertainty surrounding questions such as those posed by Spivak (1996, p. 237), ‘Who decolonizes? And how?’ Is decolonisation about doing epistemic violence, and creating disorder as Fanon proposed? (Fanon (1963, p. 61) as read by McConaghy 2000, p. 269). Or does it, as the writings of Indigenous academics (Morgan 1992; Oxenham 1999, 2000a; Osborne & Dick 1995, Watson 1989) suggest, involve the recognition, acceptance and incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference within our everyday reality. Others suggest that the role and responsibility of teacher entails 'decolonising the imagination' of students through processes of deconstruction and reconstruction (Spivak 1996, p. 239), as well as providing a range of possibilities, skills and techniques to contribute to personal opportunities and social transformation. Several critical theorists also assert the need to decolonise the imagination of teachers. Indigenous writers in other colonial sites, such as Linda Tuhiiwai Smith (1999) from New Zealand and Elizabeth Lightning (1997) from Canada, also emphasise the need to engage in decolonising education and research which includes recognising both Indigenous knowledges and the processes necessary to give space for this knowledge.

McConaghy claims that decolonisation is a program for ‘exposing the compartments established by colonialism, and of re-establishing relationships between social phenomena’ (2000, p. 269). Others reveal the transformative possibilities in the sphere of discursive processes and policies (Braaten 1995; Code 1995; Habermas 1984; Lemke 1995). This section reveals that the ICMDP operates from the position that incorporates all of the elements above especially in the work that can be done at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface, another theoretical construction with implications for the ICMDP curriculum, pedagogy and every day practice which is discussed further in the next chapter.
Interestingly, many of the decolonising strategies outlined by Smith (1999) and Lightning (1997) are similar to those developed and deployed in the ICMDP over the last decade. Several of these ideas, which are evident in the curriculum competencies and pedagogy show how giving a space for and incorporating Indigenous knowledge at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface can contribute to a broader political vision in Australia which provides recognition of the distinctive status of Indigenous peoples.

As Linda Smith writes, ‘decolonisation is now recognised as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power’ (1999, p. 98). Ironically and importantly, although part of theIdeological State Apparatus (ISA), the academy’s capacity to be critically self-reflexive still makes it a viable site to provide the necessary knowledge, skills and capacity to engage in the process of decolonisation. More importantly it provides a site to give legitimation to Indigenous knowledges and values that are being reclaimed or produced through this process.

The Centre’s positioning within Curtin University provides some excellent examples of the productive potential in this particular site. This includes the development of the ICMD curriculum which is premised on the idea of reframing, challenging and ‘Indigenising’ dominant knowledges and techniques to meet Indigenous interests, needs, aspirations and situations in community and work contexts and at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains through the application of Indigenous terms of reference as both core content and as a pedagogical process (ICMDP Course Materials 1994-2000; Oxenham 1999). In addition, in 2001 Curtin’s Aboriginal Education Policy Implementation Committee (AEPIC) comprising key academic and managerial staff across the University endorsed the addition of a new objective to be included in the University’s Indigenous Education Strategy 2001-2004, which recognises ‘The academic legitimacy of all forms of Indigenous Knowledge’ (Curtin, 2001, p. 1). The University’s Statement of Commitment and Reconciliation also provides an important basis for decolonisation (Appendix 2).

‘Indigenous Ways of...’ Workshops
In terms of the ICMDP, specific decolonising elements are found in the series of ‘Indigenous Ways of...’ Workshops, which are intensive five-day workshops held in each of the three years of the course. These workshops explore Indigenous Ways of knowing, being and doing or en/acting and their intersection with the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface. The ‘Indigenous Ways...’ workshops (1, 2 and 3) provide excellent examples of how the ICMDP establishes and enacts the links between the curriculum content and theory, pedagogical practices and processes and its stated commitment to decolonisation.
and transformation. Each successive workshop addresses increasingly more complex processes of critical self-reflection, deconstruction, reconstruction and knowledge production that recognise Indigenous knowledge, values and experience and how they can be incorporated with or reframe non-Indigenous knowledges and influence the organisational and governmental processes with which students are working. In other words it links knowledge with agency and structure.

Decolonisation in the university

The importance of this process of deconstruction and reconstruction in making connections between past and contemporary representations of identity and agency for Indigenous futures is captured by Indigenous staff in the following excerpts from a two-day discussion in October 1997 regarding the Centre’s position in relation to teaching in CAS and the wider university:

*Indigenous staff member 5:* So what we’re on about is a deconstruction process — a deconstruction and reconstruction process.

*Indigenous staff member 2:* …And it’s a commitment to that process that would be one of the requirements [for a code of ethics].

*Indigenous staff member 5:* Yeah… it’s implicit that we don’t accept the way in which Aboriginality has been shaped for us rather than by us, and, the way I see it… the corner stone of this whole issue needs to come from a recognition and respect for and legitimacy of Aboriginality in a variety of settings. And so, if we don’t accept given constructions or ideas about Aboriginality, what follows out of that then would be that we also need to be committed to reconstruction — reworking it — throwing some things away … So that there’s a revitalised commitment to research — and maybe that’s covered if we say reconstruction.

*Indigenous staff member 4:* It can be maintenance and resurgence too; you know, there are some aspects… I think what’s important is cultural maintenance. There needs to be some emphasis on cultural maintenance because if you depart from that you’re severing the ties with, you know,
what has been in the past, the links or whatever it is that constitutes your Aboriginality (CAS 1998).

These narratives echo the proposition by Linda Smith (1999, pp. 3-4) that ‘in a decolonising framework deconstruction is part of a much larger intent.’ As Smith argues it is a process which ‘engages with imperialism and colonisation at multiple levels’ (op.cit, p. 20), one of which is a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform any practice. As with Indigenous staff at CAS, Smith also asserts the importance of reconstruction that encompasses Indigenous interests and perspectives. It is precisely this intent that underlies the ICMDP process of ‘deconstructing’ the social science disciplines of community management and community development and public policy through a critical theory lens, and reconstructing them through an Indigenous standpoint (Nakata 1997a). Smith makes the point that decolonisation encapsulates a constant reworking of understanding from an Indigenous perspective (op.cit, p. 24). Nakata makes a similar point regarding the possibilities of utilising and reshaping feminist and critical discourses from an Indigenous standpoint in ways that meet Indigenous interests (Nakata 1997a, 2002b).

This ‘constant reworking’ of understandings to provide new ways of knowing, being and doing is a key aim and process in the Indigenous Ways of … Workshops within the ICMDP. This process occurs by establishing a learning process to assist students to: firstly, understand why, and how, many of the managerial and organisational policies, practices, processes and discourses serve to marginalise Indigenous groups; and, secondly, to look at Indigenous ways of overcoming exclusionary, oppressive and unjust policies and practices. For example, concepts and practices such as networking and negotiation, which are key elements of Western managerial practice, are democratised and operationalised from an Indigenous perspective to achieve Indigenous agendas and interests (ICMDP 2nd and 3rd year workbooks). Similarly, planning, monitoring and evaluation are reworked to include a ‘goodness of fit’ with Indigenous interests and future goals and aspirations. This includes analysing who determines what it is that constitutes effective and appropriate outcomes in Indigenous contexts, and the standards and criteria for measuring them.

These are just some of the many examples of ways in which students sift through, take up and assimilate those elements of these Western disciplinary practices in a culturally appropriate and ethical way (Crawshaw 1993), that serves their interests in their everyday lives (de Certeau 1988; Nakata 2002a). This decolonising tactic encompasses the
possibility of the ICMD practitioner co-opting or appropriating elements to access the previously excluded zones of colonialism and to negotiate new aims and outcomes within that zone — or what in the ICMDP has been reconceived and increasingly articulated as the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface (ICMDP 1993, 1994d, 1995b). Ironically, by deploying both de Certeau and Nakata in this way, the notion of a ‘culturally appropriate’ curriculum acquires a new meaning that in some important respects defies the connotations of assimilationism. A strategy that I have already asserted was effectively and strategically deployed in redefining the competency-based model.

Decolonisation and the curriculum
In addition to addressing decolonisation at the structural level these ICMDP strategies also engage with agency at the personal level, which is also a crucial aspect of decolonisation. There are several other decolonising elements involved in the process of transformation that are directed towards healing and restoring individual and collective wellbeing and resilience. The ‘Issues and Factors’ Workshop is perhaps one of the most important and foundational strategies underpinning many of the others in this respect. It is a five-day process held in the first semester of the first year in a student’s regional context (if feasible), and is another example of the ICMDP’s decolonising curriculum process and teaching practices. In this workshop (shaped within an oral history framework) students participate in a process of healing and transformation through a series of pedagogical processes including naming, reclaiming and representing their individual and collective histories. A key aim of the ‘Issues and Factors’ workshop is to give students an opportunity to recognise Indigenous diversity and locate themselves historically, politically, socially and culturally within their local and regional contexts taking into account broader national and global influences. Importantly, in addition to sharing oral histories, it is an opportunity to imagine and share with other students a vision of possible futures for Indigenous peoples encompassing their relationship with other Australians. Each of these elements is similar to those identified by Linda Smith (1999) as constituting a decolonising process.

In the Issues and Factors workshops students are encouraged to engage with others through interviewing, reading and writing, and to connect with other students through storytelling or yarning processes with the aim of promoting individual and collective healing, agency and new understandings through the recognition and sharing of situated knowledges. This is often a painful process for both students and staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and one that as teachers we can at times feel totally inadequate to facilitate and manage to achieve the intended outcomes. But staff and students — past
and present — continue to reaffirm the importance of this process. The stories students share are real. They depict the raw emotion and reality of intergenerational loss, despair, pain and suffering as well as hope, resilience and even triumph and reconciliation in the face of adversity experienced by many Indigenous people, including students. Their stories cut across the Indigenous/non-Indigenous divide, revealing the extent of interrelationship, commonality and divergence of experience that is part of the untold history of Australia.

Within the program these stories demand us to be more than teachers, they compel us to be courageous, passionate and compassionate and remind all of us of the bigger purpose and necessity for developing and implementing the ICMDP associate degree and degree courses in the first place. Participating in these processes can be painful and scary and on the razor’s edge of voyeurism. Not surprising, some academic staff were/are cautious and critical of the pedagogical worth of engaging in a learning process that gives equal recognition to both affective and cognitive domains and is located in the area of cultural politics. Some teachers were/are impatient to just ‘get on with the business of teaching community management and community development skills and techniques’ which they see as the most essential elements of the course for students and which they were ‘after all employed to teach’ (ICMDP 1994 File Notes). Some have difficulty coming to understand, accept or acknowledge the importance of the decolonising purpose of these processes or the transformative potential of engaging in them (for both teachers and students). Even for those teachers deeply committed to ‘getting it right’ in Indigenous contexts — and most are — it is an area fraught with contradictions and uncertainties as writers such as Greville (2000), McConaghy (2000), Nakata (2002a) and Osborne (2001) attest. While there are problematics and dilemmas at every turn it is more dangerous and potentially oppressive to ignore these issues and to deny students their histories and contemporary experiences. The importance of engaging in this decolonising curriculum process and pedagogy to achieve the program’s intent cannot be overstated. As Freire (1993) states:

Narratives of liberation are always tied to people’s stories, and what stories we choose to tell, and the way in which we decide to tell them, form the provisional basis of what a critical pedagogy of the future might mean. Such a pedagogy recognises that identity is always personal and social and that while we cannot predict the path of historical action or name human agency in advance, we can never give up the struggle for self-formation and self-definition such that domination
and suffering in this society are always minimized (foreword in McLaren & Leonard 1993, p. xi).

The process of collecting and sharing oral histories connects students’ private and public lives and provides an important space for healing and for understanding the contemporary issues and constraints which they (and the groups they are working with) constantly confront. Each year, most students report that these workshops, especially the Issues and Factors workshop, which is for many the first encounter with the process of telling their history, are an important powerful and empowering, life-changing experience (ICMDP workshop evaluations 1991-1997; Personal communications 1997-2001). In the process of sharing stories over several days students are encouraged to draw upon those aspects of their own and/or others experience which highlight and celebrate survival and resistance to oppressive policies and practices through Australia’s colonial history. At the same time by mapping historical timelines students are encouraged to understand other perspectives and to locate their history within broader temporal and spatial diversity of experiences among Indigenous peoples in different places in Australia. This process connects people’s personal everyday lives with the political thus opening the networks and capillaries of power identified by Foucault (1980) in an ethical and potentially transformative way.

But it is even more than that — as Linda Smith notes, many Indigenous groups agree ‘that history is important for understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonisation’ (1999, pp. 29-30). Despite the many poststructuralist and feminist accounts that reveal that ‘history is mostly about power’, and the powerful, and how they have used their power to marginalise and exclude ‘others’ (op.cit, p. 34), Smith suggests that the significance of history in decolonisation resides in ‘the intersection of Indigenous approaches to the past, of the modernist history project itself and of the resistance strategies which have been employed (loc.cit). As Smith writes:

*Coming to know the past* has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implications of this access to alternative knowledges are that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps
us to engage with, understand and then act upon history (op.cit, p. 34 emphasis in the original).

This link between history and contemporary ways of knowing, being and doing is what connects the Issues and Factors Workshop to the Indigenous Ways of …workshops. The ICMDP curriculum as outlined in the competency statements and elements underpinned by Indigenous terms of reference provides students with both a theory and an approach to engage with and act upon their local histories with regard to the broader modernist and postcolonial projects at work in the global, political and historical arena.

**Strategies of Transformation in the ICMDP**

Decolonisation also requires an understanding of how transformation occurs at individual and local levels and within the broader society. In the ICMD curriculum this involves examining how the processes and mechanisms to maintain the status quo can also serve to either assimilate or marginalise Indigenous groups and understanding how these discourses and policies also provide opportunities for marginalised groups to out-maneuuvre these processes. This leads inevitably to exploring how Indigenous peoples can become involved in negotiating areas of change that are necessary to enable the participation of Indigenous peoples on equal, sovereign terms — ideas which will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

It is widely recognised that new theories, discourses and positions and practices emerge when previous theories, discourse and positions and practices no longer adequately explain extant phenomena (Kuhn 1970) or enable new experiences and emergent interests in the face of continuing domination (Hartz in Hodge & Mishra 1991; Lemke 1995). From this perspective the ICMDP is a particular response to Australia’s contemporary predicament in Indigenous education and in the social and political arena. A predicament largely influenced by the discourses of plural and individual liberalisms, racism and the simultaneous emergence of contradictory discourses of cultural diversity and cultural unity that have vied for currency in managing multiculturalism, corporatism and globalisation in Australia in the contemporary context — and, in doing so submerged Indigenous interests.

In many respects the development of the ICMDP represents and involves an ongoing search for a political and social theory that recognises the cultural diversity and commonality which exists both within Indigenous society, and between Indigenous and mainstream society, and the extent to which students can work within specified and
negotiated parameters at the Indigenous/non Indigenous Interface to impact upon the wider society. In doing so, it encompasses ontological beliefs regarding how the ways in which we know influence and are influenced by nature and parameters of individual agency, subjectivity and society. Consequently, the ICMDP theoretical and curriculum and practice frameworks are intertwined.

Many Indigenous academics make it clear that the articulation of a theory is necessary to increase Indigenous opportunities to assert their right to participate in an ‘ideal’ discourse and to arrive at consensus in their interactions with the broader society without denying or compromising their individual or collective rights to have their perspectives considered on equal terms (Crawshaw 1993; Dodson M. 1996; Morgan 1992; Nakata 2000a, 2002b). The engagement in consensus making and negotiated rights is conceivable at both the everyday level, which encompasses localised specific changes in organisational and community contexts, and at the broader political level. The latter is conceivable as a collective engagement in which Indigenous Australians reach a consensus with the dominant society by way of a treaty and/or statement of reconciliation that recognises Indigenous sovereign rights to be self-determining while still participating and enjoying the same rights and opportunities as other Australians (Ross 2001).

Both Crawshaw (1993) and Nakata (2002b) have posited a set of questions that capture the multiple positions that need to be held to achieve such a vision for the future. For example, Crawshaw asks:

Are we aspiring towards a society which mirrors the society we are fighting, different only in the fact we are now exploited by our own people? Or are we going to fight for a society based on satisfying our needs as human beings, a new society in the sense that it can use the technology, the results of human creativity for the benefit of human beings and our home this planet, yet an old society based on our law which respects and cares for the individual, which shares the resources and cares for the earth — a society without the terrible divisions of race, sex and class? (1993, p. 17).

Crawshaw’s questions assert a clear moral imperative and ethical practice. Nakata poses an equally crucial question:

What skills do Indigenous peoples then need to make the choices that serve interests that allow for continuity with traditional ways of thinking and experience, but not cut themselves off from recognising the day-to-day reality of being
circumscribed by other systems of knowledge—and not make the divide too difficult too bridge without elevating one at the expense of the other? (op.cit, p. 11).

Similar questions have influenced the development of the multi-disciplinary framework ICMDP that underpins the curriculum. The coherence of this multi-disciplinary framework derives from starting with and centring the subject, that is the ICMD practitioner, and then asking what understandings, knowledge, skills and values are important to develop the capacity to act in order to positively change their individual and collective lives. This question needs to be asked regularly by program staff in reviewing and determining the relevance and appropriateness of the course content in response to social and disciplinary changes. The answers of course are continuously informed and re-formed by the multiple and changing perspectives of students who as Indigenous community members are subject in a multiplicity of ways to the dynamic shifts in the wider social and political context including an increasing demand for information technology and leadership skills. Consistent with a feminist standpoint which recognises the legitimacy of situated knowledges, especially subjugated epistemologies (Haraway 1988; Code 1995), the ICMDP curriculum acknowledges that Indigenous student perspectives are grounded in, and reflect, the diversity of their historical and contextual experience and community and workplace dynamics.

As mentioned in Chapter Four the distinctive elements of the curriculum derives its decolonising and transformative potential through the construction of the ICMD practitioner. The development of curriculum discourses also grows out of what is required of the ICMD practitioner in effecting change in their social, community and work contexts. Both are derived through the discourse of Indigenous terms of reference (Oxenham 1999).

**The conception of the ICMD practitioner**

The conception of the ICMD practitioner as a key strategy of decolonisation and transformative practice resolves some of the theoretical problems of agency and structure as well as the practical problems identified by Linda Smith (1999) in attempting to settle the account with the unfinished business of modernity and achieve social justice and Indigenous self-determination. The pivotal role of ICMD practitioner in the program is acknowledged by colleagues, as Greville described in her research:  

The concept of the *ICMD practitioner role* has enabled the program to assemble a curriculum of *knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and ethics* which are embodied in
the competencies of the graduate. This practitioner role is embraced by students and graduates who develop a strong sense of themselves as a ‘community’ of ethical and sensitive cultural brokers (Greville 1998, p. 3, emphasis in the original).

I suggest that transformative possibilities for ICMDP students exist in ‘Indigenous Ways of knowing, being and doing’ in strategies which simultaneously embody, centre and problematise notions of agency, identity/ies and subjectivity/ies in all relations of power that exist in the various sites at the Indigenous /non-Indigenous interface in their everyday realities. This research shows how the curriculum and processes systematically and simultaneously embody, centre and problematise notions of ICMD learner/practitioner roles and identity formations corresponding to each of these sites. There is substantial evidence to show that students from different backgrounds and positions, and with differing experiences and expectations, assume, adopt and redefine the ethical roles of an ICMDP practitioner in their diverse contexts. The embodiment of these roles and discourses (through the agency, identity and subjectivity of those engaged in the change process) enables many of the strategies and concepts of decolonisation to avoid becoming complicit, co-opted and re-colonised.

The interrelationship between the concepts of empowerment, subjectivity, agency and structures examined in this process are arguably essential ingredients for the realisation of Indigenous self-determination and positive social change. These notions are problematised by ICMD learner/practitioners through identifying and analysing the relations of power in the various sites in which they are situated in their everyday realities. The decolonising and emancipatory potential of the program resides in ICMD learner/practitioners’ moving beyond the critique of their reality to engage (as cultural brokers) with a language of hope, political and ethical agency and transformative possibility in their practice—discourse—praxis.

The conception of the ICMD practitioner gives form to the idea(l) of transformative possibility in their multiple roles, identities and practices in various situated realities. As described in Chapter Three the conception of the ICMD practitioner holds together a range of complex, often competing ideas and even contradictory aims and values and provides a core as a basis for action. This theoretical construction became a cornerstone of commitment to the transformative goals and the broad political vision of the program as well as to the critical reflexive, innovative constructivist, and outcomes-oriented approach. The ICMD practitioner is required to identify, develop and enact Indigenous terms of
reference to work effectively and appropriately to bring about positive social change in their work and community.

Once the idea of the ICMD practitioner was agreed upon within the program, the different skills, knowledges and understandings considered essential for ICMD practitioners to achieve the goals of self-determination and self management and positive social change were identified and embedded in the curriculum. The specification of competencies enabled us to begin to ‘name up’ the curriculum content with a sense of shared understanding and purpose. A key argument of my thesis is that the conception of the ICMD practitioner was a pivotal point in the development of the ICMD curriculum and instrumental to achieving an ethical discourse and transformative practice. It is also a key decolonising strategy at a number of levels. My claims regarding the critical centrality of incorporating the ICMD practitioner into the curriculum as a key transformative strategy are affirmed in the writings of, and ongoing discussions with, several colleagues (including Bill Genat 2002; Heath Greville 1997, 1998, 2000; Ricky Osborne 1999; Darlene Oxenham 1997, 2000;). As Greville writes in her research:

> In making this constructed role the entry point and the foundation concept of the course, the ICMDP names itself not as primarily concerned with the transmission of a set of instrumental skills, but as a course concerned with the development of professional practice according to certain cultural and ethical ideals (1997, p. 2).

The ICMD practitioner construct became pivotal to determining both the curriculum content and pedagogical processes in the program. More than this, the ICMD practitioner embodies the theory and practice of the course allowing both staff and students to take real issues, concerns, aspirations, and realities into account, as well as recognise the value of existing skills and knowledge in devising the curriculum, and teaching, learning and assessment processes. Fundamental to this is the idea that the ICMD student/practitioner will be able to maintain/challenge/reframe/integrate existing knowledges with the various theories, methods and techniques with which they choose to engage to work more effectively at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts.

The conception of ICMD practitioner roles also provides students with a legitimate, critically, reflexive standpoint by which they can question how epistemologies/paradigms/disciplines of community management and development influence their existing roles and work. In turn it provides the basis for students to
influence the policies and practices in their work and community contexts. In many ways this both appropriates aspects of, but pushes beyond, and attends to some of ‘the unfinished business of the modernity’ (Smith 1999, p. 34). Another related argument of this thesis is that the establishment of a curriculum framework encompassing and appropriating aspects of instrumental, humanist and critical theoretical paradigms, made it possible to establish an Indigenous conception of professional standards which transcend instrumental knowledge and skills to include cultural and ethical ideals.

As outlined in Chapter Three by 1993-94 the concept of the ICMD practitioner was fully incorporated into the ICMD discourse. There was shared agreement that it provided a means to articulate, plan and enact the curriculum content and processes in a way that had previously not been possible. For several colleagues this was the point in the program's development when the course began to ‘really make sense’, ‘when it all came together’ (ICMDP File Notes 1994). The discourse that emerged opened the opportunity for students to recognise the contradictions, limits and possibilities inherent in policies, processes and programs and determine their actions on that basis. This practitioner discourse enabled the curriculum to hold together competencies to facilitate individual and collective agency in order to meet the ICMD course goals and aims. The construction of the ICMD practitioner roles was/is a means to draw together potentially oppositional disciplines and hold them in tension as a basis for students to explore the various factors influencing their situation and develop a critical understanding and necessary skills and techniques to work with appropriate groups to identify their needs and transform their work and everyday lives. The elements comprising the ICMDP curriculum have been specified to facilitate student’s own critical agency and provide them with skills to work in emancipatory and empowering ways with others to bring about positive change. From a critical standpoint the ICMD practitioner was envisaged as a means to operationalise the program's aim of identifying, privileging and achieving Indigenous determined futures as a key goal and area of competence.

As explicated in Chapter Four, both of the Centre’s CBE programs (ICH and ICMD) the construction and deployment of specific practitioner roles for Indigenous peoples in health, public service and community positions was a means of challenging dominant professional paradigms/discourses operating in the wider society. The creation of a (re)visioned, indigenised multiple role construct provided the basis for both the conscious inclusion and/or exclusion of particular aspects of disciplines, subjects and processes. These could be distinguished in terms of the competence/ies (knowledge, skills, understandings, values and attributes) necessary for a professionally qualified ‘Indigenous
community management and development practitioner’ to work effectively and appropriately with communities and government and non-government agencies in realising Indigenous determined futures and community wellbeing. And importantly, it was a means for those practitioners to engage in transformative discourses and actions in their work and community contexts at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface (Grogan & Walker 1995).

Decolonising the imagination of students

When the notion of the ICMDP practitioner was first introduced students were asked to work in small groups to identify all the roles, attributes and understandings they thought were essential in community management and community development. The responses from the groups were unanimous and compelling. All of the groups identified social change agents as a primary role (ICMDP File Notes 1993). While there were lots of jokes, calling each other ‘agent 99’, ‘justice warriors’, ‘the freedom fighter’ and so on, when the humour ebbed it was evident that student’s notion of social agency was firmly anchored to redressing social injustices, changing policies, enacting cultural brokerage, advocacy and mediation roles, building family and community capacity and so on, together with the necessary knowledge, understandings and skills to achieve it (ICMDP File Notes 1993).

There is now ample evidence (see for example the following student’s testimonies) to show that individual students have, through acknowledging their own agency and subjectivity/ies been able to operationalise and harness their disciplinary power and knowledge (Foucault 1980) and develop, take into account, and enact Indigenous terms of reference in their particular contexts. At the same time the theoretical construct of the ICMD practitioner is an important, decolonising tactic because it enables new movements, new derivations in becoming — thus refusing to be ‘already-read’ (Vijay Mishra 1996, p. 351, in McConaghy 2000, p. 242).

Furthermore, by involving students in the process of defining the competencies required in their various contexts it was now possible to generate more culturally relevant and appropriate competencies with student input and understandings. This student-centred, participatory process gave students the opportunity to explore the various competing and complimentary components of each of the disciplines encompassed in the program. These were now deconstructed and reconstructed through a trans-disciplinary lens in order to arrive at an understanding of the necessity of holding the competing (but not necessarily irreconcilable) components together. One of the activities in the first and second year Indigenous Ways Of … Workshops required students to reflect on how they were taking Indigenous terms of reference and the interests of the Indigenous
communities with whom they were working into account in the different Indigenous contexts in which they were located. Their various responses showed how students, some of whom were already competent managers in Indigenous organisations, had begun to question their own taken for granted assumptions in these roles, and to acknowledge the existence of the competing interests and tensions in their work. The sense of being cultural brokers, being more reflective, being conscious and ethical is evident in their narratives. Students said things like:

Now I understand why we always feel like the ‘meat in the sandwich’ (Student 12).

I find myself questioning some of the things I expect of staff a lot more than I used to… (Student 33).

In my job I still have to meet community needs and balance the books but I’m clearer about where my priority lays now (Student 8).

Prior to reconceptualizing these tensions, students in the program had expressed confusion, resentment and anger at being pushed and pulled in a kind of paradigmatic tug of war. Most were attempting to deal with the difficulties they experienced in their work by taking a particular unitary standpoint – opting for a position that they felt they could live with. Their response at that time had been to say things like:

You fellas had better get your stories straight… (Student 39).

You all tell us different things, we’re supposed to provide leadership and direction one minute and sit on our hands waiting for the community to decide what they want the next — we don’t know what you want! (Student 36).

I know community development principles are important for some students — such as those working with communities — but I can’t do that sort of thing as a manager (Student 31).

Both of these sets of comments in course evaluation and research findings suggest that through a critical engagement with the ICMD practitioner role construct, (and an embedded Indigenous Terms of Reference discourse), many students see themselves as engaged in a process of ‘becoming’ a particular kind of practitioner defined from within an Indigenous frame of reference as opposed to dominant frames. Most students seem to
understand and believe that the course can simultaneously recognise their existing knowledge and experience and provide them with appropriate processes to learn new and more powerful ways to utilise and extend their understandings of their work and community contexts.

Interviews and discussions with students support the idea that by adopting the theoretical construct of the ICMD practitioner they are more willing to critically reflect upon and rethink their own ways of doing things and at the same time see themselves as engaged in a broader decolonising project — that is neither assimilationist or oppositional — but offers transformative possibilities for them individually and in their work and community. Several students noted that taking on the ICMDP practitioner role gave them greater freedoms to step out of themselves as well as a greater sense of responsibility. Two students working in Liaison Officer roles agreed that the notion of the ICMD practitioner enabled them to negotiate a legitimate space to make changes in the workplace that they could not have envisaged before (ICMDP 1995 File Notes).

A year or so after the incorporation of the ICMD practitioner one group of 3rd year students at the Regional Workshop on Indigenous Self Management and Indigenous Self Determination in Darwin wrote this:

We as ICMD practitioners need to have good analytical skills and problem solving techniques and processes to build on ideas, draw out findings, produce knowledge and theory and use these to facilitate positive social change to benefit our people whom we are working with and for. Many ‘minefields’ are identifiable when we analyse the processes of Indigenous Self Management and Indigenous Self Determination but there are also methods, strategies and activities which can defuse these. …

It is our opinion that Indigenous Self Management is the appropriate vehicle to implement strategies to achieve the goal of Indigenous Self Determination and means of gaining and utilizing skills, attributes and behaviour of a high degree within Federal, State and Territory Departments, Indigenous communities, organisations, agencies and private industry.

… ICMD practitioners have to recognise the inhibitors which are constraints to the process and use their skills to overcome these factors. It is also necessary to
acknowledge the enabling factors and maximise usage of them in the development process.

…an effective ICMD practitioner has to also call on their attributes such as quick thought processes, patience, perceptiveness, sensitivity and affinity with the critical reference group to keep pace with the numerous issues occurring simultaneously (ICMDP 1994 File Notes).

The above narrative highlights how Indigenous students engage in the process of specifying the competencies necessary for Indigenous futures. There are also many other diverse examples of ICMD graduates who have continued to demonstrate understandings of the complexities surrounding their work and a transformative commitment long after they leave the course. This is further validated by external sources including senior officials in Government departments (meeting 2002) and senior Indigenous academics around Australia (reported communication by Head of Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Professor Joan Winch, August 2001).

Travelling in the Kimberleys throughout 2000–2001 I continually encountered graduates working in positions of leadership and transformation in their different contexts. Discussions with these people revealed their continued commitment and political and practical engagement with the ICMD discourse and practice in a range of different sites, reinforcing the significance and potence of their engagement with the ICMD practitioner construct. But it is their stories that tell it best.

The following narratives from these encounters highlight the importance of the discourse and the strategies and practice frameworks with which ICMD practitioners consciously engage as active agents of change in their work.

**We’ve still been doing some very good things**

For example, Johnny had completed ICMD course some time ago. He was still working in a community organisation running a specific program funded through a government agency. When I asked Johnny how things were going he replied:

Yeah…We’ve still been doing some very good things now…
I still use that knowledge I got back then [in the course] and I build on it…
I still get around a lot,
the mob here they still expect me to do everything for them, especially if they are my relations [grins]
but I tell them you got do it for yourself…. I can’t do it for you… but maybe I can help set it up….
mm…[pause]
You can’t really look over there [local park] and say well that [Johnny] he’s been doing a good job [laugh]
there’s always a big mob there [laugh]
but I can look over there and see that [Lucy] is not there and [Old fella] he’s not there this last two weeks...
mmm…[pause]
I can say to myself well maybe what I’m doing has rubbed off a little—
I am still planning and evaluating my program, [body language and expressions acknowledges that it is ‘course-speak’]
but you can’t really see what I do properly…maybe you can… but the figures aren’t gonna tell you…
I think to myself when I look over there, well maybe that mob’s not there because they are too sick from too much grog…
I won’t know until I see them around maybe …
but the figures won’t be able to tell [funding body] about what’s really going for this mob,
see…they would have to come and see me [shrugs and grins].
(ICMDP 2000 File Notes, Community organisation worker (Dec 2000).

The discussion with Johnny reveals his understanding both of the complexity of renegotiating cultural role expectations with ‘his mob’, some of whom are his relations, and at the same time meeting government program objectives. In particular, Johnny identifies the problematics of keeping statistics on the number of ‘itinerants’ in the park (one of the governmental measures of his program’s effectiveness). He is clear that the monitoring and evaluation process defined by government is inadequate and inappropriate. He points out the importance of his ongoing engagement with the local mob and out of town mob to know what is really going on, whether strategies are being implemented effectively in meeting the program outcomes and whether the measure for these are appropriate in the first place. It is evident that his own local knowledge is necessary to know whether people are moderating their drinking, staying in accommodation or not there because they are sick and so on. His narrative highlights the inappropriateness of determining the effectiveness of the everyday operations of
programs such as the one he coordinates which are intended to assist individuals on the basis of aggregated statistics.

**Changing things from the community level**

Walter’s narrative foregrounds the diversity of goals and aspirations within Indigenous groups and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. He reveals the tensions for him in attempting to work inside government to change the system, he is still trying to change things but from the community level, ‘from the ground up’.

If you looked at what I am doing from the perspective of Curtin’s graduate survey I don’t look like much of a success story..
I actually earn less now than I use to… but from my perspective and in my family’s eyes… I am a success.
I chose to leave my job with [Government department]—that was my choice. Some people might think that was a bit selfish, but I had my family’s support too…I couldn’t stay once I understood how restricting the policies were.
I began working with my mob…now that is success in my own eyes…
we are putting in place the things they want…
I have my brokerage skills…
I could have been a level nine now…
some of the graduates are — and that’s okay too — they are still trying to change things from the inside…
but that wasn’t my way…
I was too impatient… there are too many obstacles, constraints, disablers, not enough opportunities..(laugh)…
see I can’t think of any more positives in the policy process…
what are they again?…
what did Scoug’s [lecturer] call them again?…
Enablers …(laugh again)
(ICMDP 2000 File Notes, Community organisation worker 2 (1999)

The above story highlights how Walter managed his personal dilemmas and his dissatisfaction with the limitations of being inside government. Together, these narratives reveal students’ agency and subjectivity, through the incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference, and their critique of governmental processes and possibilities.
The ICMDP practitioner – creating transformative agency

The previous discussions reveal how those ICMDP staff committed to decolonisation engage with a ‘radical reflexive transformative pedagogy’. They also confirm the transformative potential of the ICMD pedagogy and the strategies such as the ICMD practitioner. These discussions reveal the different ways in which the teaching and learning approaches recognise human agency, centre the ‘student/learner’, and acknowledge and promote the capacity of individuals and groups to contribute positively to social change.

Engaging in decolonisation has necessitated working with the paradoxes of poststructuralist, postmodernist and structuralist standpoints regarding knowledge, power, identity and experience — taking up the ‘space’ for Indigenous voices at the same time as providing an emancipatory pedagogy which acknowledges and facilitates individual’s conscious agency and determinancy in social change. The ICMD programmatic discourse and curriculum is premised on the Freirian notion that the student is a conscious ‘being’ with critical agency (Greville 1998; McPhee & Walker 2001; Walker 1994; Wilson 1999). As Freire (1993, p. xii) writes:

To invent new identities as active, cultural agents for social change means to refuse to allow our personal and collective narratives of identity to be depoliticised at the level of everyday life.

Student narratives highlight how the operations of governance including the scientific procedures that measure, objectify and aggregate our individual lives adroitly dispense with and depoliticise people’s realities. Student’s capacity and agency derives from their understanding of the epistemic inadequacies and procedural violations inherent in ISAs on the basis of their actual lived experiences. The course assists students to understand why this is so, and what they can do to change it. Thus the infused ICMDP/Indigenous standpoint and aims are in line the possibilities of feminist and critical theorists, who have argued the legitimacy of individual knowledges and experiences (Code 1995).

As discussed earlier the ICMDP course elements are structured to encourage ICMD practitioners to use their own historical narratives together with rewritten histories of colonisation to understand why and how their contemporary realities are underscored by cultural politics, overt and covert racism, and colonial ambivalence. This also includes understanding the various roles that institutions play in creating processes for discussing or discounting these histories. The program also gives students an opportunity to explore
strategies, possibilities and techniques as cultural brokers and social change agents and to gain a greater understanding of precisely what it is they want to change and how they can best proceed to change it. The notion of the ICMD practitioner reveals how ICMD theory building and practice (praxis) challenges the conception of ‘the fractured, fragmented subject postulated by poststructural discourse’ (Lather 1991, p. 28) and looks instead to their potential (Smith 1999) to exercise their power in multiple ways.

Through adopting the theoretical construction of the ICMD practitioner the ICMDP has been able to give primacy to human agency and develop and articulate a transdisciplinary theory and practice. This theory and practice framework encompasses both humanistic and critical paradigms and integrates community development discourses, cultural politics and personal and social transformation. Moreover, by adopting these theoretical positions and using practitioner skills identified in a critically reflexive manner, skills underpinned by a moral and ethical discourse, the program has avoided the soulless ‘corporate’ identity found in instrumental paradigms although requiring us to walk along the same path (and possibly fall on the same sword of Hunter’s as those intellectuals ‘who continue the arts of ethical self-problematisation and self-concern’ (Hunter 1994, p. 35).

Developing a program discourse and theoretical framework that reflects and is relevant to students’ realities and experience has required us to reconfigure our conceptual understandings and relationships, to ask different questions and bring ideas together differently. For example, students explore their identities by beginning with their historical and geographical location transcending the liberal, structural/functionalist emphasis on notions of identity that span the elements that constitute the private/public and individual/nation state (such as individual or collective, subaltern or sovereign). The value of doing this resides, as Homi Bhabha states:

> In shifting the question of identity from the ontological and epistemological imperative — What is identity? — to face the ethical and political prerogative — What are identities for? — or even to present the pragmatic alternative — What can identities do? (Bhabha 1997, p. 432, emphasis in the original).

Such repositioning of identities and reframing of questions is a key critical transformative element within the ICMDP. The strength of the course hinges on the question of what an effective ICMDP practitioner needs to do (with the answer dependent on the students conscious engagement with the course elements which encompass Indigenous terms of reference processes). Moreover, the answers are drawn from the student’s experiences.
in their specific contexts. The importance of issues of location or positioning is particularly apparent in both the elements of competence across each of the years and streams (Community Management and Community Development) and the learning processes outlined in the ‘Issues and Factors’ and ‘Indigenous Ways of …’ Workshops. These workshops, designed to encourage and support ICMD practitioners to reflect on their identities and subjectivities serve as difficult but crucial transformative moments in the program as students become more conscious of both complexities and possibilities available in seeing themselves as located at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface.

In keeping with the notion of bricoleur and participant observer as part of the methodological approach I have chosen for ethical reasons and to draw on relevant primary ICMDP sources on the basis that it recognises and validates ICMDP colleagues and students understandings and experiences and enriches this research. Permission was obtained by colleagues and students in such instances. One of the students (referred to as Elizabeth) that Erin Wilson (2001) interviewed in her complementary research of liberatory practice within the ICMDP clearly distinguishes between learning about Indigenous culture and engaging in processes that enable students to learn more about how colonialism and racism has influenced their contemporary situation. She suggests that some people may not understand the difference, and while not saying it, Elizabeth’s own understanding highlights how the course actually circumnavigates the problems of culturalism. She states:

... doing the course, we do usually know, we live in that way, in Aboriginal ways of, and things like that. But I guess what people who say those things maybe can’t see, is that you’re learning to deal with some of the issues that you face because of the way you are, you know, because of the way, because you’re Aboriginal...

in the issues and stuff and you’re learning to deal with this so that it....benefits... because I don’t think people realise that... until you come and do the course, just how much has happened to Aboriginal people and that leads to the problems we may be facing today in our workplace with somebody, or with, you know, or for whatever reason we're offering the service and that. And then you...

really put it into that perspective, and you know why and how we came to this point, then you can know how to, how to maybe change that and that’s through the course.
As Wilson says

the course provides an analysis of change based on the “why and how we came to this point” as Aboriginal people. It is not identity that is being taught, though it is confirmed, it is the analysis of the issues which arise because of identity ...(Wilson 2001 p.3).

Acknowledging that as teachers we are always working with Subjectivities (rather than subjects) demands finding the right balance of often painful historical revisiting and renaming, restorative powers of hope, individual and collective visions and reconstituted agency to negotiate new social realities. Bhabha’s account helps explain and encapsulate the complexity of reworking existing identities,

The power of historical locality becomes particularly persuasive as the problem of cultural identity is staged in discourses of geographical complexity...The demand for specificity increases as the subject of cultural citizenship becomes inscribed with more and more of the striations of difference found in multicultural, pluralist, late capital society. The call for historical locality is also then a dislocation of the agency of cultural and disciplinary identity (Bhabha 1997, p. 433).

The Centre’s standpoint is consistent with Bhabha’s position regarding the importance of challenging dominant cultural and disciplinary assumptions that underpin roles/positions/identities in the process of redefining professional practitioner roles (Grogan & Walker 1994). The principles of citizenship in multicultural society necessarily require questioning and renegotiating what has been taken for granted and unquestioned by the dominant society and maintained and justified through disciplinary rules, procedural knowledge and economic capacity. But it also requires the simultaneous, reflexive affirmations and questionings encompassed in Indigenous terms of reference (ITR) processes and Indigenous standpoints that have the potential to constantly rework and reaffirm identities and relations at the Cultural Interface (Nakata 2002b). At this historical moment, in any postcolonial site, emergent minority positions (and the transformative roles that grow out of their emergence) require the ability to shift back and forth between specific identities relevant to the specific history, social and political context of the individuals, groups and collectives involved. I suggest that such a position requires and rests on what Bhabha refers to as ‘the possibility of a certain ambivalent and contingent double consciousness’ (op.cit, p. 434).
Likewise, the ICMDP discourse suggests that the ICMD practitioner, aspiring to being an engaged and productive 'citizen', yet reluctant to become assimilated also needs to maintain an ambivalent and contingent double consciousness. Drawing upon, but adapting Bhabha’s argument, I suggest that many of the learning processes that I have described throughout this thesis can enable ICMD practitioners to:

move from a defensive third-person perspective — where recognizing oneself as a [victim and claiming marginality as a change agent] is a [necessary] reaction to the histories of colonial oppression...and postcolonial/neo-imperialist racial discrimination — to the more active self-aware first-person perspective... (op.cit, p. 434).

ICMD students/practitioners move back and forth between their own Bhabha suggests that the transformative possibilities inherent in claiming some other position depends upon establishing an interstitial space of identification. The individual/collective identities to which people aspire are achieved in the movement between, and in between, the two — the first and the third persons. Bhabha explains it thus:

It is moreover in this movement that a narrative of historical becoming is constituted not as a dialectic, between first and third persons but as an effect of the ambivalent condition of their borderline proximity — the first-in-the-third/the one-in-the-other (loc.cit).

A similar proposal can be made with respect to theorising about ICMDP practitioner/students and the importance of incorporating both affective and cognitive elements to galvanise the desire and commitment to act. I suggest that for ICMD practitioners the recognition of the ambivalent condition of their borderline proximity provides the momentum for taking up a position that simultaneously acknowledges the legacies of colonial oppression and works with the contemporary social, political and economic constraints and possibilities of multicultural democracy. Importantly, part of the paradox and possibility for the individuals who ‘employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways’ to engage with the unfinished business of colonisation (Linda Smith 1999, p. 34) can be found in Bhabha’s suggestion that the identity of becoming that which is aspired to succeeds as a political and cultural practice only ‘on the condition that the first and third positions are accepted as living in an unresolved, ongoing, ambivalent articulation in relation to each other’ (op.cit, p. 434).
The ICMDP disciplines and discourses

Students as ICMD practitioners also find themselves having to recognise and live with the competing frameworks, disciplines, discourses and ideas that inform, drive and continuously challenge the ICMD curriculum and pedagogy. Not least of these are the inherent contradictions between the goals, theories and disciplines of community management and community development (albeit fused with cultural politics, social linguistics, and the psychology of histories and healing) and between these and the goals of decolonisation and social transformation.

The way the course elements are expressed captures the positive interaction of reworking community development with cultural politics. These elements both require and allow students to explore both the assimilationist tendencies and strategic and socially just opportunities underpinning ‘community development’ approaches. They also assist students to see themselves as people engaged in practices and processes in specific contexts that require their conscious and critical agency and which, in turn, require the conscious and critical agency of the people with whom they are working. Students as ICMD practitioners assist Indigenous groups to determine their future goals and aspirations in a manner that recognises the diversity of Indigenous interests, values and lifestyles. This process aligns with and deploys critical and humanist conceptions of community development that are about people determining their own futures in accordance with their own values, beliefs and aspirations (which depending on their historical, geographic or social location may be similar to or completely at odds with the broader population) and maintained via their ‘contingent identity’ (Bhabha 1997).

Both community development discourses and cultural politics are underpinned by assumptions of human agency consonant with transformative pedagogy. The ICMD theory and practice is about empowering participants to analyse the causes of their powerlessness and to understand as well as change their social circumstances both individually and collectively. The ICMD theory and practice also involves students gaining a sense of their own power, and understanding of their own contexts. Such a position is optimistic that individuals can and do make meaning and assume a sense of direction over their own lives along the lines alluded to by Linda Smith as necessary for decolonisation (1999).

The ICMD theory and discourse draws upon both humanistic and critical theoretical strands which together they make possible a conception of an individual subject capable of ‘full consciousness’, ‘reflexive rationality’ and human agency who at the same time
knows that they are ‘inscribed by multiple contestatory discourses’ (Lather 1991, p. 5) and demonstrates an acceptance of a ‘certain ambivalent and contingent double consciousness.’ (Bhabha 1997, p. 434), necessary for working at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous interface, or what Bhabha refers to as the ‘liminal space’.

The notion of social change agents used by students is influenced by and reinforced through the incorporation of the Indigenous terms of reference framework in the program. The framework enables students to participate in the process of identifying how both Indigenous and non-Indigenous frames of reference are used to constitute their identities. Students talk of ‘shifting identities’, ‘switching language’ and ‘code switching’ ‘taking on a different body’ as necessary to move within and between the different domains which they inhabit (ICMDP File Notes 1997-2001). The history, picture building and naming elements within the Indigenous terms of reference framework enable students to maintain, re-establish or redefine a sense of coherence and continuity in the Indigenous domain together with an ability to deal with the reality of shifting identities and subjectivities as their ways of knowing, being and acting intersect with the non-Indigenous domain.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasise the interrelatedness of these key transformative strategies deployed in the ICMDP. The discourse analysis undertaken by Erin Wilson (1999) suggests that students who complete the course are highly conscious of their agency, and their own ability to work with the contradictions, they are more willing and confident with their own ability to live with the multiplicity and uncertainty of their situation and more confident to confront unknown territory. Their voices in the research reinforce the links between a political vision and commitment to social change, a constructed ethical practitioner, decolonising curriculum, reflexive transformative pedagogy and transformative practice.

The next Chapter looks at how much of the decolonising and transformative potential for the ICMD practitioner resides in the notion of negotiating the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface, a notion that is perhaps even more foundational to ensure Indigenous interests are achieved.
Chapter Six

Negotiating the Interface

Over the years, I have pursued an interest in the theoretical underpinnings of practice (Nakata, 1997b). I have called the intersection of the Western and Indigenous domains, the Cultural Interface, and theoretically I have been inclined to begin there and have argued for embedding the underlying principles of reform in this space. This is because I see the Cultural Interface as the place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and more to the point the place where we are active agents in our own lives – where we make decisions – our lifeworld. For Indigenous peoples our context, remote or urban, is already circumscribed by the discursive space of the Cultural Interface (Nakata 2002b, p. 9).

The Cultural Interface – as a place to begin

In an important sense the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface — or Cultural Interface as Martin Nakata refers to this space — contains the theoretical underpinnings for this thesis. While the theoretical construct of the ICMD practitioner offers a powerful and pivotal point for the embodiment of Indigenous ethical practice the theoretical construct of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface provides the necessary site in which the ICMD practitioner is positioned and where their practice takes place. The Ganma metaphor referred to earlier encapsulates both a description and explanation for the turbulence, the unsettled business, the ongoing need for negotiation and the generative, productive possibilities within the Cultural Interface that are recurring motifs throughout this thesis. In the ICMDP discourse the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface is where all of our various discourses, policies and practices intersect and compete and influence our daily lives (Indigenous and non-Indigenous whether we are aware of it or not). In fact I suggest it is the failure of non-Indigenous Australians to acknowledge, allow or accept the intersection of Indigenous/non-Indigenous cultures as distinctive entities that still fosters assimilationist and colonising polices and practices.

Within the ICMDP curriculum these theoretical constructs give new meaning and practical purpose to the notion that our reality is socially constructed. While highly complex and difficult to maintain these constructs provide a basis for a reflexive decolonising pedagogy
and transformative practice with broad implications for Indigenous and non/Indigenous interactions and relations. This is also evident in the Centre’s policy negotiations at Curtin with respect to university-wide curriculum and pedagogy and with government funding and policy making bodies in relation to decisions, principles and practices pertaining to Indigenous research and education across a range of areas such as health, housing and community management and development which impact on Indigenous wellbeing (see Curtin’s Policy on the Role of CAS, www.policies.curtin.edu.au/documents/role_cas.doc).

Acknowledging that we are all located within the Cultural Interface is important for all Australians because it allows for the idea of leaving cultures intact in all their diversity while recognising that we are all becoming something different than we were because of our interactivity in this space. I suggest that the notion of the interface is a theoretical construction encompassing Indigenous and Western ideas which provides all Australians but more particularly Indigenous people ‘with a rhetorical space in the landscape to reject colonial discourses and practices and renegotiate future possibilities’ (McPhee & Walker 2001, p. 22).

It is worth noting that even though I agree with Martin Nakata that the theoretical construct of the Cultural Interface is the place to begin — and I have headed this section as such — this thesis did not start from this point precisely because we only discovered the unequivocal import of this assertion along the way in the ICMDP journey. Instead as Chapter Three attests, we waded around knee-deep within the turbulence of the Interface for a long time arguing and debating over what constituted the most culturally appropriate curriculum design and pedagogical practice, what knowledges should be taught and what understandings should be assessed, what a graduate should look like and where they should be able to go in the future. As long as our discussions were centred around working from two separate domains towards the contradictory and irreconcilable dual aims of the NATSIEP policy we kept finding ourselves going down blind alleys leading to impossible tasks or unacceptable costs for both ICMDP staff and students in terms of meeting the ICMDP goals and course requirements.

As with the notion of the ICMDP practitioner, the idea of working from the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface provided a solution to these dilemmas while still recognising the incredible complexity of the tasks ahead for ICMDP students/practitioners and teachers. The theoretical construct grew out of these dilemmas and complexities as a viable means to position the ICMDP practitioner in a way that was neither assimilationist nor resistant,
but able to work with the contradictory roles and relations of power at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

The beginnings of the Centre’s articulation around this notion are evident in the paper ‘Standards and Indigenous Cultures - Issues of equity and cultural integrity in higher education and the workplace’, presented by Grogan and I at the Global Competencies Conference in Sydney in 1995. We stated that:

Aboriginal people’s values, needs, priorities and aspirations, and ways of doing things often differ from those of non-Aboriginal people. Policy-makers, government workers, service providers and others have generally, for whatever reason, failed to take those differences into account in dealings that impact upon Aboriginal people. As a consequence, the majority of Aboriginal people within the current social and political context continue to experience disadvantage in all aspects of their life including areas of health, housing, education and employment — areas which most non-Aboriginals believe are their most basic right to access. The social and economic situation of Aboriginal people will not shift from its current and past status unless culturally appropriate processes, which take these differences into account, are undertaken at all points where the two cultures intersect (Grogan & Walker 1995, p. 1, emphasis added).

The idea of the Interface is also evident, yet still not fully articulated in the early Workbooks. For example in the 1994 Indigenous Ways Of Workshop …3, which examined the various factors which impact on the achievement of Indigenous Self Determination one of the main aims of the workshop was to:

examine the implications of working within and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains for own role as a social change agent (ICMDP 1994d Indigenous Ways Of Workshop …3, p. 2).

Similarly, in a conference presentation at Fremantle in September 1994, ICMDP colleagues, Osborne and Dick, suggest that the Indigenous terms of reference framework is:

a means of engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the process of culturally appropriate positive social change for Indigenous peoples, through conscious reflection and other appropriate educative processes which will enable
Indigenous people to define their world view from within their own contexts (Osborne & Dick 1995, p. 1).

The notion of the positioning or locality of culture is fundamental to both notions of decolonisation and transformation. Positionality also has implications for the goals of Indigenous self-determination. As Linda Smith writes in response of the cynicism and purism of attempts by marginalised groups to assert a position:

The means to the end involves human agency in ways which are complex and contradictory. The notion of strategic positioning as a deliberate practice is partially an attempt to contain the unevenness and unpredictability, under stress, of people engaged in emancipatory struggles (Smith 1999, p. 186).

Early ICMDP narratives reveal such attempts to find a strategic position from which to pursue both the program goals and an achievable engagement for students in positive social change. Initially, the ICMDP curriculum was influenced by the ideas embedded in separate domain theory (Rowse 1992). While this theory highlighted the seeming intractability of the problems students experienced and the reasons why students might feel ‘like the meat in the sandwich’ it did not cater for the complexity and diversity of student experiences and interests. It was insufficient as a theory to enable students to negotiate Indigenous interests and to engage with the broader notion of Indigenous self-determination in ways that moved outside of the Indigenous domain to engage with aspirations which intersected with those of the wider Australian society (Harris 1994). We became aware of the limitations created by working solely with the idea of Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains. Theoretical coherence was largely dependent on retaining the idea of two discrete oppositional cultures (an inevitability of domain separation theory which McConaghy has also identified 2000, p. 202). For our purpose the notion of cultural binaries was neither ‘tenable or useful’ (McConaghy 2000, p. 203) in terms of the broader vision of the ICMDP or of the ICMD practitioners attempting to navigate a diverse array of positions but still nevertheless inscribed in the goals of Indigenous self-determination and future interests.

Equally important, ICMDP attempts to discuss Indigenous positionality and intersections with non-Indigenous Australians in terms of working from the margins also caused us some problems. While we drew on Pettman (1988a, 1988b, 1992) and others in theorising student’s engagement and relations of power within bureaucracy and policy as
being located in the margins it still failed to offer a satisfactory theoretical framework in
which to account for the complexities of student’s realities.

Working beyond marginality

The discourse of marginality, while a powerful and strategic construct in the context of
critical education, was initially employed within the program with varying degrees of
ambivalence. For some, the concept of marginality derives its authority, legitimacy and
importantly its subversive, and hence transformative, potential from being located within
the margins of mainstream society positioning the practitioner as an outsider to the centre.
Authors such as Donna Haraway (1988) suggest the position of the subjugated other
offers a great capacity to see. Such studied positioning enables what Connor (1989, p. 229)
refers to as a ‘cultural/critical frame which explores the possibilities of inverting
conventional mappings and distributions of power.’ At the same time there is the risk that:

…such oppositional models themselves may derive from and reproduce colonial
structures of thought - so that to proclaim oneself as marginalised or silenced
people is to implicitly accept and to internalise the condition of marginality (Connor
1989, p. 233).

Discussions with Indigenous staff and postgraduate students highlight that there is
considerable ambivalence about ‘working the margins’ reinforcing the importance of
engaging in deconstructing the structures and histories of the dominant and margins
(Spivak 1987; Bhabha 1994). In part, for some the usefulness of the concept of
marginality depends on who is doing the positioning. There is a difference between
experiencing and being marginalised and naming one’s position(s) as marginal in order to
critique the dominant power relations, to being described as marginal. For example,
referring to Bennett’s description of Indigenous people as ‘powerless to defend
themselves against the final onslaught’ (1978, p. 67) Michael Dodson (1994a) states that
such proclamations ‘continue to construct us as innately obsolete peoples’ (p. 4).

In contrast some critical theorists have suggested that from the margins Indigenous
people can critique the unifying or universalising meanings and values of the centre that
contribute to their oppression, misrepresentation and materially disadvantage. They can
draw upon their own experience of what it is that the modernist project fails to deliver
outwards (or downwards) from the centre (obsessed as it were with always working
inwards and upwards). Therefore to not speak from this position is to risk losing an
indignant legitimacy of a ‘particularised and marginalised’ voice. Nevertheless, to admit
this is to admit the power of the margins, a power that ironically derives from being able to
seek a redistribution of power and/or justice by being able to refer to one’s marginal and powerless position. Ultimately it is a risky strategy with limited and short-term gains. Dodson in the same article alludes to other problematics associated with being categorised as marginal, or minority, where for example one’s membership of an Indigenous community becomes linked to the ‘objective criteria’ of their marginality (1994, p.4). The margins remains an uneasy place from which to assert one’s agency and I suggest — that without taking the steps identified by Bhabha (Chapter 5) — it generally requires one to maintain a critical, resistant or oppositional stand in relation to the wider society.

David Smith acknowledges the problematic bind this situation creates for minority groups but still argues for the transformative potential of boundary politics that defines the ‘fringes’, because critical pedagogy is concerned:

not with the end of appropriating behaviours that will move individuals to the centre, but with the end of reconstructing the social order and redrawing the boundaries themselves (1997, p. 371).

Nevertheless both the concepts of ‘separate domains’ and ‘the margins’ remain limited as a strategic position in terms of future possibilities, with transformation and decolonisation dependent on oppositionality. Attempts to explore the idea of ‘deploying the margins’ still meet with suspicion, disquiet and even outright resistance among students as evident in a Curtin Indigenous Research Centre postgraduate seminar in 1999. Nakata describes a similar experience as a student ‘I began to feel uneasy whenever I read about people “in the margins” — a strange sensation you get when you read about what is supposed to be a representation of yourself in a text’ (1995a, p. 68). As some of the discussion above shows increasingly, and in more or less articulated forms, the notion of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface emerged as an important theoretical construct to work beyond the limitations of marginalisation, which is generally the only way Indigenous people are represented or represent themselves. As one student noted at this CIRC Seminar:

The margins don’t sit well with me given our status as Indigenous people and First Nations People —
I think that ‘the margins’ ignores our rights and our status of equality…
I don’t think we should be giving up these things even though we are disadvantaged (Postgraduate Student, CIRC 1999).
The interface
The discourse of the ICMD practitioner and their location at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface is a crucial transformative strategy within the program that shifts the dimensionality of the centre–margin binary to the notion of the intersection of different ways of knowing, being and doing of distinctive groups. The idea and ideal of the ICMD practitioner working at the Cultural Interface in contemporary Australian society informs the ICMDP curriculum and pedagogy and the transformative interactivity between identity and agency, action learning, critical reflection, political vision and ethical practice (Mezirow 1990). The notion of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface overcomes some of the ambivalence that resides in discourses and discursive practices that begin from and remain in the notion of marginality.

It is also a useful conceptual framework for Indigenous people to understand how Indigenous and Western power relations and knowledges intersect, and how their potential can be harnessed for ‘Indigenous management of Indigenous communities and affairs’ (Nakata 2002b, p. 12).

Indigenous Ways Of... knowing, being and acting
As discussed in Chapter Five the ICMDP, Indigenous Ways of... Workshops are held across each of the three years of the course. Each of these workshops progressively examines Indigenous Ways of knowing, seeing, being and doing. The Indigenous Ways of... 3 Workshop examines the notion of separate Indigenous/non-Indigenous domains, how Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains have impacted upon each other and how each has power and control over different elements of society (ICMDP 1995b, pp. 19-20).

By 1994 and 1995 there was a definite shift in ICMDP thinking or perhaps a much clearer articulation of these ideas. The Indigenous Ways of... 3 Workshop explores these different elements of control, power and influence and the complexities involved in renegotiating these elements at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface. These elements encompass the different values and belief systems, religious ideas, knowledges, languages and relationships with the land and so on. The Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface is a powerful construct because it acknowledges the struggle that has continued at the intersection of and within these domains since colonisation. It thus allows for notions of diversity, and importantly it admits the notion of agency, the ongoing influences each domain has had on the other since colonisation by their very existence. In the workshop students engage in a range of activities to explore the complexities and possibilities of working at this Cultural Interface. The rationale in this ICMDP Indigenous
Ways Of...3 Workshop workbook begins to articulate this theoretical construct, it acknowledge that these are areas of 'conflict and confusion' (ICMDP 1995b, loc.cit). The workshop encourages students to explore the idea that as ICMD practitioners they are involved in working between these domains in different roles, responding to different discourses on a day-to-day basis. The processes students engage with, the group discussions, the issue identification, the role plays, case study analysis and so on assist students to recognise how these different values and discourses intersect with and influence their own responses and decisions. Students examine the implications of the fact that these different roles and interests vary according to specific contexts and the different groups they are working with as service providers, policy-makers, community workers and so on and can conflict with or be in accord with their roles as members of families and communities (loc.cit). Through this exploration of their multiple roles and engagement with competing discourses and values students come to recognise that they are 'responding, interacting, taking positions, making decisions and in the process re-making cultures — ways of knowing, being and acting' (Nakata 2002b, p.9).

Being involved in action research requires that ICMD practitioners analyse their own roles and reflect on how they move within and between domains and how these domains interact and how each impacts on their ways of working and on the values, policies and processes within the organisation or community (ICMDP 1995b).

When students return to their workplace they engage in action learning and reflective practice to further examine, reflect on and act to make changes that are positive (Morgan & Ramirez 1983; Ramirez 1983).

Working at the Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Interface

In the first year Indigenous Ways of... 1 Workshop, students look at how the social science disciplines of community management, community development, social policy and notions of identity and culture and history interact to influence themselves and all other stakeholders in their work at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface (ICMDP 1994d).

In a paper titled Citizens for a New World: Education for Negotiating and Transforming Social Realities presented at the Learning Conference in Greece in 2001, Rob McPhee and I claimed that:

In order to address existing social inequities and inequalities for Indigenous peoples ICMD practitioners need to be able to understand how differences in power can
influence Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and access to resources. They are also required to develop the skills to negotiate and mediate the dynamics and power relations at the Interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

Such philosophical and political concerns are at the heart of the ICMD curriculum, and can be found in the course content throughout the workbooks. For example one of the third year workbooks states that in order to work effectively across this interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains ICMD practitioners are required to:

• gain a deeper understanding of how various issues and factors within the broader social, political, historical and economic context impact on, or influence their work, and
• demonstrate their ability to analyse and consider such things as:
  - the institutions they represent;
  - the structures they inhabit;
  - the policies and programs they administer;
  - the practices and processes they employ; and
  - the language they use in their relationships with clients/others

McPhee and I suggested that the ability for students/practitioners to analyse and act more effectively within and upon this wider social and political context is further developed by encouraging them to engage in a range of learning activities which assist them to be critically reflective. In the same workbook it states that:

Being a critically reflective practitioner requires that students:

• engage in deeper level analysis and interpretation by asking questions about their own practice that go beyond ‘what happened next?’;
• examine their routine behaviours to identify patterns of behaving;
• critically examine their own underlying assumptions, values and position and their attitude towards different or opposing positions; and,
• recognise the existence of and encourage multiple perspectives on issues
  (ICMDP 1999c, p. 157-158 cited in op.cit, p. 17).

These processes enable ICMD practitioners to reflect on how their own attitudes, values and technologies can work for and/or against Indigenous needs, interests and aspirations. Students are also required to examine other discourses and knowledges and technologies
and whether and how these can work for and/or against Indigenous needs, interests. Finally they are required to identify strategies to incorporate these ideas in their work and community lives. This fits well with the proposition put forward by Nakata who writes:

Viewing the Cultural Interface as the beginning point accepts that inevitably Knowledge systems as they operate in people’s daily lives will interact, develop, change, and transform. It accepts that all Knowledge systems are culturally-embedded, dynamic, respond to changing circumstances and constantly evolve. It is not strictly about the replacement of one with the other, nor the undermining of one by the other. It is about maintaining the continuity of one when having to harness another and working the interaction in ways that serve Indigenous interests, in ways that can uphold distinctiveness and special status as First Peoples (Nakata 2002b, p. 10).

It is precisely this potential that that begins to address the uneasiness about working from the margins. Students generally pick up on a sense of working from the basis of equal rights alongside the recognition of the distinctive status of First Nation Peoples that inheres in the theoretical construct of the Cultural Interface.

Embedding principles

As I have shown increasingly between 1993 and 1995 the notion of the Interface has operated as a powerful theoretical construct in defining ICMDP practice. More recently Rob McPhee and I have continued to theorise this space and to argue the importance of reasserting the notion of human rights within the ICMD discourse. By both circumscribing the Cultural Interface within discourse of human rights and incorporating the attendant principles within the Cultural Interface we are able to consider the possibility of new discursive and ethical spaces. From this reading the concept of the Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Interface or Cultural Interface is an important decolonising and transformative strategy reinforcing the importance of the idea of it being ‘the place to begin’ and the space in which to embed ‘the underlying principles of reform’ (Nakata 2002b, p. 9) which are predicated in both human rights and fundamental principles.

As Rob McPhee and I have stated: This Interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains is a site of ‘complex negotiations, competing discourses and interactions’ reflecting ‘Indigenous attempts to achieve equity and self-determination on Indigenous terms’ (McPhee & Walker 2001, p. 14). Further, other colleagues and I have also suggested elsewhere that the Interface ‘encompasses the various structures, policies, processes, practices and languages which can influence the outcomes of such
negotiations’ and function to ‘either weaken or strengthen Indigenous social capital and overcome or exacerbate Indigenous disadvantage’ (Walker, Ballard & Taylor 2001b). We have attempted to illustrate the dynamics at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in trying to establish a framework of principles and processes for Indigenous research and evaluation.

The idea of locating the principles framework we developed (with input from Indigenous participants) within a more fundamental and foundational theoretical construct of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface was strongly influenced by my earlier work within the ICMDP and our attempts to articulate the transformative potential that occurs at the intersection of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous contexts and cultures (knowledges, values, practices and ways of being). The diagram below (Walker, Ballard & Taylor 2001a, p. 24) illustrates the argument I made earlier that by situating and delineating the notion of Cultural Interface within a human rights framework allows that First Nation rights asserted by Indigenous Australians are consonant with and reflected within the ideals, values and rights of social democracy. Moreover, it incorporates and recognises that Indigenous self-determination is firmly embedded within a human rights framework through the Commonwealth government’s endorsement of the *International Covenant Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. 
Figure 1: The interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations

Human Rights

Indigenous Values

Declaration of Indigenous rights

Principles of practice

(strengthening Indigenous communities/building Indigenous capacity in accordance with Indigenous interests, aspirations and values)

-------------------------------------------------   Interface ----------------------------------

(strengthening community in accordance with democratic values and goals)

Principles of practice

Human Rights

Australian Liberal Democratic Ideals and Values
(represent dominant culture)

The argument, which the model above attempts to depict, asserts that ‘…democratic ideals, values and human rights ought to inform principles of practice, programs, policies and processes employed by governments and relevant industry sector’ (Walker et al. 2001a, p. 15). Further, it suggests ‘that the rights asserted by Indigenous Australians are consonant with and reflected within the ideals, values and rights of social democracy which underpin notions of community building in broader community contexts’ (loc.cit). The interface is a space where the productive interaction and negotiation of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous values and ideals creates a new cultural democracy.

In each of the papers I have co-authored with CAS staff and postgraduate students we have suggested that the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface represents:

the intersection of competing claims and possibilities … regarding Indigenous and non-Indigenous priorities, interests, goals, values, needs and aspirations.

Importantly, this point of intersection also encompasses the potential opportunities for policy-makers, service providers and Indigenous people, communities [and]
organisations to develop partnerships and negotiate their respective positions, interests and goals’ (Walker et al. 2001a, 2001b, p. 16).

Furthermore, we suggested that ‘situating the dynamic interplay between Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations within a human rights framework provides a basis for working towards shared or common goals’ (Walker 2001a, p. 16). This proposition should not be read as an assimilationist or soft pluralist argument nor is it a radical culturalist argument. Rather, it holds its cultural efficacy on the basis that while the Interface does not presuppose some warm and fuzzy place of harmonious coexistence it does assert the right of Indigenous peoples to negotiate Indigenous interests on Indigenous terms, but negotiated with an understanding of and access to Western discourses and practices and without forfeiture of Indigenous identity through their incorporation or appropriation. Furthermore, and importantly it also foregrounds for public acknowledgement that these rights are now being firmly embedded in mainstream policies, vision statements and practices (for example Statements of Commitment and Reconciliation such as Curtin’s are increasingly being endorsed — and to a much lesser extent enacted — in Universities, Shire Councils and individual State Government Departments). However, their decolonising potential resides in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people being conscious of these rights and the principles on which they exist as a basis from which to negotiate Indigenous interests. Knowledge of the ways in which underpinning assumptions and competing discourses of past and present policies and practices influence the contemporary discursive space — what Nakata refers to as meta-knowledge (2002b, p. 11) — provides a means to articulate, deflect and reflect back those practices and processes that are inimical to Indigenous interests.

In an interview with ICMDP lecturers, Heath Greville and Erin Wilson in 1998, after graduating from the program, Rob McPhee made the following comments that highlight how the course encompasses these same aims and outcomes:

Working for a government department is quite difficult in that it is very much a culture about providing a service to the community. Often policies and programs are developed by people within the system and they are then delivered to the community. Right from the beginning I felt that there was something missing because there was little control over what was being delivered and people just had to fit with what was on offer.
Government have that service provider mentality and even though it intends to do things for the better of the community, it tends to do that coming from its own values rather than the values of the community. Thankfully, with people like us in the system, we can start to change things from the inside.

Well [the course] made me look at life differently and to be a bit more analytical in my way of thinking not just take things for granted. I started to unpack some of those inequalities and intolerances we were dealing with. I learnt to try to read from them the different values of the people involved and to look for different ways of overcoming them. It wasn’t about just trying to take on the world and fight blindly for Aboriginal rights, but rather constructively challenge the systems that so frequently cause the level of intolerance and injustice amongst us (McPhee, Greville & Wilson 1998, p. 24).

Many of the ICMDP staff and student narratives included in this thesis support the claim that the theoretical construct of the Cultural Interface provides a crucial space for ICMDP practitioners to negotiate with communities and government policy-makers, service providers and funding bodies to achieve more effective outcomes in accordance with Indigenous social realities and interests. Importantly, the notion of the Cultural Interface also ‘has important implications for governments and agencies and how they negotiate their relationships and develop and deliver programs with, or for, Indigenous Australians. Particularly in the current policy context committed to such goals as strengthening family and community and building capacity and enhancing social capital (Walker et al. 2001a, p. 24). In this context the interface represents a space where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous values and ideals can coexist and be mediated.

**Getting the ear of government**

James’ story is located within the Interface. It confirms the ability for communities to ‘get the ear of government’ in order to effect Indigenous determined futures. James acknowledges that his own way of operating has changed ‘since doing the course’. He has the relevant knowledge about how things work ‘to get inside things’ which has been publicly legitimated within the town. His story also illuminates the possibilities of operating with different levels of government:

Since doing the course even the local town people (including the guardia [whitefellas]) take me seriously.

Since coming back here I have been able to really get inside things,
I am on the local Shire Council and I am working with the different communities on their terms…
I think what’s different is that I am really listening now...
not just nodding my head and thinking my own ideas and doing that..
I see my job as laying out the options and opportunities...
this way I am showing my mob we can build some bridges in this place and get the ear of government too.
When the [state department] came up here last year they asked to meet with me, (people here had recommended me)...
They made it clear they were impressed with what we are trying to do.
...I think they were surprised that it was us Aboriginal mob that had a vision for a future here in [town],
we have plans for tourism, cultural tourism and jobs for the young fellas around here…(ICMDP File Notes 2000/1: Community organisation worker 3, Jan 2001).

James’ story is important because it shows that it is possible for communities to negotiate with government. It also reveals the different roles of the ICMD practitioner negotiating both within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous contexts.

Navigating Indigenous realities
As with the other student stories, Sandra’s story reveals the tensions that ICMDP practitioners constantly have to navigate in taking Indigenous realities into account, as well as the critical importance of contextual knowledge in effecting change at the Interface:

In my role as Chairperson I make sure the kids get a say…I know from doing the management course that it doesn’t work if you don’t get them involved, they don’t own the idea it doesn’t work.
I understand that, but its tricky too…. from the Aboriginal side…you know …we don’t tell our kids what they have to do …
but then we don’t usually go out and go ‘hey kids what do you want?’—you know what I mean? [laughs, shakes her head]…. that’s not our way…
you got to be careful too…to make sure these kids are realistic..
but it’s no good us say imposing sport when they want a disco or something like that…
…getting the parents involved can be tricky too…
but it’s hard on the kids if the family’s not involved at some level,
but some kids they have to rely on extended family...
you have to know that history too—whose parents are drinkers—and make sure you
ask caregivers, not just mum and dad whitefella way…
that can shame kids you know,
they won’t come….  
they don’t want other kids to know…
you have to know these things…[long reflective pause]

But I think we are making a difference around the [place].
Aboriginal people around here trust us too because it’s an Aboriginal controlled
organisation (ICMDP 2000 File Notes, Community Organisation Chairperson 4, Nov
2000).

**Slipping Aboriginal terms of reference alongside**

On a different angle, Andy’s story reinforces the transformative potential of discourse, and
the consciousness with which students navigate existing and emergent discourses at the
Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface to transform and integrate different discourses:

It’s my job to come out here to [town] … I go all over and work with all the
communities… I’m out a lot…its hard on my family but the kids have grown up, they
support me…
But it's really good…I keep bumping into other people who went through the
ICMDP, even some that are doing it now.
It’s great when that happens; you start talking the same language…
We got our own special language... we all know what we all mean, and we are
spreading that all around everywhere,
You start hearing people in the office talking about ‘building a picture’, ‘building
community’, ‘strengthening family’, ‘negotiating partnerships’ …it’s all the go now,
you know,
So we just slip our language in, you know — Aboriginal terms of reference —
alongside…(laugh) (ICMDP 2000/1 File Notes State Government worker 5, Aug
2001).
Andy’s story highlights the potential of conceiving of gaps and spaces in existing government as transformative opportunities in which to introduce Indigenous ideas and interests,

Martin Nakata also emphasises the idea of working within a negotiated space and the importance of critical reflection on both Indigenous knowledges and practices and Western knowledges and their interconnections with Indigenous contemporary interests. He writes:

This notion of the Cultural Interface as a place of constant tension and negotiation of different interests and systems of Knowledge means that both must be reflected on and interrogated. It is not simply about opposing the knowledges and discourses that compete and conflict with traditional ones. It is also about seeing what conditions the convergence of all these and of examining and interrogating all knowledge and practices associated with issues so that we take a responsible but self-interested course in relation to our future practice (Nakata 2002b, p. 10).

Student and staff narratives discussed in these chapters confirm ICMD students/practitioners’ recognition of the need and their capacity to negotiate Indigenous terms of reference at the Interface. Nancy Gordon’s story in the preface illuminates the role of critical reflection that is also a key element of the ICMDP pedagogy and practice for staff and students.

**Being critically reflective**

The importance of embedding the principles such as a commitment to interrogating and integrating Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and critically reflexive practice within the Interface is evident in the work of both CAS and ICMDP staff and students. Within the ICMDP curriculum critical reflection is regarded as an essential skill and attribute for all professional practitioners engaged in the ‘highly politicised and complex interface between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains’ (ICMDP 1999c, p. 150 cited in McGhee & Walker 2001, p. 18). In addition to influencing everyday practice critical reflection is also an important part of the action learning process in the ICMDP. McPhee and I have argued that:

The ability to be critically reflective is a crucial competence and attribute of practitioners working across the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface. Considerable emphasis is placed on developing critically reflective practitioners in the ICMDP.
addition to providing students with opportunities to further develop their knowledge and skills and transform their practice critical reflection assists individuals and groups to identify and change aspects of their situation (McPhee & Walker 2001, p. 17).

Drawing on our experiences within the ICMDP and extrapolating these ideas into broader domains of professional practice in an article in Working with Indigenous Australians: A Handbook for Psychologists (Dudgeon, Garvey & Pickett 2000), Rob McPhee, Ricky Osborne and I emphasise the importance of critical reflection as a key principle for ethical practice. We stated that:

All practitioners, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, tend to operate according to a complex interaction of their own values, beliefs and experience and the values, assumptions and paradigms of their professional discipline or field. The way individual practitioners carry out their roles, and the way they act with clients and other professionals depends largely on their interpretation of that discipline which is largely influenced by their own beliefs and values, knowledge and experience (Walker, McPhee & Osborne 2000, p. 322).

We also reiterated the requirements that underpin the ICMDP curriculum as outlined in workbooks. We stated that the process of critical reflection:

• requires practitioners to analyse and understand the broader cultural, social, political and economic environment and how it impacts on or influences our professional and personal practice.
• is a powerful tool for producing new knowledge and processes and contributes to improving fundamental social justice outcomes for Indigenous people.
• requires us to ‘make our own practice the subject of our inquiry so we can analyse it, and where necessary change it’, so that our actions are more effective and appropriate in the specific context in which we are working. It assists us to become more conscious of our own practice in order to ‘improve the relationships, processes and outcomes of our practice’ and interactions with others (ICMDP 1999c, p. 152).
• requires that practitioners draw information from a broader social and historical context as well as their professional context to better inform and interpret their own and other actions in their work. While the focus remains with the
professional in context, explanations need to extend beyond the taken-for-granted practice to look at how relations of power in the broader social and political context impact on issues of race, culture, gender and class, and in turn, how they may influence their own and [others'] beliefs, values and behaviour (Walker, McPhee & Osborne 2000, p. 18).

Figure 2 below (from Walker et al. 2000) depicts the multi-dimensional nature of critical reflection. It illustrates how understandings of self, others and the particular profession interact with the broader cultural, social, historical political and economic context. Our understandings, and formal and informal theories underpinning our professional practice are informed by a complex interaction of values, beliefs, assumptions, experiences and contextual factors. This figure also depicts the tensions and interacting elements that occur at an individual level and experienced by those people who acknowledge that they are working within the Cultural Interface and attempt to understand their own relationship with the various elements within it.

![Critical Reflection Framework of Analysis](image)

Figure 2: Critical Reflection Framework of Analysis
A range of tools and techniques have been developed in the ICMDP to facilitate the process of critical reflection so that students are able to make more conscious decisions in their work on the basis of ideas explored in the study blocks and workshops and negotiated in accordance with the interests of the groups with whom they are working. Many of these ideas have been developed and refined over several years by a number of academic staff in the Program, including ourselves. Julie Kaesehagen, Ken Marston, Erin Wilson and many others, including students, are among those who have made a contribution to developing these techniques of critical reflection. These techniques are congruent with some of the processes that have also been developed for working in accordance with Indigenous terms of reference.

ICMDP tools and techniques for critical reflection

Rob McPhee, Ricky Osborne and I summarised the main tools and techniques developed in the second and third year ICMD course materials for the Indigenous Psychology Handbook. These are:

- **Questioning** — helps us to generate new knowledge about ourselves, others, the context and their interconnecting influences. Questions should uncover: reasons, factors, links, possibilities, intentions consequences, feelings (*how* others feel and *why*).

- **Analysing** — requires looking behind what’s happening for underlying issues, causes and effects, identifying own/others assumptions, and deconstructing complex situations into specific issues. Analysis helps make meaning of situations, events, issues and practices, both at a personal and professional level, privately and publicly.

- **Defining the issue** — requires identifying issues that causes concern or requires further exploration and/or evaluation. The issues may be related to our own practice, someone else’s response or feelings of uneasiness or uncertainty with respect to an interaction or intervention.

- **Seeking other perspectives** — involves reading widely, talking with relevant people, and ‘stepping into the shoes’ of clients/others to see how situations and ideas appear for them.

- **Mapping** — helps to draw links between different perspectives and ideas to reveal how taken for granted things fit together. It can help clarify and situate problem within the bigger picture.
Engaging in dialogue — helps student/practitioners to identify, critically assess and articulate their own informal theories about working at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface that can contribute to, and extend their understanding about their own practice (Freire & Shor 1987). Critical reflection is a kind of dialogue that can take place either formally or informally between the practitioner’s private experience and the shared understandings, discipline knowledge and professional rules and practices that inform this experience. Some of these different perspectives are underpinned by values and assumptions that may differ substantially from, and challenge our own. Approaching critical reflection as a kind of dialogue helps us to work through our own mental processes and to see other perspectives, we might not come up with on our own. It can assist students to gain the tools and discourse to challenge the accepted boundaries of traditional or dominant theories and practices.

Recording activities/observations — Keeping a diary or journal, or using tape recordings can be a useful to record activities or observations or pose questions relating to specific differences between cultural values, beliefs and those of discipline and self. These observations can form a basis self-reflections, further discussions, or assessment, although issues of confidentiality need to be acknowledged (cited in Walker, McPhee & Osborne 2000, p. 319).

The above examples highlight how the ICMDP deploys the theoretical construct of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface as part of its framework for decolonisation and transformative strategies within its curriculum, pedagogy and practice in very practical terms. It is also illuminating to read the Centre’s positioning and interactions across the University within the same theoretical framework. This includes the Centre’s curriculum interventions and developments across Curtin Schools and Divisions and engagement in the broader policy process at a state and national level (Collard et al. 1999). In addition, the Working with Indigenous Australians: A Handbook for Psychologists inserts Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing firmly into the discipline of Psychology (Dudgeon et al. 2000). The Directorate of the Australian Psychological Society has recommended the Handbook as a compulsory text for all psychology courses and crucial reading for all practitioners working at the cultural Interface (Dudgeon et al. 2000 p. ix). The Handbook exemplifies how the incorporation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges and practices can be used to decolonise and transform disciplinary practices that have traditionally oppressed, marginalised and otherwise harmed Indigenous interests (and legitimised the process) in the name of Anthropology and Psychology.
Many CAS staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) contributed to this Handbook drawing on and sharing their respective understandings, methods and experiences across a range of areas in education and research in health, mental health, community management and community development to interrupt, inform and transform the disciplinary, epistemic forces both ways (McConaghy 2000).

**Working with multiple discourses**

Both the ICMD curriculum and pedagogy are designed to interrogate and integrate management and community development processes on Indigenous terms of reference. There was widespread agreement among ICMDP staff regarding the importance of acknowledging and maintaining the tensions between the different standpoints and discourses comprising the ICMDP theoretical framework underpinning the curriculum. I suggest these included the various critical positions available to the ICMDP practitioner as a consequence of the interactivity between the different standpoints (Indigenous, feminist and post structuralist) as well as the multiple and competing discourses of community development, management and public policy ‘which are critiqued through the discourse of Indigenous cultural values and protocols’ informing the ‘inclusiveness’ of the curriculum Greville (2000, p. 85), as already discussed in Chapter Four (p. 120).

The adoption of these multiple critical positions enable the curriculum to embrace the diverse and complex politics operating across the intersections of race, class and gender within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains. The curriculum allows the ICMD practitioner to identify the level of complexities at the intersection of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ideas and practices and their own potentially ambiguous location within them. In other words it is possible to interrogate the potential positive and negative effects of these different disciplinary discourses from different subject positions. This pedagogical process is similar to the emphasis and possibility Spivak places upon different subject-positions. Spivak claims that:

> It is possible that it is not only ‘the relationship between the three domination systems [class, racial/ethnic, and sex/gender] that is ‘dialectical’ but that in the theatres of decolonisation, the relationship between Indigenous and imperialist systems of domination are also ‘dialectical’, even when they are related to the Big Three Systems cited above (1987, p. 251).

These dialectics avoid simple uncomplicated notions of cultural difference subsuming some of the broader and general imperatives of social transformations. As discussed earlier the ICMDP transformational framework acknowledges the complexity of the cultural politics of difference, and the need to incorporate processes to problematise,
dialogue and negotiate around this difference within the curriculum in order to initiate genuine change (Greville 2000; McPhee & Walker 2001; Oxenham 1999). This framework encompasses a pedagogy that is ‘coalitional and attentive to the role of power in experience’ which as Freire (1993) claims ‘can better assist in the construction of new social formations dependent upon divergent cultural and gendered practices, discourses and identities’ (p. x).

The ICMDP curriculum and pedagogy takes into account the complex nuances of cultural politics operating across Indigenous and non-Indigenous domains to address the relations of power and issues of social change differently than the ‘two-way’ model and ideas described by Harris (1988), Henry and McTaggart (1987) and McTaggart (1988). While the ‘two-way’ approach values Indigenous ‘ways’ and thus overcomes some of the colonising aspects of traditional education the ultimate aim is to provide students with skills to work more effectively within the non-Indigenous domain. Whereas within the ICMDP the notion of working at the interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous realities and the incorporation of the now widely referred to ‘ganma’ metaphor provides a discourse and set of ideas that recognise agency, subjectivity, space and the possibilities to instigate change. ‘Ganma’ refers to the foam and turbulence produced at the interface where the fresh water river meets with the salt water. Indigenous researchers from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory use the notion to encompass both the complexity and the productivity that can arise out of the meeting of Indigenous (Yolngu) and non-Indigenous (Balanda) cultures (Marika et al. 1992, p. 158). As Greville writes:

The ICMDP paradigm incorporates the ganma metaphor insofar as it enables students to learn and critique skills and to think, talk, write and theorise about the complexity and ‘turbulence' that they encounter in their own work and community settings (2000, p. 11).

The metaphor of the foam produced by the mixing up of waters suggests something new, not a slightly diluted version of the dominant element, but the idea that a decolonising and transformative potential resides in that space. However, incorporating a human rights framework as both principles to act by and principles to bind together with the notion of working at the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface allows us to go even further than this in theoretical and practical terms (McPhee & Walker 2001; Walker et al. 2001a) to engage in dialogue about shared futures. Such a possibility requires epistemic capacity, the ceding of equal power relations and an understanding of the cultural politics at work.
The ICMDP curriculum attempts to address these elements in the course content and processes. Students participate in a range of activities and learning processes that simultaneously provide skills and techniques to enhance their work. They also develop a clearer understanding of their roles, the power relations operating within their work and the range of strategies possible to address the issues and concerns they are facing. My assertions regarding the transformative potential of the curriculum to enable ICMD students/practitioners to harness their capacity to make a difference and to effectively navigate the cultural interface are well supported by ICMD staff. Several colleagues have acknowledged the critical transformative potential of the program in their own formal postgraduate studies (Greville 1997, 2000; Oxenham 1999; Wilson 1999) as well as in professional development workshops and course reviews (ICMDP 1997, 1999). For example Greville (1997) captures this critical dimension of the ICMD curriculum in a research essay *Learning about Development — Teaching Developmentally*:

The foundation of critique in ICMD enables an interrogation of the political, social and cultural positioning of Indigenous people in particular contexts (including ‘community’ contexts), while holding to a strong affirmation and validation of Indigenous identity and difference. These are explicit curriculum competencies (Greville 1997, p. 5).

**Power, knowledge, culture and politics in the ICMDP**

The curriculum processes require ICMD students/practitioners to engage in a range of intensive study blocks and workshops in which they explore and gain greater insights and understandings from an Indigenous perspective of local/global issues and Australia’s colonial history and their influence on the issues and factors in their contemporary local/regional situation. They are also required to learn and demonstrate community development skills and processes in working with others to make a difference in some aspects of their work or community contexts, for example through the redistribution of resources and control over some aspects of their lives.

The competencies covered in the first year of the ICMDP are designed to provide a strong coherent framework of analysis throughout the three years of the course which allows students to identify, further understand and critique the historical and political factors influencing the contemporary situation and existing power relations operating in their community and work contexts. Running alongside of these elements of competence (as discussed in Chapter Three) are others which require students to operate in an ethical, conscious and critically reflexive manner and with regard to the power, responsibilities and expectations inscribed within their professional, community and personal roles.
The specific outcome statements in the ICMDP require practitioners to explore the relations of power operating at different levels in all spheres of their lives. The notion of power relations is explored progressively throughout the courses beginning with looking at political structures and how they influence policies, which in turn impact on people’s everyday lives. Both the theoretical framework and discourse underpinning and informing this critique are founded on the notion of power as fragmented and circulating; leaving spaces of freedom that the ICMDP has taken up with students as the points of possibility, negotiation and transformation within the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface.

In the ICMDP the deconstruction of knowledge and power entails looking at how management, development and public policy discourses and paradigms can operate to serve both positive and negative ends; and how and why they operate in ways that do not always serve Indigenous interests. Foucault’s conception of power is helpful in articulating the connections between global/local theorising and analysis, and local practice directed towards bringing about positive change, both of which underpin the ICMD curriculum. The notion of ‘capillaries’ or networks of power (Foucault 1980) permeating all levels of society fuels the potentiality and possibility of ICMD practitioners to change institutional and social policies, practices and processes that impact negatively upon Indigenous people. Foucault’s conception of power is also a useful analytical tool to both critically examine assumptions operating at a micro level within students contexts, and for CAS teaching and management staff to reflect on the overall viability of a cultural politics in education.

Students are encouraged to think about power as something that they can harness and enact through dialogue thus extending or juxtaposing traditional definitions of power underpinning critical education in which power in the hands of the powerful is used to dominate, coerce, and constrain the interests and aspirations of the powerless which needs to be unmasked to reveal ‘truth’ through education and knowledge (Freire). While the ICMD curriculum encourages students to critique the system to reveal those representative, formational and transformational processes at work it is premised on the notion of working from within the system to bring about change through negotiation, dialogue and consultation (along the lines of Braaten 1995; Lemke 1995; and Habermas 1984) and with interrupting and reordering elements within various sectors in the diverse multifaceted system (McConaghy 2000) rather than by the overthrow of some non-existent monolithic system.
In the *Indigenous Ways of…* Workshops students are asked to situate themselves in relation to their history and to identify the existing power relations operating in their contemporary social, political and economic contexts at both micro and macro levels. In this way students develop an individual and collective awareness and understanding of why and how Indigenous peoples have been marginalised within Australia’s social, economic and political systems. The focus is on acknowledging and working with notions of multi-perspective, subjective and partial ‘truths’, diverse experiences and complex social realities in order to negotiate the competing discourses of social justice and human rights (McPhee & Walker 2000). Dialogue allows ideas to emerge and possibilities to be presented which can interrupt and challenge the system.

**Conclusion**

I have shown how the ICMDP has been effective in applying the theoretical construct of the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface within the curriculum, pedagogy and practice through the incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference and the embodiment of the ICMD practitioner construct. Equally important is the identification, negotiation, and enactment of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing by ICMDP students/practitioners within and across complex, diverse and dynamic social realities to bring about positive change.

I have also provided some practical examples of the different ways in which the notion of working at Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface has proved a viable and productive theoretical construct as a basis for ethical transformative practice. I have suggested that CAS works from its location within the Cultural Interface at many levels, negotiating to ensure Indigenous terms of reference are incorporated in policies and programs that impact on the Centre, the staff, students and Indigenous community. Through its publications the Centre also provides examples of Indigenous knowledge and experience intersecting with non-Indigenous knowledges to produce new ideas, strategies and models for working within cross-cultural contexts.

The ongoing struggle for both the ICMDP and CAS at this Interface and the difficulties of remaining strategically positioned in the face of emergent, complex and competing discourse and priorities is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Seven
Responding to the Colonialist/Corporatist Assault

The language of neo-liberalism and the emerging corporate university radically alters the vocabulary available for appraising the meaning of citizenship, agency, and civic virtue. Within this discourse everything is for sale, and what is not has no value as a public good or practice. It is in the spirit of such a critique and act of resistance that educators need to break with the "new faith in the historical inevitability professed by the theorists of [neo-] liberalism [in order] to invent new forms of collective political work" to confront the march of corporate power, [Bourdieu 1999, p. 26] ... The current regime of neoliberalism and the incursion of corporate power into higher education present difficult problems and demand a profoundly committed sense of collective resistance (Giroux 2002, p. 452).

In March 1997, the Federal Government announced the West Review with terms of reference encompassing all aspects of educational delivery for the next twenty years. Curtin University immediately established a university wide review panel to represent the University’s key interests. Incredibly, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) was not included. Yet the Centre’s innovative, block release programs had contributed significantly to the University’s outstanding performance in achieving equitable outcomes in Indigenous education in the Quality profiles in the previous triennium. Within a month DEST also announced that ABSTUDY was going to be reviewed and substantially amended. It was clear that these Reviews could have profound implications for Indigenous education generally, and more particularly for CAS and the ICMDP. These policy announcements in quick succession demanded an instant response, and rapid organisation on the part of Indigenous Centres throughout Australia.

This chapter discusses my readings of the broader implications of these issues on the wider scene including: illustrating the nexus between being effective in a racist and economic rationalist society and respecting and sustaining Indigenous peoples, and their diverse interests and values in the face of such an adversary, which is also the concern of the program, (and its apparent dilemma, a contradiction which mirrors contradictions at every level). In a sense, the analysis and defence of Indigenous education (in the face of the corporatist assault) complements the ICMDP principles: only disconnected from the
ICMDP by an inadequate theory (which implies that pedagogy and the politics of education are separate and autonomous spheres rather than comprising an interrelated part of a multi-dimensional social, political and historical whole as revealed in this thesis). This chapter also introduces corporatism in relation to other discourses and assumptions that have underpinned and influenced Australia’s pervasive colonial history.

This chapter also argues that economic rationalism, managerialism and corporatism have now merged as a seemingly coherent and all pervasive neo-liberalist paradigm on a global level, penetrating spheres of government, bureaucracy and human service delivery agencies even at the micro level where the ICMDP is located. Employing both macro and micro level analysis, I argue that these social and political forces have affected higher education policy, particularly Indigenous higher education, creating immediate and long term ramifications for Indigenous Centres, their programs, associated academic outcomes and for the lives of Indigenous students and their communities.

At a macro level this chapter explores the work of theorists such as Marginson (1997), Muetzelfeldt and Bates (1992), Reid (1996) and recent research by the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) (1999). It considers some of the explanations offered within a broader political perspective for the enduring contradictions of liberalism and capitalism, and the emergence of a corporatism that pervades all aspects of society including higher education structures and policies. This chapter then looks at some of the ways in which these macro elements and the resultant institutional and policy changes have impacted on, and been responded to, by Indigenous education stakeholders and the Centre, making specific reference to the ICMDP. The argument is based on a policy analysis framework (Barrett & Fudge 1981; ICMDP 1990) and draws substantially on Foucauldian techniques and tools of discourse analysis as employed by Taylor (1997) and Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry (1997).

As the title, ‘Responding to the Colonial/Corporatist Assault’ suggests, this chapter brings to the fore the conflict and struggle which underpins much of Indigenous and non-Indigenous race and power relations in Australia. Although there have been some positive changes during the last three decades, there are powerful, ongoing elements of race and power relations that have remained unresolved since colonisation. It is argued here that these elements — which are deeply embedded in Australia’s political, social and economic structures, systems, discourses and policies — substantially influence the way cultural politics are played out across all public arenas. There is widespread agreement that racism is a predominant factor which still governs and limits Indigenous access to
many areas including education, employment and health (McConaghy 2000; Sonn et al. 1997; Walker 2000). This chapter attempts to capture the dynamic, conflicted, unresolved and multifaceted nature of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations — and the processes of engagement within the higher education sector — through the deployment of the metaphoric language of battle.

The struggle, like many throughout history, is over sovereignty, territory and the right to self-determination. From the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, outflanked by the political vision of multicultural Australia, threats to Indigenous peoples from the discourses of racism and an outworn liberalism had retreated. But the mere presence of a political discourse and amorphous desire for equality and diversity has done little to re-form the structural inequities of race, gender and class that have always weakened Australia’s ‘great nation’ potential. It is now evident, post-Hanson, that Australia’s distinctive socio-economic and political conditions, when combined with certain catalytic events, personalities or ideas, can suddenly manifest new dimensions of hostility (ACIRRT 1999; Langton 1999).

This chapter provides an account of how dominant discourses have impacted upon Indigenous rights and interests in education. It explores governmental impositions upon, and incursions into territories previously ceded back to Indigenous peoples under the policy of self-determination, and the retreat (and subsequent commitment to ‘negotiation and partnership’) in the wake of Indigenous responses. Importantly, this account refuses to read the events of the last few years as a triumph for corporatism, neo-liberalism or neo-colonialism, or as an Indigenous defeat. As yet there is still no ‘settled’ outcome — only the ebb and flow of events stirred by deep undercurrents of race and the turbulent, yet ‘shallow’ waters of the economy. What follows is an account of how this political reality has impacted upon the ICM DP, CAS, and Indigenous higher education generally. Drawing upon contemporary social, cultural, political and economic theories, this account places the CAS and ICM DP experiences within a broader Australian social and political context.

Muetzelfeldt and Bates argue that ‘an underlying crisis tendency persists in liberal democratic societies’ (1992, p. 43). This crisis is experienced in both the economy and the social structure. Australia, like other liberal democracies, adopted a corporatist framework in response to specific economic, social and political conditions experienced throughout the 1980s. From a political analysis perspective, Australia’s responses were made to ward off what was perceived as an impending fiscal crisis of capitalism and a
weakening of the political legitimacy of liberal democracy (Muetzelfeldt & Bates 1992). They suggest that public sector corporations are mechanisms that have emerged to contain these crises within the society and state structures. Furthermore ‘these various corporations of the state are both agents in power contests and contested resources’ (op.cit, p. 44). Dilemmas in state and society relations can range from costly operations to a real possibility that outcomes can destroy or transform the system. Muetzelfeldt & Bates suggest that the ‘contradictory imperatives’ (Moran 1988, p.398) embedded within state-economy-liberal democratic politics give rise to and account for some of the crisis of state that occur (1992, p. 45).

As Muetzelfeldt and Bates (1992, p. 45) argue both the conditions experienced and the available responses are in part a result of each state’s history and specific location within their wider contemporary circumstances. From a social policy perspective, Barrett and Fudge (1981) analyse the successive movements of action and response to reveal how each new set of policies attempts to redress the inadequacies of previous policies. Their analytical framework is relevant to emancipatory projects because it both acknowledges the importance of individual and group agency at the same time as recognising that action/responses by government policymakers are often highly reactionary.

According to ACIRRT an impending social, political and fiscal crisis in Australia was the result of different elements in the system breaking down at different times, rather than ‘as if some unitary social phenomenon broke down like an old watch’ (1999, p. 17). ACIRRT suggest Australian settlement had been about ‘balancing the market forces with state intervention’ and providing ‘a remarkable degree of social protection to the Australian people for nearly half a century’ (op.cit, p.11). However, imbued by an ideology of ‘White Australia’ (loc.cit), the ‘social protection’ and ‘equality and fairness’ discourses of colonial liberalism were exclusionary discourses that had ignored the rights of Indigenous people, migrants and women since colonisation. In addition Australia’s colonial history has played an important role in determining the particular economic and political relationship between the state and society and the unique blend of ‘settler’ or ‘dominion’ and ‘metropolitan’ capitalism (ACIRRT 1999, p. 13; Beilharz 1993). This is reflected in its highly developed public service sector and state institutions, and reliance on the state to regulate the market to protect the interests of certain primary and secondary industries. Nevertheless, economic rationalism, deregulation of financial markets and the floating of currency created a ‘brave new world’ for the public whose perceptions required management.
According to Muetzelfeldt and Bates both liberal and Marxist political analysts identified the increased bureaucratisation needed to manage and legitimate state economic and social policies (1992, p. 69). Earlier liberal notions regarding the roles of the state, and its economic and political legitimacy in relation to the individual no longer held true. They cite Keane who argues that to counter these contradictions we need to break away from 'liberal notions of a public of individually rational persons' because in reality ... such a public sphere really only privileged 'or foregrounded as it were, its own bourgeois middle class' (Keane 1984, pp. 10-13).

This is doubly ironic, as liberalism has always been concerned to limit the rule of government over the individual in the belief that rationality based on self-interest would prevail. Echoing the liberal tradition of the Chicago School (Dennis Smith 1988), Australian politics and policies have been largely shaped by a widely held belief that combined, the underpinning principles of capitalism and liberal democracy — economic growth and individual freedom respectively — could achieve the ideals of enlightenment and the common good. Muetzelfeldt and Bates (1992) claim that recent Marxist analysis and theorising indicate that particular historical events and the emergence of new ideas/theories greatly weaken the claims of the linkage between liberal ideals and the benefits of capitalism.

I suggest that the problem resides in the fact that many of the principles and values underpinning liberalism have been an easy target for co-optation by managerialism, economic rationalism and ultimately corporatism. The economic imperatives of each of these discursive formations of capitalism have been linked to the goals of liberalism (see de Tocqueville in Dennis Smith 1988). Several theorists suggest that the notion of the 'corporate good' has transposed the 'common good' and the discourses of economic rationalism and managerialism have relegated the individual to *homo economicus* pursuing their personal goals and thus the common good through the accumulation of capital (Marginson 1997, p. 113). Despite a stated adherence to liberal principles in corporatist discourse, this shift in emphasis (or sleight of Adam Smith's invisible hand) has blunted liberalisms' 'ethical' commitment to enable all individuals to realise their potential as rational beings in society.

Furthermore, as Muetzelfeldt and Bates suggest, states generally have the capacity to displace the consequences of these contradictions, and to develop and disseminate, engage in and endorse a wide range of meaning-constructing legitimations that 'lie well beyond the various rational legitimations proposed by liberals and Habermasians' (1992,
In addition states also have the capacity to establish a range of containment mechanisms that both involve and influence the bureaucracy in shaping the context within which issues are identified and possible courses of action are established. Australian bureaucracies for example, have been largely successful in this, in the spheres of immigration, welfare and employment and multi-cultural policy. Nevertheless, the public policy action-response motivated by pragmatism, rather than guided by a sincere/coherent ethical foundation — such as reconciliation and negotiation of Indigenous rights and interests — is always subject to the potential havoc wrought by competing political and social discourses. As the next section suggests, given Australia's social and political structure, this situation is at best tenuous and vulnerable to unexpected contingencies. For example, Pauline Hanson’s actions and claims regarding Indigenous Australians and Asian migrants, underpinned by a discourse of racism, have brought some of the internal contradictions of liberalism (and its convergent and divergent offspring) into headlong collision with one another.

An analysis of contemporary works by writers such as Hughes (1998), Marginson (1997) and Muetzelfeldt and Bates (1992) suggests that corporatist incursions can be construed in several ways. At a global level corporatism has gained increasing acceptance as a major discourse in institutional and bureaucratic domains, including higher education. Corporatism also exposes the difficulties experienced by governments as they attempt to foster/salvage notions of the common good amid the contradictions of the convergence of liberal individualism and communitarianism. Sarah Joseph (1998) suggests that part of the difficulty resides in the theoretical and philosophical inadequacies and contradictions of classical and neo-liberalism and the propensity to reduce all debate to the binaries of individualism and communitarianism.

From another perspective corporatism can be seen as a new form of neo-assimilationism and recolonisation, reflecting the pervasive ambivalence of government policy-makers towards ceding genuine political representation and just distribution of resources for Indigenous Australians. Such postcolonial ambivalence also ignores government legislation for Indigenous self-determination and control over decision-making in spheres such as education and social policy despite formal recommendations and public statements of commitment to reconciliation, partnership and Indigenous rights expressed in social justice reports (Daube 1994) and higher education institutional reviews (Dodson P. 1995, 1996; NBEET 1997). These areas remain complex, difficult to implement and problematic to resolve as contemporary critical commentary on government’s policy action

According to research by ACIRRT Australia’s economic, political and cultural fabric, or ‘social settlement’, ‘began to unravel during the 1970s’ (1999, p. 11). There was a shift from liberal democracy (with limited welfare) to social (welfare) democracy. The expansion of social welfarism in Australia in the mid to late 1970s was largely in response to the growing global economic crisis and to ‘make good’ liberal policy goals through the implementation of the findings of The Henderson Report into Poverty (Henderson 1975), which argued the need for changes to address the structural inequalities which contributed to the extant levels of poverty in society. It was also an attempt to redress the national groundswell for social transformation that echoed the demands and outcomes of social justice and human rights movements at a global level including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, ratified in 1975. Muetzelfeldt and Bates claim that all advanced capitalist and democratic states have become welfare states in response to the global economic crisis of the 1970s (1992, pp. 66-67). Although these states responded diversely to meet their own particular historical and geo-political circumstances, nevertheless their policies and actions were made to ‘support capital accumulation, maintain legitimacy, and respond to political pressures coming from organised class and other interests’ (op.cit, p. 67).

However, these authors also point out that by the late 1980s and early 1990s welfarism was increasingly becoming an area of political and social contestation (Muetzelfeldt & Bates, 1992). Growing dissatisfaction with the assumptions and theories underlying Keynesian economics of Australia’s ‘post-war social settlement' was advanced on several fronts. From an economic perspective rising unemployment and poverty were blamed on ‘lack of productivity’ and globalisation. From a social perspective these conditions were blamed on increased Asian immigration, multiculturalism and ‘separate’ Indigenous policies (Blainey 1984; Chipman 1985; and others), highlighting the government’s inability to predict and establish containment mechanisms to adequately manage the many uncontainable events and discourse and incontestable contradictions. Thus, fuelled by fears of a mixed bag of local and global demons, ‘racism’, xenophobia and calls for a peculiar mix of protectionism and ‘isolationism’, discourses of neo-liberalism gained ground on both social and economic fronts (see ACIRRT 1999; Hughes 1998).

According to ACIRRT, ‘The 1980s saw the launch of a ‘neo-liberal project’ in which the advocates of free-market economics won unprecedented power within the ranks of
business and government’ (1999, pp. 10-11). A growing number of Australians believed that the economic and social situation was ‘unsustainable’ (Paul Kelly 1994, p. 2 in ACIRRT 1999, p. 11). ACIRRT contend that ‘Many of the tumultuous changes which flowed from this neo-liberal project’ have resulted in further ‘economic insecurity and community dislocation’ (loc.cit).

Under the new corporatism, demands for greater productivity and workplace reform advanced the acceptance of enterprise bargaining and accord rhetoric. Managers and corporations gained increasing power in relation to workers, and unions lost their stronghold. According to ACIRRT neo-liberalist solutions for Australia’s economic and social reform during 1990s have proved to be both economically and ‘morally bankrupt’ (1999, pp. 16-17). Rather than acknowledge or address the structural weaknesses which ‘are an intrinsic feature of advanced economies and a necessary outcome of economic development’ (Brenner 1998 in ACIRRT 1999, p. 16) neo-liberals have exhorted the need for greater productivity, corporate downsizing, consumer moderation and drastic cutbacks on social services. These human costs are justified as necessary for companies to maintain high profits and compete in the international market. While traditionally economic liberalism had extolled the merits of free-market forces, neo-liberalism ‘takes the idea of the supremacy of the market much further. All areas of social life are now regarded as candidates for the rule of the market’ (ACIRRT 1999, p. 10). Under this ideology education is just another element of the system that should be subject to these market forces.

**Neo-liberalism, corporatism and higher education**

Not surprisingly, responding to the conditions and trends outlined above, the interacting factors of a disintegrating ‘social settlement’, the emergence of neo-liberalism and the legacy of colonialism, have impacted markedly upon higher education. The prevailing social and political forces along with ensuing changes in economic and social discourses have had a significant impact on higher education in terms of the way education is provided, who it should be provided to, and what should be provided. Changes in the social structure of the workplace have affected the roles of managers, policy-makers and employees, with implications for what they are expected to study and the time and opportunities they have available to do so. The next section shows some fundamental contradictions between the expectations and assumptions of micro-economic reform and the structural changes and resources provided to accommodate it. These issues affect all groups, but particularly Indigenous people, who have few opportunities to access education outside of the limited and often inappropriate or irrelevant choices offered in the
public education domain. Reinforcing the crucial importance of Indigenous higher education centres and culturally specific programs such as the ICMDP.

For economic analysts such as Marginson (1997, p. 221), the Whitlam Government policies in education were the high point in the government sector share of the financing and provision of education in Australia. Traditionally it was believed that if education was to facilitate equality then government should carry the costs and for the most part, education should be provided in government institutions. Throughout the 1980s, however, there was a considerable shift in the thinking about the nature and extent of the roles and responsibilities of government in the provision of post-compulsory education and training for employment. These paradigmatic shifts were subsequently reflected in federal government education policies; structural changes including the merging of education, employment and training departments; the establishment of private education and training providers; the involvement of industry in the determination and accreditation of competencies and standards; and the shift in funding allocations from the arts to science and technology. Policy documents show that the focus of responsibility for making Australia ‘a clever country’ shifted from the Government to the industry and corporate sector for ‘broad skilling’, and to the individual for ‘lifelong learning’. These trends were reinforced in the 1997 Review of Higher Education, Financing and Policy discussion paper ‘Learning for Life’ (West 1998). The government introduced compulsory training and professional development for all employees to ensure these reforms occurred. Many of these reforms were designed to give Australia a strategic advantage in the new global economy. Citing from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (1981, p. 2), Marginson claims that:

Efficiency in government is more than a neutral technique. It can only be understood in relation to the purposes it serves (Ball 1990). In the neo-classical definition that became increasingly dominant, efficiency was market rational. It meant education should be judged by its contribution to value creating activities in the economy, such as the preparation of skilled labour for employers, while its demands on government should be minimised (op.cit 1997, p. 209).

According to Marginson ‘Higher education was the first sector to experience the fuller implications of the efficiency imperative’ (1997, p. 213). The economisation of education allows education to be conceived in ‘input-output terms’ so that the system and institutional managers could ‘pare back activities’ to a minimum. At the same time, in order to win support for the efficiency and marketisation, the politics of the economisation
of education required the weakening of the popular perception that more public spending increased education quality and opportunities (op.cit, p. 210). While education goals of equity and equality were still evident, they were increasingly threatened by new economic rhetoric. In this revised efficiency framework it was taken for granted that non-market education programs were characterised by ‘expansionism, feather-bedding, producer-capture; and waste’, so that there was always ‘fat’ that could be identified by ‘smart management consultants and trimmed by zealous governments’ (loc.cit). As Marginson (drawing on Buchanan 1976 and Porter 1988) claims, ‘efficient non market education’ was seen as a contradiction in terms (loc.cit). Any views that challenged this emerging perspective were ignored or punitively dismissed. The 1986 review of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education by Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) defined ‘effectiveness’ in terms of educational goals and gave it the same weight as cost efficiency. However, within a year of making its stand CTEC had been abolished (Marginson 1997, p. 218).

As Marginson points out the CTEC Review had been ‘unable to retard the advance of economisation’ (1997, p. 210). The CTEC’s attempts to halt further per capita reductions were a complete failure. Although higher education public funding increased by just 33.2 per cent between 1975 and 1992 student enrolments increased by 98.1 per cent.

Marginson states that ‘Government funding per student underwent a marked deterioration’ (1997, p. 213). From 1985–86 to 1988–89 Government contributions to operating costs were reduced by almost a quarter. From 1988 to 1992 the student load increased by one third (1997, p. 219). Yet according to Marginson (1997, p. 220), in the context of micro-economic reform and the policy emphasis on efficiency and entrepreneurial management, declining government resources per student were no longer seen as politically negative, except within the higher education sector itself. Schwab (1997) has highlighted similar market deterioration in Indigenous higher education discussed later in this chapter.

There is broad agreement that the Labor Government’s 1988 decision to introduce Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) fees ‘was a decisive moment in Australian education’ (Marginson 1997, p. 231) which sealed the transition to market liberal policies which had begun in 1975. In effect Labor finally conceded to the seduction of market liberalism as the competing discourse to social democracy. According to ACIRRT in the heady days surrounding the Accord ‘Labor became infected with the neo-liberal credo and turned its back on its own history’ (1999, p. 10). With respect to their shift from previous practices in education, Marginson observes:
Labor gambled that the demand for higher education was robust enough to sustain a high participation regime; and it shrewdly softened the blow by introducing HECS as a deferred income-contingent payment so minimising the immediate impact (1997, p. 231).

However, the next section argues that HECS has had a negative impact for all socially and economically disadvantaged groups including, and perhaps more disproportionately for, Indigenous students. In the Dawkins reforms of 1987-1989, the higher education system was reconstructed as a 'quasi-market' of competing institutions manifesting some, but not all, of the features of an economic market (Marginson 1997, p. 231). Marginson claims that:

The Government deliberately fostered the development of corporate-style institutions. All institutions were autonomous in educational matters and the detailed expenditure of public monies. At the same time, reporting and data collection were standardised and intensified. Central planning gave way to institutional planning and the annual quasi-contractual negotiations between government and institution over student numbers (the 'profile'). The government encouraged institutional managers with the business skills of entrepreneurial and strategic and financial planning. It funded management reviews and training, urging a reduction in collegial decision-making (Dawkins 1988). Growth, mergers and competition, and the reforging of missions and course profiles, encouraged both organisational restructuring and changes in personnel. This favoured the emergence of a new layer of innovators and entrepreneurs (1997, p. 232).

In ‘Higher Education or Education for Hire?’ Ian Reid (1996, p. 7) also makes the point that deregulation of financial arrangements increased the need for greater regulation of academic standards. This has occurred through Quality Assurance measures. Changes in government funding resulted in the establishment of mechanisms for ‘steering at a distance’. ACIRRT (1999, pp. 37-52) describe how the processes of ‘de-regulation’ increasingly became ‘re-regulation’ and internal imposition (Buchanan & Callas 1993 in ACIRRT, p. viii, emphasis in the original). There are tensions in neo-liberalism regarding the extent of the role of government in ensuring industry accountability and corporate accountability to the ‘public’. Some argue that the failure of economic rationalism is largely the failure of management accountability and the failure of government to take control of management.
At the same time, changes in the ‘social structures of society’ have been just as influential as government initiatives in redefining the function of universities (Reid 1996, p. 7). This is evident in the changing make-up of families (for example an increase in single parent families), rural/urban migration patterns, changing social age and ethnic composition of society and the dramatic shift in Indigenous demographics larger, younger families compared with non-Indigenous population. These shifts in society have also forced governments, irrespective of political party affiliations, to initiate other policy changes to attain a more socially just and equitable access to education and employment opportunities. Increasingly, universities have had to redefine their roles and function — responding to both state and societal changes. Universities are now required to demonstrate that policies, processes and resources are in place to achieve equity of access for all groups identified as socially, economically or geographically disadvantaged (including Indigenous people). Universities are also expected to develop curriculum to meet the needs of, and adequately prepare, all students to participate effectively in multicultural Australia. Consistent with the notion of quasi-market education, the government has also strengthened a consumer culture by encouraging student evaluation of teaching and more emphasis on the employability of graduates (Marginson 1993). As part of its accountability and quality control mechanisms, the government encourages the assessment of course relevance and teacher effectiveness against appropriate criteria. The incorporation of ‘culturally appropriate’ criteria means that governments and institutions committed to positive social transformation can ensure that important social and cultural as well as academic goals are incorporated and monitored in curriculum development.

However, there are flaws in this thinking. Not least of these is the incompatibility of promulgating a liberalist ideology as a means to justify a tightening of institutional accountability to the state. In addition, a critique by Gavin Moodie suggests an ‘important feature of the higher education market is that consumers’ options are shaped by factors beyond their control, some even before the question of consumer choice arises’ (1999b, p. 33). Social, geographic and cultural factors influence student attitudes towards study, access and participation in higher education (James et al. 1999; Ramsay et al. 1998; Walker 2000). Referring to a study by Glen Postle and colleagues, Moodie (1999b) argues that these factors can also influence the university attended, with non-traditional students more likely to attend traditional high status universities. He concludes that:

the higher education market is distorted by asymmetric information about higher education, by social and economic factors that operate outside the market, and in
many cases by factors that operate before the market even comes into play (Moodie 1999b, p. 33).

There is a persistent and widening critique of the corporatisation and marketisation of higher education that delineate the inappropriateness and philosophical and epistemological flaws of neo-liberalism and the inequities via the ‘hierarchical diversity’ it fosters (Kemmis et al. 1999; Marginson 1993, 1997; Moodie 1999b; Reid 1996). Nevertheless, despite the growing dissatisfaction and demonstrated inappropriateness of this quasi-market discourse in education, it has retained its stronghold in Australia. This may be in part because Australia’s higher education and training are promoted as a niche market in the global economy (Walker & Roberts 1997).

**Corporatism and Indigenous education**

The above discussion forms the basis for an analysis of the implications of corporatism (and its colonialist legacies) for Indigenous higher education and the ICMDP in particular. The effects of corporatism are still being experienced in many ways. Not least of these, is the way the discourse interrupts the transformative and decolonising potential of Indigenous centres, programs and educational agendas. Given that the driving force of corporatism resides in the dual self-[pre]serving imperatives of capitalism and liberalism — this is not surprising.

Results from a survey of CAS students confirmed that the introduction of HECS for students in 1990 did impact upon the ICMDP (Walker 1997c). The economic and academic implications of HECS are intertwined and far-reaching for students and the program. Research findings show that many students withdrew or considered withdrawing from the course because of the high levels of pressure associated with the need to complete their study workload within each semester in order to avoid additional HECS penalty (Walker 1997c, 1998b). Concomitantly, student withdrawals for academic and/or economic reasons impact on student enrolments and course completions. The principle of self-paced learning and assessment, a core component of competency education, was argued for strongly in early course development documents (ICMDP 1988). It was believed that self-paced learning and assessment would cater for the diversity of educational and experiential backgrounds of students — enabling them to ‘work at their own pace’ to achieve mastery. However, the principle that course completion should not be time based was effectively negated with the introduction of HECS and the ability to cater for student’s individual learning and assessment needs was strongly compromised. Interestingly, many of us found ourselves using managerial
discourses to rationalise the situation to students. We argued that students in a competency-based course needed to reflect the same skills as those expected of competent managers or other professional practitioners. It was important therefore that students should be able to demonstrate the ability to work within deadlines. It was possible to argue that even the idea of outcomes negotiated in learning contracts between students and teachers needed to occur within timeframes circumscribed by contingencies in the 'real world'.

While there is substance to this argument, an uncritical acceptance of this discourse often made it difficult to do justice to the notions of equality of opportunity or give recognition to the diversity of Indigenous needs and issues, circumstance and priorities in our discussions about curriculum in the program. Moreover such a standpoint left little room for questioning whether the justifications for specific academic standards and practices made on the basis of managerialist discourses were relevant or culturally appropriate in Indigenous contexts, or even whether they really worked in non-Indigenous contexts. Importantly, and paradoxically, such a position also overlooked the fact that students were often unable to meet course related deadlines because they were meeting their work deadlines or responding to other real world contingencies in their various work and community roles. In any program committed to emancipatory transformation these problematics need to be recognised. Even if they cannot necessarily be resolved, recognition of their existence serves to counter recolonising tendencies.

At a political level, in terms of the broader impact of HECS, there is still considerable controversy regarding the extent to which HECS influences Indigenous student participation. During the last five years, key Indigenous stakeholders including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Network (ATSIHEN) and Indigenous Higher Education Association (IHEA) have intensively lobbied state and federal members of parliament, opposition members, ATSIC and key government personnel about their concerns over the negative implications of HECS. These issues included increased HECS fees and reduced income ceiling for repaying HECS charges (CAS File Notes). Their concerns have been supported by several studies regarding the factors that impact on Indigenous university participation (Walker et al. 1999, Walker 2000) and several policy and financing reviews (Ham 1996; NBEET 1997). Several findings indicate that HECS is a disincentive to university study for disadvantaged groups (Ramsay 1998; NBEET 1997; Walker 2000).
Successive studies have put forward recommendations to limit the impact of HECS including changing the income threshold for repayment and providing a moratorium on increases for equity groups (NSW/ACT ATSIHEN 1996; Walker 2000). Despite these findings and ministerial endorsement of the recommendations, DETYA insists that HECS does not appear to have affected Indigenous participation in higher education, dismissing Indigenous perspectives as erroneous (Walker 2000). This position effectively negates attempts to address the issues identified through partnership and negotiation. Such reactionary responses make a mockery of governmental endorsement of recommendations from previous task force and policy reviews regarding partnership and consultation as principles of practice in Indigenous higher education (Ham 1996; NBEET 1997).

In addition to the introduction of HECS a number of other policy related issues and events have impacted on Indigenous education since the widespread adoption of the persuasive discourses of corporatism and neo-colonialism. These changes are the same as the elements identified by (Reid 1996). They include: ongoing amendments to ABSTUDY; the establishment of performance indicators for equity groups including Indigenous people (Lin Martin 1994); the introduction of an Indigenous student support funding allocation model (Ham 1996); the institutionalisation of Indigenous education profiles; the introduction of full training, and the corresponding establishment of the National Training Board (NTB) and the Australian Standards Framework (ASF); and, the introduction of performance based management via Quality and Benchmarking strategies.

Many of these changes, brought in under the Dawkins’ reform agenda (Reid 1996) have been justified under the general auspices of social justice and equity policies. Other changes have been justified specifically to improve Indigenous higher education outcomes as a consequence of reviews (Schwab 1995, 1997; Walker 2000).

As the remainder of the discussion shows, ministerial and policy statements are often thinly veiled attempts to bring Indigenous education under the same regulatory rules and standards that govern mainstream education. This requires a rhetorical masking of values such as ‘equality of opportunity’ which are consonant with one variant of liberalism and replacing them with the dominant discourses of another. This has been achieved by shifting the focus from an equal ‘right to access’ to equal ‘outcomes’ (or in the case of Indigenous education the lack of them) within an efficiency framework. As suggested in Chapter Two this involved a careful reframing of the government’s initial commitment to the equity goals identified in A Fair Chance For All: National and Institutional Planning for
Equity in Higher Education (DEET & NBEET 1990) and the Joint Policy Statement: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) goals, objectives and strategies (DEET 1993).

The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (NREATSIP) summary and recommendations (DEET 1994) and Final Report (DEET 1995) provided a strong case based on moral, cultural and social grounds as to why the Commonwealth government should continue to fund high quality equity and access programs for Indigenous Australians. In 1995 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) task force described the Commonwealth government’s continuing commitment to Indigenous education through the provision of financial assistance to Indigenous students through ABSTUDY and to education providers through equity initiative funds (for example the Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP)) as an important step towards achieving reconciliation. This gave significant reinforcement to the moral and social importance of the federal government’s commitment to fund Indigenous education.

The Commonwealth Government allocation of an additional $143 million through 1996-2000 to improve outcomes across all sectors Indigenous education suggested a degree of responsiveness (MCEETYA 1996). However, based on subsequent policy decisions, many Indigenous stakeholders believe that the government using economic rationalist discourse is determined to reincorporate Indigenous Australians into mainstream education.

Although the NATSIEP policy goals and strategies were reinforced by the MCEETYA task force review in 1995, the various programs such as ABSTUDY and HEEP that provided the necessary funding base were subsequently eroded by DETYA changes between 1996/97 and 1999 (NIPAAC 2003). The insistence on equal academic outcomes in education alongside a NATSEIP policy purporting to recognise cultural difference are examples of a postcolonial ambivalence overlaid by colonial economic discourse of human capital and unreflexive dominant self-definition which is by its nature is racist. Many of the governments’ more recent responses and justifications to particular events suggest that we have learned very little as a nation from our history in education. The government continues to privilege corporatism despite evidence which shows that Australia is more likely to achieve cultural harmony and social and economic development through programs and services, policies and practices which recognise cultural diversity and which acknowledge that assessment methods, measures and outcomes are contingent.
The period since 1996 has proved to be a constant struggle to maintain a foothold in the ground thus far gained against what seemed like deliberate attempts to dismantle existing gains and strike new strategic, de[moral]ising assaults to Indigenous education. This process has underplayed the extensive range of achievements including increased academic outcomes, innovative culturally specific programs and Indigenous staffing and leadership against seemingly insurmountable odds (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000).

In many respects the examples discussed in this section parallel the philosophical and political issues pertaining to the economic rationalisation of competency-based education examined in Chapter Four, although they focus on decisions and issues related specifically to Indigenous education policies and programs in higher education. They highlight the way in which many of the recent policy decisions and processes by government run counter to existing Indigenous education policy aims, goals, strategies and their related outcomes. They include the West Review (1997), the ABSTUDY review (1997) and recent changes to ABSTUDY allowances looking at their implications for the CAS and ICMDP.

By 1996 it was apparent that the then Federal Minister for Education, the Hon. Amanda Vanstone (1996), intended to make significant reductions to ABSTUDY and ATSIC which could have a serious impact on Indigenous participation in universities. The full implications of these changes and broader government intentions became evident through a series of ministerial statements and press releases over the following months.

The West Review and Indigenous response

The issues and related policy reviews surrounding the announcement of West Review were outlined in the introduction to this chapter. As already mentioned it remained an appalling oversight on the part of the University that to gain Indigenous representation we had to invite ourselves onto the Panel and make a separate CAS submission without access to the funds allocated to represent the Universities interests.

A key focus of the CAS submission to the West Review argued that:

Indigenous programs need to remain distinct from, but nevertheless clearly attached to funding mechanisms within universities. This involves the continued use of profiles and equity plans which review performance against targets as a basis for distribution mechanisms of Higher Education Equity Program funds as well as for...
accountability and evaluation purposes. These targets need to be negotiated with the appropriate Indigenous groups, based on past performance and future demands and coordinated with all relevant funding programs.

To a large extent successful implementation of Indigenous programs is dependent upon the degree to which universities value equity activities, view their incorporation within the central university planning and resource allocation as a legitimate function of Universities, and are prepared to take responsibility to implement these activities at all levels of the University system. And, in the final analysis are prepared submit to auditing and reporting mechanisms that have the endorsement of relevant Indigenous associations (CAS 1997c, p. 5.).

There are some positive aspects to the government’s adherence to corporate accountability. For example, the Government could exercise its responsibility to ensure Indigenous equal rights and opportunities are achieved in the sphere of education by insisting that Universities continue to make a commitment to Indigenous Higher Education. The Higher Education Council (HEC) (NBEET 1997) recommends:

that the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs require universities to report on their management of education and support programs for Indigenous Australian students against indicators based on the principles of best practice outlined in this report (Recommendation 14 cited NBEET 1997, p. xvii).

These best practice principles and organisational attributes are grouped under nine headings:

- cultural affirmation and inclusively;
- planning priority;
- senior management support;
- budget processes;
- accountability to the Indigenous Australian communities;
- academic autonomy;
- academic recognition;
- consultative processes; and
- physical environment (NBEET 1997, pp. 29-30).

Although DETYA ‘encourages’ universities to outline their strategies and outcomes related to these principles in annual profile reports, it is not compulsory for them to do so. Not
surprisingly, given the limited space allocated to reporting on outcomes, most universities tend to focus on their performance against the Lin Martin equity measures (Martin 1994).

The argument in the CAS submission to the West Review advocates that the government hold universities accountable to these principles in their reporting. In doing so, it encompasses a tricky double agenda: desiring universities to acknowledge their corporate responsibility to Indigenous education; and, both desiring Indigenous tertiary centres to have more rather than less cultural autonomy in their day-to-day operations and more input into university direction. The Centre’s position was that an endorsement of the principles listed above is paramount to successfully hold these agendas together. Most Indigenous tertiary centres throughout Australia share a similar concern to see universities assume more corporate responsibility for Indigenous education without losing their autonomy (Anderson et al. 1998).

Some Indigenous Centres have been more successful than others in securing both of these aspects. In research within Western Australia, few universities were able to provide examples to show that they embraced all or most of the above principles (Walker 2000). Curtin University performs well in this regard and reports against these nine principles in its DETYA annual profile documents (Curtin 1997-2000). This situation has not come about because of institutional goodwill but through the unyielding determination of Indigenous staff at the Centre. In particular, Pat Dudgeon, Head of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, has, for example, argued over several years that universities have a moral and corporate responsibility for ensuring that equity goals for Indigenous Australians are achieved. Pat Dudgeon has consistently argued that while Indigenous Centres need to provide the direction for Indigenous education strategic plans within institutions, university governing bodies need to take a stronger position in the implementation of these plans, and provide the support necessary to obtain successful outcomes (AEPIC Minutes 1995–2003; Dudgeon & Stringer 1993).

This argument has certainly gained (at times begrudging) acceptance at an institutional level. In comparison to many universities throughout Australia, Curtin University has shown considerable commitment and strength in this area through the establishment of the Aboriginal Education Planning Implementation Committee (AEPIC) in 1995. AEPIC is a high level committee chaired by a senior Deputy Vice Chancellor. It comprises all Divisional and Branch heads, and reports directly to the University Academic Board. AEPIC has the potential to ensure ‘that Indigenous education is integrated into the overall institutional planning, implementation and review. AEPIC plays an important role in
developing University-wide strategies and plans for Indigenous education as well as overseeing and supporting their successful implementation' (Curtin 1999). In theory AEPIC is supposed to ensure that the ‘necessary structures, policies, processes, support and resources’ are in place to achieve the combined priorities of the university and CAS (loc.cit).

From one perspective, it is possible to point to a number of important achievements through AEPIC, and to recognise the goodwill and commitment of most committee members. From another perspective there is a smouldering concern among some CAS staff that the Committee is little more than a ‘pat on the back club’; one lacking a deeper understanding of the extent and speed of institutional change needed to eradicate the incipient racism which still permeates all aspects of the academy (Collard 1999; Sonn et al. 1997; Walker 2000); and, lacking the sense of urgency and courage to take up the fight at a School and Departmental level to execute such change. The failure to adopt a serious commitment to ‘Aboriginalise’ the curriculum across campus and the reluctance to contribute recurrent operating funds to support Curtin’s cultural awareness strategy for all staff remain vexing issues for CAS (Collard 1999; Collard et al. 1999).

A response to Changes to ABSTUDY

In May 1997, the Federal Government represented the decision to make policy changes to ABSTUDY as beneficial to Indigenous people. Over a period of months, the New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Network, and representatives from other groups including the Indigenous Australian Higher Education Association (IAHEA), the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and National Union of Students (NUS) lobbied members of the Commonwealth Parliament regarding the potential implications of funding cuts as well as issues related to HECS for Indigenous students.

In November 1997, the Government announced ‘a major back-down’ on some of changes to ABSTUDY proposed in May. In an article, ‘A win on ABSTUDY— but the fight goes on’, Julie Wells of the NTEU Advocate reported that ‘the Government had conceded that its budget changes would not ‘meet its objectives’ of more effectively targeting Abstudy’ (November, 1997, p.5). While Wells claimed a small victory for Away-From-Base (AFB) funding (for both interstate travel for ‘enabling courses’ and postgraduate allowances), she stressed that the overall reduction in allowances would affect more than 3000 students around Australia and have a negative impact on student participation.
Over the following months it was clear that the Government ‘back-down’ was a temporary [con]cession; a retreat to gather the necessary information to justify the future changes. The policy discourse focussed on Indigenous failure, emphasising poor academic outcomes in comparison to mainstream student performance, reinforcing the idea that existing attempts were not working. A Review of Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) Community Discussion Paper was distributed by DEETYA in December 1997. The paper prefaces the discussion with the argument that:

Although the number of Indigenous students enrolled at all levels of education has increased in recent years, the gaps between educational outcomes for Indigenous people and other Australians are still unacceptably wide and in some areas may now be getting worse (DEETYA 1997).

The rationale positioned the ABSTUDY review in the context of Government plans to introduce a Youth Allowance ‘to ensure that Indigenous Australian students receive the most appropriate form of assistance, with a view to maximising Indigenous participation and retention rates’ (DEETYA 1997, p. 4). The review glossed over increases in student access, participation and completion rates that had been gained in a relatively short period of time given the history of Indigenous education described in Chapter Two—increases gained in spite of the difficulties and disadvantage Indigenous people experience in relation to the majority of other Australians (Bourke et al. 1996; Ellis 1998; Walker 2000). The aims of the review were primarily about economic efficiency and looking at ways to achieve these improved academic outcomes within the most cost-effective manner. The terms of reference for the review stipulated that review recommendations had to be ‘budget neutral’.

The DEETYA discussion paper stresses that ABSTUDY is only one among a number of factors influencing the educational decisions of Indigenous tertiary students (DEETYA 1997, p. 9). It draws on previous studies to argue that about half of these students indicated they would ‘drop out of education’ if ABSTUDY was not available. It also points out that these same students ‘considered self-esteem, lack of encouragement, lack of school and family support, and racism were more important than financial difficulties in causing Indigenous students to leave’ (loc.cit). The Discussion Paper reasons that although these findings suggest that ABSTUDY may remove financial disincentives to study, ‘financial factors are only one among a range of factors’ influencing participation. On this basis it concludes therefore ‘that removing financial disincentives alone is not enough to increase participation to the same levels as the rest of the community’ (loc.cit).
On the face of it this argument merely highlights the need to encourage individuals, their families and institutions to recognise their responsibility; and attain wider system level change in order to increase Indigenous education participation. However, the argument is underpinned by liberal assumptions of individual self-reliance and the need to limit government welfarism, it ignores the structural inequities that exist. From an Indigenous perspective it allows the government to place an unrealistically heavy burden on institutions, Indigenous Centres and individual students (Flood 1998; Walker 2000). The discussion paper ignores the extent of financial disadvantage currently experienced by Indigenous students and the inter-causal relationship between poverty, these other factors and student academic outcomes. Importantly, it brushes over the dominant cultural politics at work at a systemic level and the vast differences in the levels of disadvantage experienced between Indigenous peoples and other Australians as a result of these politics. Arguably, it is also a glaring example of Althusser’s principles underpinning the ideological state apparatus (ISAs) (Althusser 1971), as outlined by Hodge and Mishra (1991) and discussed in Chapter Five.

At the close of the academic year in 1998, when most Indigenous Centres were frantically trying to finalise academic and administrative requirements, a DEETYA document was leaked to the press outlining a series of changes to ABSTUDY to take effect in 2000. These changes related to eligibility criteria, student allowances, AFB payments and the transfer of administration responsibility for block release funding from Centrelink to DETYA (ATSIC 1999; Walker 2000). The response by Indigenous stakeholders to this news was swift and concerted. Within hours arrangements were in place for the Chairperson of the Western Australian Aboriginal Education Training Council (WAAETC), Ms May O’Brien, to meet with Indigenous leaders and government officials in Canberra the following day. At CAS, several Indigenous colleagues and I met with the Head of Centre at five in the afternoon to plan a response. Key personnel from other Indigenous Centres endorsed the Centre’s position to highlight the key issues on their behalf. By four in the morning we faxed a Position Paper outlining the perceived implications for Indigenous higher education to May O’Brien as she was leaving for the airport (CAS/Western Australian Aboriginal Council of Higher Education (WAACHE) 1998).

There was a strong sentiment expressed amongst CAS staff that the government’s timing and method of announcement was deliberate, reminiscent of governmental machinations in ‘Yes Minister’ (BBC Television Series). The timing ensured that Indigenous Centres would only be able to muster a limited response, thus giving tacit consent to the Minister’s proposed changes. However the force and speed of response by Indigenous
stakeholders and their allies was remarkable and durable — causing the government to 'backdown' once more on some of the proposed changes. By early 1999 senior DETYA staff were on the 'campaign trail' to inform Indigenous staff and students about the 'benefits' of ABSTUDY changes. Most Indigenous staff and students I spoke with were sceptical about the exercise. The focus on public forums gave very limited opportunity for key Indigenous staff to have serious input into the policy changes. Even formalised meetings with Indigenous Centres were designed to inform staff of the Minister's 'bottom line', rather than provide a forum to register concerns — an approach more consistent with the discursive practices of economic rationalism and corporatism than with those of participatory or representative liberal democracy (Personal observations at the University of Western Australia (UWA) public forum and DETYA State Office meeting in April 1999).

Most Indigenous staff and students were also sceptical of the benefits given the balance sheet on winners and losers under the ABSTUDY changes. Their concerns were borne out by the 1999 ATSIC report, Analysis of Proposed Changes to Abstudy on Indigenous Students, which identified the ‘gains and losses in dollar terms of students in different age groups, in different family circumstances and living in different geographic locations’ as a result of the changes. The report, based on an analysis of submissions from Indigenous Centres and higher education stakeholders around Australia, found that changes to ABSTUDY for students in higher education ‘benefit only a small proportion of the total ABSTUDY student population — the young and the single’ (ATSIC 1999, p. 3). Further, the report states that the most disadvantaged group are the ‘mature age students who make up 80% of the TAFE & University Indigenous Student population in Australia’ (loc.cit). It was estimated that some 3,045 mature aged women on sole parent pensions would be disadvantaged. The report argued that the majority of Indigenous students tend to return to study ‘later in life after becoming established in family and community affairs’ (loc.cit). As the report reasons ‘[i]t is from this base of community family support and direction that mature-aged Indigenous students undertake further study; study most connected to qualifications contributing to community development and autonomy’ (ATSIC 1999, p. 3). The conclusion drawn from this ATSIC study is worth quoting at length as it provides another example of how both economic and political forces and ISAs work to constrain Indigenous self-determination:

The changes to ABSTUDY in 2000 will diminish the effectiveness of this study support scheme in terms of its continuing contribution to Indigenous
community development as determined, in the past, by the members of these communities themselves through their participation in further study.

The policy implications to be drawn from this research are that the alignment of ABSTUDY to Youth Allowance and Newstart in 2000 damages the opportunity for life-long learning for Indigenous Australians, attempts to force Indigenous Australians into a pattern of further study most suited to non-Indigenous middle-class Australians, and reduce the financial support for those Indigenous community members most ready and equipped to contribute to their community’s economic, social and political determination (loc.cit).

The report also estimated that while the ABSTUDY budget could be reduced by as much as $18.8 million in 2000 there are no alternative state or territory programs to offer corresponding levels of support. This was considerably different to the claim by the Federal Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs that the changes to ABSTUDY would be budget neutral (Gavin Moodie, *The Australian* 1999a, p. 37). It was apparent from the ATSIC report findings that those students most adversely affected by these changes would be forced to either endure greater levels of hardship or withdraw from their studies. The report predicted ‘a sharp decline in the overall enrolment figures in TAFE and University courses by mature age Indigenous students’ (ATSIC 1999, p. 4), which has since been affirmed in the report, *Higher Education Report for the 2004 to 2006 Triennium*, (Nelson 2004). The Higher Education Report notes a 15 per cent decline in the number Indigenous students commencing higher education in 2000 and an 8 percent decline in Indigenous student participation, emphasising that the figures had stabilised by 2003 (Nelson 2004, p.17). While HECS increases and ABSTUDY policy changes have been a major contributing factor, other factors such as saturation of particular courses by target groups, and the redirection of some pre-tertiary level enabling courses to the TAFE sector may have also have added to the decline (CAS 2003). This point was confirmed by the same report findings which noted that there were 65 fewer students in enabling courses and 115 fewer in diploma courses while new enrolments increased by 48 in bachelor level courses and 24 at doctoral level (loc.cit).

In total CAS submitted five submissions to government over a twelve-month period in response to ABSTUDY changes. The first provided a case study of the ICMD and ICH block release program demonstrating the impacts of changes to AFB funds. The second provided an overview of the potential impact of ABSTUDY changes to all CAS programs. The third was in response to the ATSIC ABSTUDY review. The fourth confirmed the
academic, employment, economic and empowerment benefits of ABSTUDY. The fifth involved a survey of Indigenous students perceptions of the impacts of ABSTUDY changes (1999) undertaken by CAS revealing that the majority of students and staff CAS programs were adversely affected by changes in ABSTUDY allowances and other DETYA policies.

Increasingly, Indigenous staff at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies and other Indigenous Centres have expressed concerns that federal government financial, regulatory and administrative decisions will impact negatively upon existing and future directions in Indigenous higher education (CAS Correspondence & Submissions 1997-1999; Walker 2000). Curtin University and the University of Western Australia have submitted their continued concerns which are registered with others in the latest ministerial report ‘achieving equitable and appropriate outcomes: Indigenous Australians in higher education’ (Nelson 2002).

Findings from recent studies (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000) show that many Indigenous education stakeholders believe that many of the recent changes in Indigenous education policy and the subsequent responses by senior university managers do not support Indigenous priorities and successes. Some Indigenous staff and students believe that recent policy changes erode or undermine their capacity to determine their own standards and priorities in higher education (Anderson et al. 1998; Walker 2000). They are concerned that policy decisions regarding university fees and ABSTUDY allowances will erode the important advances being made by Indigenous Centres/Units around Australia. Their concerns include innovations in curriculum development, teaching strategies, academic support systems, and all other elements which further Indigenous higher education and research within the broader system. Returning to the transformative framework discussed in Chapter Five the role of racism and the competing discourses of neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism in influencing events cannot be underestimated.

Despite the extensive and well-based arguments by Indigenous stakeholders and the evidence supporting their concerns during 1998 (through to 2000), the then Hon. Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Dr Kemp continued to defend the proposed ABSTUDY changes on the grounds that they are intended to ensure improved academic outcomes in higher education for Indigenous Australians (Kemp 1998a, 1998b, 1999). As already mentioned, the government tends to ignore Indigenous voices and the evidence presented in recent studies (Walker 2000), referring instead to in-house publications.
(DETYA 1999; Encel 2000) to suggest that Indigenous staff and student perspectives are misguided (Foreword in Walker 2000).

Ironically, many of the recent changes, while couched in terms of greater efficiencies and effectiveness in Indigenous higher education, affect the ability of Indigenous Centres to provide culturally inclusive and appropriate programs to effectively meet the distinctive and diverse needs of the Indigenous community. Further, the impact of achieving these efficiencies has had a profound impact on the CAS. Many of the elements necessary to support transformative and decolonising education programs have been gradually compromised under the weight of staff cut backs, the devolution of some administrative tasks and centralisation of others, all of which are the inevitable ends of corporatist means.

Perhaps of more concern is the possibility that the discourse of economic rationalism masks a different but related agenda. There is a widely held belief among Indigenous staff at the Centre that some of the most recent changes to ABSTUDY policy were an attempt by the government to diminish the impact of Hanson’s allegations of favouritism, inequitable standards within Indigenous education and mismanagement in Indigenous affairs. As Ricky Osborne, the then Coordinator of ICMDP, stated in a press release to the Curtin Independent in October 1999:

The Centre for Aboriginal Studies is seriously concerned that the significant progress achieved in Indigenous Tertiary education over the past ten years will be severely diminished as result of the recent changes to ABSTUDY.

The ABSTUDY changes are not in anyway directed by any evidential need for reform, but more likely ‘Hansonite’ type driven agenda for economic rationalism and a contemporary attempt to assimilate Indigenous Australians (Osborne 1999, p. 1).

A significant concern for the Centre for Aboriginal Studies is that the changes to ABSTUDY have taken place without proper consultation with those most affected. Moreover the changes ignore the very disadvantaged position of Indigenous Australians which is very much a result of similar Government policy and practice in the past, that is limited consultation with Indigenous peoples and scant regard to the measures required to deal with these levels of disadvantage.

Gavin Moodie makes a similar observation:
These changes are not designed to improve ABSTUDY or, more importantly, outcomes for Indigenous Australians. They have been introduced to assuage Hanson supporters. There is considerable resentment among white rural and isolated people at the travel allowances available to ABSTUDY recipients (1999a, p. 37).

As Moodie observes ‘Special Aboriginal programs are lightning rods for expressions of white resentments' (loc.cit). These resentments are a consequence of the unmet needs of these non-Indigenous Australians. Rather than formulate policies to address the unmet needs of non-Indigenous Australians in rural and isolated areas as recommended in recent studies of the geographic influences on university participation (James et al. 1999; Ramsay et al. 1998), the government has responded to the resentment by bringing Indigenous Australians back in line with existing mainstream policies. As suggested in Chapter Two this response is manifested by simultaneously reducing ‘special program’ funding and rekindling the notion that mainstreaming is the best way to achieve ‘equality in education for Indigenous people’. It is difficult to maintain the momentum of social and political transformation beyond the outcomes of historical colonialism because of adherence to neo-colonial liberal ideals. In effect the government has pandered to a specific sector of the white population at the expense of the Indigenous interests, priorities and academic outcomes. Moodie argues that by allowing ABSTUDY to become a ‘plaything of white politics’ the coalition government:

has risked the great improvements achieved through ABSTUDY by introducing changes without the advice, ‘ownership’ and still less the self-determination of Indigenous Australians, who more than anyone else are keen to extend ABSTUDY’s successes (Moodie, loc.cit).

However, it is possible to read the government’s handling of the situation and the implications as indicative of something far more serious than a reversal or slowdown in Indigenous academic outcomes. The discussion earlier in this chapter suggests that many of the policies, practices and institutions of Australia’s historical, colonial liberalism were justified by and justified racism. And concomitantly, the findings discussed show that corporatism simultaneously propagates and masks racism. As research by ACIRRT shows, the prevailing economic and social situation in Australia with its increasing cutbacks in health, education and housing, and growing unemployment and poverty have caused deep resentment among many sections of the Australian community (1999, pp.
157-158). This has resulted in an increase in the number of people who want to ‘wind back the clock’ to the good old days and those who argue for even more neo-liberal ‘reform’. Neither of these options is sustainable in the future. Both are based on philosophical beliefs and collective values that lead to exclusionary practices based on race and gender. Alternatives to this are necessary if Australia is to have a future founded on genuine reconciliation, equality and social justice. These alternative possibilities are discussed in the concluding chapter.

The theoretical framework provided by Muetzelfeldt and Bates (1992, pp. 67-68) is useful in the analysis of the Hanson phenomenon, the fragmentation it caused and how this has in turn impacted upon Indigenous affairs and race politics generally, and higher education policy in particular. Their framework reminds us that there are diverse responses within states to the threat of fiscal and political crisis as well as difference between states. These differing responses tend to correspond with the different perceived realities and experiences of different interest and social groups, and the different reasons given for the cause of the crisis. This can create considerable fragmentation of effects. While some of the differences reflect different perceptions and experiences, others reflect a failure to consider specific social and economic issues in relation to both the contemporary condition and its broader political and historical contexts. The latter is revealed in the unquestioning acceptance among a small but significant group of Australians of the reasons put forward in 1996 by the Member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson as responsible for the declining economic situation and social wellbeing of ‘ordinary’, ‘everyday’ Australians. In a series of naïve and ill-informed public statements, Ms Hanson was able to tap the public’s fear that globalisation and multiculturalism would lead to economic collapse and further social fragmentation (Adams 1999; Langton 1999). By blaming Indigenous Australians and Asian migrants for the current situation Hanson managed to displace the force of serious social and political analysis into an equally ‘naïve and ill-informed’ (Hughes 1998, p. 475) racist attack unleashing a xenophobia reminiscent of an earlier, uglier monocultural Australia (Adams 1999; Hughes 1998).

Any attempt to frame the ensuing discussions of the wider situation in terms of the rise and subsequent failure of corporatism to address the social and fiscal crisis of late capitalism or the limits of political legitimacy of liberal democracy would have been effectively lost in the public commotion and confusion that followed. The confusion was not surprising. The Hanson phenomena is a concrete example of the social fragmentation that I suggest may perhaps be linked to Australia’s particular colonial history and postcolonial desires outlined by Hodge and Mishra (1991). In her maiden speech Hanson
made brief rhetorical gestures towards allegiance to those noble liberal principles of equality and justice, individual freedom held dear by most Australians and then claimed that special treatment of Indigenous Australians posed a serious threat to these values. Ironically, as Indigenous academic, Marcia Langton (1999, p. 93) argues the effect of Hanson’s position was to drive a wedge into those principles.

Previous chapters discussed how the CAS and ICMDP have purposively countered/responded to colonialist imperatives through the development of an innovative, emancipatory curriculum framework, encompassing decolonising content and processes and a reflexive transformative pedagogy. Chapter Six specifically argues that this has required working with the complexities and ironies of establishing a program whose goal is to develop a practitioner who consciously works to negotiate their position and gain recognition on their terms. In many respects it has involved acknowledging and working with the problematics of multiculturalism and the 'new citizenship' debate which have emerged with the changing face of Australian society, in order to assert a rightful space to argue for recognition of specific Indigenous rights, interests and self-determination. This is always 'tricky', contentious, shifting ground (see Woods 1996; Mickler 1998).

The Government’s adherence to the ill-conceived virtues of neo-liberalism and corporatism has had the effect of impeding the missions and aims of the Centre and its programs such as the ICMDP. Ironically, there is ample evidence to demonstrate how programs such as the ICMDP produce an informed ‘community/citizenry’ who contribute productively and positively to Australia’s social, cultural and economic systems. For example at the end of the 2001 academic year, there were some 211 graduates from the Bachelor of Applied Science and Associate Degree in Indigenous Community Management and Development from all states around Australia (ICMDP 2001 File Notes). This constitutes a significant percentage of the total number of Indigenous graduates from Bachelor level courses since 1991. Many of these graduates have taken up positions within government departments or non-government agencies that provide services to Indigenous communities; others have continued to work within their own communities. Some 70 per cent of graduates hold key public positions in towns in rural and isolated areas contributing to, and in many cases, are helping to transform the social, political and economic situations in their regions (Walker 1998). At the last count some 20 percent of ATSIC commissioners were graduates or ex-students of the ICMD and ICH programs (CAS email correspondence, 1999).
The discussion thus far also shows the various ways in which CAS, CIRC and the ICMDP have engaged in decolonising strategies and practices that include, but extend beyond, curriculum and pedagogy in an attempt to transform processes and practices within the macro-political system. Each of these organisational sectors have continued to engage in principled debate in an attempt to hold the government accountable to the principles of justice and equality and recognition of the distinctive rights and interests of Indigenous Australians.

The ICMDP is one of the many programs within the CAS and the University that are being compelled to respond in the face of the contemporary economic climate, the related corporatist assault and the government’s flirtation with neo-colonialism. There is no doubt that some elements of the ICMDP program can and need to be changed to accommodate corporate, global and technological imperatives. However, there is also no doubt that maintaining and operationalising a critical education approach will place enormous pressures on the program in the wake of some of these impending changes.

Since 1998 the University has fostered and marketed a strong and positive corporate identity, but at the same time there has also been a shift in the climate of the University. ‘Mergers’ and ‘restructuring’ and other euphemisms cannot hide the fact that universities are having to batten down under the corporatist assault. In the midst of this, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies has continued to struggle to retain Indigenous self-determination and control in the face of funding cutbacks and corporate demands within the University (Walker 2000).

Critical education theorists such as Giroux (1983, 1985) provide clues for programs such as the ICMDP to maintain their transformative and decolonising potential. He suggests that at a program level there is a need to build in strategies, (including deconstructive analysis) which allow us to more fully understand how social and power relations within the university operate through the organisation of time, space and resources. This analysis will help us to understand the way in which students experience these relations via their economic, political and social locations outside of the university context (Giroux 1985, p. 34). This chapter has attempted to do this through deconstructive analysis of the micro and macro forces that are impacting on higher education in general, and the CAS in particular.

In ‘Rethinking the School’, Ian Hunter uses a ‘genealogical’ approach, to reconceive the school system ‘as an improvised assemblage, [as] a device to meet the contingencies of a
particular history’ (1994, p. xvii). It is argued here that many of the actions and decisions of CAS staff reflect a deliberate attempt to understand how past and present contingencies can limit and constrain the possible futures of programs such as the ICMD. In this chapter I have discussed some of those particular contingencies of history that have influenced government policies and practices towards Indigenous education. I have attempted to relate this to both the transformative framework outlined in Chapter Five and humanistic politics. In a similar vein to Hunter (1994), I have suggested that contemporary Indigenous education policies reflect reactionary governmental responses to a range of social, political and economic factors; factors which are mostly banal reactions that are designed to appease white resentment, rather than further a genuine commitment to principles of social justice, freedom and equality or an adherence to fundamental human rights. The governments actions are directly counter-productive to the argument I have made elsewhere that the ‘Government has a vital role to play in ensuring the higher education sector makes the best contribution to Australia’s society, culture and economy, through maintaining a focus on access and equity, quality and diversity in Indigenous higher education’ (Walker 1998).

As a postscript, the government recently confirmed that block release programs have been given a reprieve. There is even talk of moving onto four year funding grants. Although elated at the news, I did wonder what that meant for this chapter, how it fitted with my argument. What happened to the corporatist assault? What had influenced the government’s change of heart on block release programs? It would make a nice end to this story to suggest that the government’s latest decision was driven by moral and cultural considerations in response to the Indigenous Centre submissions discussed previously rather than financial concerns. It is highly likely of course that these submissions did influence the government’s decision. Further threats to Indigenous funding had become ‘too much of a hot potato for them to ignore us’ (CAS Head of Centre, Personal Communication, 2001). Most Indigenous Centres and stakeholders had linked arguments regarding equity and the right of Indigenous people in rural and remote areas to have equal opportunity to education with economic efficiency and effectiveness. Ironically, the same economic imperatives that had threatened Centre operations, particularly the block release programs, were now to breathe new life into them. Of course the problem is the tricky, potentially self-serving nature of such manoeuvres. This ‘win’ does not come unconditionally. Centres will have to monitor and evaluate these programs against a range of measures (of mainstream making) to validate their efficiency and effectiveness argued in those earlier submissions. Experience suggests this is slippery ground. At times it is too easy to start making internal decisions on the basis of
these external requirements. These decisions can amount to a punitive self-governance/self-surveillance and related restraints on our emancipatory actions.
Chapter Eight
Transformative Possibilities

Living through vision engenders living for a purpose, and as such, significantly enhances the meaning and quality we find in living. Vision forms a contextual frame of reference through which we can measure, relate, and act during our daily lives (Cajete 1994, p.145).

...it is only the radical visions such as Ganma which can capture the popular imagination. We argue that Australians must seek to develop a greater cognisance of this multicultural society’s contradictions, disjunctions, and incoherence (Heitmeyer, Nilan & O’Brien 1996, p. 13).

Navigating beyond/Out manoeuvring the colonial/corporatist assault
As I concluded in the last Chapter, for the moment Indigenous higher education appears to have gained a reprieve from the colonial corporatist assault. Returning to the ganma metaphor, it seems that Indigenous stakeholders in the higher education arena have been relatively successful in steering a path through the always turbulent and sometimes treacherous waters at the interface between Indigenous and non-Indigenous social, cultural and political encounters. However, it would be unwise to ignore the government’s penchant for subsuming social and cultural wellbeing under the auspices of economic efficiency in reformulating goals pertaining to access, equity and quality outcomes in Indigenous higher education. At the same time it is important to acknowledge the changes that have occurred and transformative possibilities that exist in shaping Australia’s future.

As the title of this thesis suggests I set out to explore a range of transformative strategies in Indigenous education designed to simultaneously engage with, and achieve decolonisation and positive social change. This is not a glib, rhetorical, ‘roll off your tongue’ positive social change, but an urgent postcolonial imperative to address the incomprehensible level of social disadvantage still being experienced daily by a large percentage of Indigenous Australians. Equally important is the need to recognise Indigenous political equality and First Nation Status. The strategies to achieve these aims discussed in Chapters Three to Seven, encompass curriculum approaches, pedagogy and
policy processes in the university, as well as the broader political arena of national education policy. Each of the ‘operational’ chapters explores the dilemmas and contradictions we have experienced and the strategies chosen to work with each of these elements throughout my own personal and shared professional journey.

In the process of mapping the defining moments of this journey each chapter encapsulates the core thesis — cumulatively revealing the necessary preconditions for the realisation of transformative possibilities as well as the strategies to achieve it. These preconditions include the acceptance of the contradictions and multiplicity of issues and recognition of the productive potential which occurs at the Cultural Interface for Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students/practitioners individually and collectively. This productive potential at the interface provides the transformative possibilities for Indigenous communities and for Australian society as a whole, and within the discourses, policies, programs influencing Indigenous higher education as well as the wider political and public policy domain.

Locating this thesis within the broader political and policy contexts of Indigenous higher education I have identified some of the very real and perceived threats to the goals and aspirations of self-determination for Indigenous higher education in contemporary Australia. In turn, I have analysed the implications for the ICMDP by exploring some of the actual events and social and political forces that provide the challenges, threats and opportunities in this arena. I have presented evidence to show how policy decisions and actions of government and bureaucracy in this arena are often contrary to the goals and aspirations of Indigenous self-determination and social justice. I have examined some of the key assumptions, discourses and factors that have contributed to this.

This chapter summarises the connections of each of these elements without collapsing them into one another. It illustrates the need for a standpoint that acknowledges that discourses and their attendant actions and responses generate inter-connected relationships and outcomes at the Interface, creating the ever-present turbulence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Centre for Aboriginal Studies is a significant site and the ICMDP is an important case study in which to explore the various ways in which Indigenous people and those of us aligned with Indigenous concerns have identified/discovered/engaged with and initiated transformative possibilities. The Centre provides a fertile dynamic site for analysing the implications of particular political events and shifts in policies, discourses and practices.
which have occurred within the university and nationally for Indigenous higher education. It has provided an opportunity to explore the transformative potential of notions of colonial ambivalence, to examine the limitations and possibilities of liberalism, and to analyse the impacts of colonist corporatism as they apply to Indigenous social relations within Australia. Most especially, it has also provided an opportunity to analyse the transformative potential of the ICMDP curriculum and pedagogy using multi-disciplinary theoretical frameworks and strategies of decolonisation.

Employing the ICMDP as a case study has enabled me to shed light on a range of transformative strategies which have contributed to multiple positive outcomes for both Indigenous students and their communities at both micro and macro levels. The more abstract outcomes include the identification of educational principles and strategies that contribute to contemporary critical education theory and pedagogy. In addition, tangible outcomes of more obvious and conventional importance include increases in Indigenous student access, participation and success rates in higher education. Of particular policy interest in this regard are the significant benefits of mixed mode, block release delivery in achieving higher graduate outcomes than conventional on campus courses (Walker 2000) in demonstrably cost-effective ways (Walker 1997c). Other equally important outcomes, which ICMDP students/graduates' individual stories attest to, include enhanced education, empowerment and employment opportunities which have resulted in substantial individual and collective benefits for Indigenous peoples in communities around Australia (McPhee, Greville & Wilson 1998; Walker 1997b, 2000; West 1998; Wilson 2001).

Throughout this thesis I have identified and discussed the political and ethical dilemmas that teachers and researchers inevitably confront when committed to a personal and professional practice embodying discourses and strategies of decolonisation and transformative possibility. Chapters Three and Four explore the emancipatory and transformative potential of the ICMDP and its limitations and possibilities for Indigenous peoples. This has involved discussing how Indigenous peoples 'are actually positioned in their daily lives in relation to colonial knowledges, languages and practices in the material world' (Nakata 1995a, p.72) and how this has happened. I have explored the philosophical and political underpinnings of colonialism and liberalism, corporatism and economic rationalism and their interconnectedness to systemic racism, and the roles played by government, bureaucracy, higher education institutions and academics and their responsibility in relation to shaping individuals as global ‘citizens’ in Australia’s contemporary social democracy.
By describing and theorising about the ICMDP within the broader historical, social, political and theoretical context I aim to contribute to the theories and practices of Indigenous education generally and more particularly to the potential of a reflexive, transformative pedagogy/education in contributing to positive social change.

Revisiting main themes

Throughout this thesis I have examined a range of theoretical, historical, political, philosophical and practical issues. In particular, I have attempted to bring together theories, drawn from practice, that account for the tensions, dilemmas and contradictions which underpin both the evident pervasive ambivalence regarding Indigenous education and the manifestly transformational effects of Indigenous interactions within the wider society. These themes interweave throughout the thesis and tap theories and discourses pertaining to decolonisation and transformation, critical education and pedagogy, cultural politics, social justice, human rights and Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.

Within previous chapters I have provided actual examples of the consequences of the interplay of these competing discourses, policies and practices and their resultant implications for the development of a reflexive, transformative curriculum, the exercise of related emancipatory pedagogical processes, and the enhancement of positive social change for Indigenous people in particular sites around Australia. I have also explored some of the problematics, contradictions and dilemmas which have arisen and the ongoing reflection and revisioning that has been necessary to move beyond the internal ambivalence and doubt these tensions and dilemmas have engendered within the program.

Deconstructing and reconstructing liberalism

A recurrent theme throughout this thesis is that the inconsistencies in the dominant discourses of neo-liberalism, late capitalism and corporatism provide both opportunities and limitations. Within Australia’s historical and social context traditional liberal notions of rights, equality and justice provide a crucial basis for recognition and negotiation with Indigenous Australians. However, the contradictions within individualist and communitarian strands of liberalism and between neo-liberalism and late capitalism work both ways. Globalisation, economic rationalism and corporatism simultaneously fused with the rhetoric of traditional principles of liberalism, yet unhinged from its ideals in practice, threaten to erode the transformative possibilities and many of the gains experienced so far in Indigenous higher education. As Chapter Seven highlights, despite attempts to adopt a proactive approach, the operations of Indigenous controlled units such
as CAS remain vulnerable to the threats of ‘neo-colonialism’ and the related emergence of ‘corporatism’.

**Transformative strategies**

Faced with these forces, this research has involved an exploration of ‘what it is that is transformative and decolonising about the program’ and ‘what elements constitute the necessary preconditions for sustained transformation’. With respect to the first question I have identified a range of transformative strategies and put forward an argument about how they contribute to decolonisation and positive social change. I have outlined some of the major issues and concerns for a reflexive, transformative curriculum and pedagogy and some of the key limitations and possibilities in meeting the goals and aspirations of self-determination for both Indigenous higher education and for Indigenous Australians in practical everyday terms. I have also discussed the issues and responsibilities that Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics must face within a transformative educational process, and the kind of roles they might play. With respect to the second question I have already mentioned the need to be willing to accept and work with the contradictions and ironies, tensions and dilemmas that arise in every facet of our professional and personal lives as well as to remain alert to the potentialities that exist in the spaces in between.

Throughout the thesis, I have outlined a range of strategies, discourses and practices employed to overcome both the disciplinary forces at work in the academy and those in the broader social, political, economic and historical context which impact on Indigenous wellbeing and education. I have suggested that the recognition and incorporation of Indigenous terms of reference (Oxenham 1999, 2000a, 2000b) into our everyday discourse is a potentially powerful strategy to enhance Indigenous opportunities in the wider society (Chapter Five). I have discussed how Indigenous people and their allies may be able to negotiate, appropriate and accommodate the corporate discourses of globalisation, managerialism and economic rationalism into their own discourse and practice without being inscribed or re-colonised by them in the pursuit of Indigenous interests (Chapter Seven).

Chapter Two suggested that the tenets of colonial liberalism, with its mono-cultural, individualistic assumptions are largely responsible for the continuing acceptance of and ignorance towards the inequality, inequity, injustice and exclusion experienced by Indigenous Australians since colonisation. The failure since colonisation to accommodate cultural difference with equality is reminiscent of liberalism’s inability to recognise gender difference 100 years ago (Macintyre 1991). Yet at the same time it reveals paradoxically
how the core principles and values of liberalism (equality, freedom, justice and solidarity/community) have been deployed by Indigenous peoples to negotiate Indigenous terms of reference within existing Indigenous education policies and practice and suggests that such principles can provide a viable cultural politics for the future. Ironically, many of the rights and gains of Indigenous peoples in Australia and internationally have been built on the principles of liberalism and democracy underscored by human rights. And, while colonial liberalism, built as it is on the concept individualism, remains a flawed and contradictory moral, political and philosophical construct (Muetzelfeldt & Bates 1992), I suggest that its foundational concepts and core values such as ‘freedom’, ‘justice’ and ‘equality’ and individual rights are crucially significant to any political and ethical standpoint which seeks to counter the dehumanising elements of corporatism and neo-colonialism. Nevertheless, it remains crucial and possible to find new ways to re-imagine, rework and remake these concepts and to invent new understandings and meanings in order to avoid the pitfalls and traps of liberalist discourse, in renegotiating the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface.

Several theorists have argued that liberalism has not been able to withstand its own internal contradictions, and, ironically, its own tenets of individual rights and freedom have eroded its core principles and values leaving it vulnerable to takeover by economic rationalist and corporate logics (Apple 1999; Pusey 1998). Its problematic nature has led other theorists to suggest that liberal ideals ought to be abandoned. However, an assumption underpinning the ICMDP (albeit only recently articulated) is that the core principles and values of equality, justice and freedom need to be resuscitated and reworked within a human rights framework in order to advance Indigenous self-determination and the interrelated goals of reconciliation and multiculturalism critical for Australia’s future (McPhee & Walker 2001). The cited paper argues that the ICMDP theory and discourse provides a strong basis for students to engage the agency and ‘ethical’ commitment of the ICMD practitioner on the basis of this standpoint, and to advocate, claim and negotiate these goals both individually and collectively at the Cultural Interface.

Hence, this thesis reasserts the belief and findings that the core principles and values of liberal social democracy are still necessary to any truly reflexive, transformative decolonising project and therefore need to be reconstituted in multidimensional forms to acknowledge and enable the full potential of a multicultural reality. I have argued that a new paradigm, language and practice, which adheres to the principles of liberal democracy (equality, freedom and community), may provide a way to navigate the politics
of cultural difference and to limit or deflect the effects of corporatism and racism. Other writers make similar claims (Dodson P. 1995; Dodson M. 1997; Mickler 1998). Mickler for example, emphasises the value of liberalism’s principles and suggests reasserting these underlying values, concepts and meanings to overcome the popularist resentment held by many Australians towards the mythical privilege/advantage of Indigenous Australians.

Within this thesis, I have shown that powerful outcomes have been achieved despite the contemporary oppositional context and regressive historical backdrop, which continues to impact upon Indigenous Australians in different ways in different geographic locations. This colonial legacy combined with the cultural diversity of contemporary Indigenous Australians contributes substantially to the postcolonial ambivalent condition referred to throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, I have also demonstrated that there are tangible social forces with particular corporatist imperatives that challenge us to engage in an ethical and positioned praxis in spite of and amid either the condition of uncertainty, ambiguity and tensions or blase indifference experienced within postmodern society. Within Chapter Seven I described how this praxis has included developing a specific ICMD and Indigenous terms of reference discourse and related micro-strategies to respond to the ‘corporatist assault’ that has infiltrated all social institutions including Indigenous higher education. I suggest such responses can be seen as attempts to resist or disrupt what Lather (1991) has referred to as ‘the alleged impotence of the subject in the face of social/political forces and situations’ in order to ‘make generative advances in the ways we conceptualize our purposes and practices’ (p. 27).

Nevertheless, theorising such resistances as ‘transformative’ discourses and emancipatory practice is often dismissed by critics as misguided attempts to refashion and extend the normative limits of the modernist and enlightenment projects for postcolonial consumption. However, in Chapters Five and Six, I have argued that there is a far more complex and positive reading for those of us committed to social transformation and decolonisation. There is compelling evidence to suggest that once ICMD practitioners engage with a language of ethical agency and political possibility, they create their own strategies to bring about changes in a range of different ways previously unimagined, and in different sites with varying degrees of impact at their local level or in specified contexts at the Cultural Interface. Moreover, the findings (student stories) show that the changes produced are not merely an extension of the modernist project; rather they disrupt master narratives of colonialism, liberalism and capitalism. Thus they can enable the realisation of Indigenous futures on Indigenous terms.
Reflecting on this research and the purpose

Reflecting back to many of the discussions at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in 1988, there was a high level of concern that neither the granting of citizenship in 1967 nor the policy of self-determination of 1975 had addressed and reduced the levels of disadvantage and suffering being experienced by the majority of Indigenous Australians. Even so, when the ICMDP commenced there was a high level of optimism and hope that we really could ‘make a difference’ for individuals, their work, family and community — a motto that still headlines the annual ICMDP Calendar. Thinking back, perhaps it was because we commenced this transformative project in 1989, possessing a certain naivety, most of us still armed with our structural and systems analysis frames largely intact that we could begin at all. Some of us had read and embraced the radical education theory of Freire (1970, 1985, 1986), the cultural politics of Giroux (1983, 1985, 1988) and the ideals of participatory community development espoused by Kelly and Sewell (1989), Gluck (1985), Stringer, Kickett and Gluck (1987), Carr and Kemmis (1986), Fals-Borda (1982) and others. In many respects our commitment to the principles and values of social justice and Indigenous self-determination allowed us to incorporate the necessary ‘theoretic fictions’ (Sloterdijk, 1987 quoted in Lather 1991, p. 12) to provide the impetus and space for our practice.

Whatever the reason, I believe that many of us, then and now, have remained committed to the principles of social and political justice and equality and Indigenous self-determination. We have adopted the position that while the issues and questions raised by postmodernism and poststructuralism require self-reflexivity of our practice as educators, the social reality of Australia demands a commitment not only to a progressive politics but more particularly to transformative practice. In this thesis I have argued that we need to move beyond a pessimism based on theoretical critique and counter critique, to engage in a transformative practice of hope and strategic purpose. While the rhetoric of hope has been/is important to provide impetus for staff and students, the program’s primary commitment is to practical outcomes within Indigenous community contexts. Embracing a critical social science (Habermas 1987) together with an ethical and cultural politics (Giroux & McLaren 1994) wedded to practice in the real world (Code 1995; Haraway 1988; Mouffe 1993, 1996) has added to the complexity of enacting, theorising and articulating the ICMDP curriculum and pedagogy.

I have argued that the ICMDP offers a range of historically contingent and localised examples of change which challenge the self-doubt, futility and globalising gloom and doom dominating postmodern narratives critical of radical transformative projects. Nevertheless, postmodern interrogations have helped in developing a critique of the
ICMDP and in adopting a more critically self-reflexive stance towards my own role and motivations. Postmodern critiques of emancipatory projects warn of the dangers of engaging in practices and pedagogies that can create new regimes of truth, and/or new forms of oppressions that have challenged me (and others) to engage in a reflective analysis of the ICMDP and my own theoretical and practical contributions and engagement.

Thus, throughout this thesis, I have tracked our attempts to move beyond existing boundaries of assimilationist language and practices in education. These tactics have included challenging our traditional assumptions about the purpose and nature of education, the inviolability of discipline knowledge and standards, the role of the teacher/intellectual and our relationships with students. I have included narratives about the program, incorporated both student and staff perspectives, positions and actions along with those of other stakeholders within the wider social and political context in order to demonstrate that there are ways to move beyond the limitations of postmodernism and liberal humanism. In doing so, I have incorporated some of the conundrums of postmodern theory by acknowledging and examining the importance of the subject/agent; deploying/recreating ideologies, exploring ‘fictive theories’, postulating ‘imagined possibilities’ of the world; and, embracing humanistic tendencies inherent in community development to bring about positive social change.

At both a metaphoric and a pragmatic level it has meant working with and through our ambivalence with faith, hope, doubt and determination to deploy the ICMDP as a genuine emancipatory strategy. As Zygmunt Bauman (1995) observes:

Unlike science and political ideology, freedom promises no certainty and no guarantee of anything. It causes therefore a lot of mental pain. In practice, it means constant exposure to ambivalence: that is, to a situation with no decidable solution, with no foolproof choice, no unreflective knowledge ‘of how to go on’ (1995, p. 296).

Thus, we have journeyed.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the idea that genuine transformation and decolonisation is dependent upon having a political vision, and the commitment and competencies to enact the vision. Drawing on my own experiences, and my analysis of discussions with colleagues, students, graduates and other stakeholders, I have attempted
to reflect the dilemmas, tensions and ambivalence that have varied considerably in both 
the substance and extent to which they challenge, resist or embrace the ideas embedded 
within the ICMDP curriculum.

As my research has progressed, and as I have tried to make meaning of the ICMDP and 
its transformative potential, I have had to draw upon many theoretical paradigms, 
recuperate various epistemologies, principles and positions and incorporate multiple and 
diverse narratives in order to reflect the faith, doubt and determination that has persisted 
throughout the last decade of program development. I wanted to reveal how, as a group of 
intellectuals and practitioners, we have been attempting to put in place a theory and 
practice discourse and pedagogy/ies, which are at once ethical and political, emancipatory, 
developmental and transformative.

I have found that in order to tell this story, I have had to readjust the lens, put on bifocals, 
use both ends of the telescope, or as one third year student once said, 'be prepared to see 
it all through a kaleidoscope, knowing that if you shake it up it will never land the same 
again'. (ICMDP Student, September 1994). This reality has meant adopting, framing, 
deploying and incorporating aspects from both modernist and postmodernist paradigms to 
argue for 'foundational aspects, and particularities and specificities' while simultaneously 
engaging with poststructuralist, feminists and postcolonial critiques. I have wanted to show 
from this multi-perspectival position how the dilemmas, disjunctures and contradictions can 
provide the spaces for transformation.

The ICMDP and Indigenous responses to changes in policy and the seductive/reductive 
forces of economic rationalism and managerialism discussed in this thesis testify to the 
'amazing resilience' (and potentiality of Indigenous postcolonial ambivalence) to continue 
to create transformative strategies in the face of colonial legacies, corporatism and 
globalisation. Postmodernism calls into question the authority of those who set the ground 
rules and establish the boundaries in the first place. It allows groups previously excluded 
from this territory to have a right to dialogue, to present and produce their version of 
knowing based on their perspective and experience, as equally as valid, useful and 
important.

Further the theoretical articulation of a critically reflexive transformative curriculum and 
pedagogy requires identifying and articulating a case-by-case analysis of practices, 
dialogues, and events in order to decolonise and bring about positive change in 
bureaucracy and policy (Howitt 1998; Linda Smith 1999).
In concluding this thesis, I suggest that the various arguments by Indigenous people and their allies examined throughout this thesis provide all Australians with an opportunity to reflect on what has been lost and what could be regained. Not from a dominant standpoint of manipulation of or comparison to Indigenous peoples (as revealed by Dodson 1994a) but through a partnership of two sovereign people’s in careful, strategic and ethical negotiation to reshape, recuperate and refine the foundational principles of liberalism to achieve a shared vision of Australia.
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APPENDICES 1-7
Appendices
Appendices

APPENDIX 1: ICMDP Course Information

Community Management Courses (ICMDP) Formerly known as ACMDP

Courses Available
The Indigenous Community Management & Development Programs (ICMDP) currently offer three courses:
- Associate Degree (Indigenous Community Management & Development)
- Bachelor of Applied Science (Indigenous Community Management and Development)
- Bachelor of Applied Science (Indigenous Community Management & Devlpm't)(Honours)

The Indigenous Community Management and Development Program began in 1989. It was established after extensive consultation with Aboriginal communities, organisations and government departments who requested a course in community management and community development. The Centre for Aboriginal Studies recognised that a culturally appropriate and integrated approach was needed to provide Aboriginal people with access to education and training in these important areas.

Program Aims
- To further Indigenous self-determination and self-management.
- To develop the knowledge and competence required by Indigenous people to assume important roles in the community and other sectors.
- To assist and encourage the Indigenous control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait organisations and communities.
- To promote Indigenous knowledges and ways of working.
- To facilitate understanding and ethical practice in Indigenous community development and community management.

Who are the ICMDP courses for?
The Indigenous Community Management and Development courses are designed for Indigenous people who work in management, administrative, leadership and community development positions in Indigenous contexts. Although students are normally expected to be employed while they are enrolled in the course, some students are able to fulfil this requirement through extensive voluntary work and active community involvement.

Course Design
The course is designed to best enable students to learn concepts and skills in class and apply learning to actual problems and challenges faced in real life situations in the workplace and community contexts.
Learning takes place:
* in class during study blocks and workshops
* during private study at home
* in professional development groups with other students
* in workplace field visits with Curtin staff
* in the community and/or workplace
* during sessions with tutors

These multiple learning sites enable students to experience a range of learning processes in classroom and work environments, including large and small group participation as well as one-to-one learning.

**Study Blocks and Workshops**
These are held at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University in Perth, or in regional areas depending on the content. Classes are normally held from 9am to 4pm each day. There is a mix of individual and group learning.

**Private study**
Students use private study time to write assignments and reports, read articles, prepare for workplace activities and record reflections on their experiences.

**Student Support/Professional Development Groups**
A Professional Development Group (PDG) is a group of colleagues who meet to support each other's learning and development. In most cases your PDG will consist of fellow ACMD students who live close enough to meet.

**Field Visits**
Staff from the ICMD Program visit students in their workplace or community up to twice per semester for several purposes:
- Revise concepts and skills covered in Blocks and Workshops.
- Plan out individual learning paths.
- Discuss real projects, activities, or issues and concerns that students are currently working with.
- Assess student competence in workplace and/or community
- Meet with the student's employer (or another relevant person) to answer any questions about the course.
Appendices

Workplace and community contexts
Students apply their learning in the workplace and demonstrate skills and knowledge in relevant workplace activities, such as managing a project. Students draw on their experiences and problems in the workplace and bring them to the class for analysis.

Tutors
Students are strongly encouraged to work regularly with tutors from their area on study tasks and exercises.

Course Content
The ICMDP courses cover a broad range of knowledge, skills and self-understanding to enable community workers to become more effective in what they are doing.

APPENDIX 2: Statement of Reconciliation and Commitment

Curtin University of Technology commits itself wholly to a vision of “a united Australia which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all”. 1,2

In aspiring to be Australia’s world-class University of Technology we are dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and enrichment of culture. Accordingly we reaffirm our commitment to cultural diversity including an informed respect for indigenous peoples, and the observance of the principles of ethics and social justice. 3

Curtin has always valued the presence of indigenous peoples from across Australia as part of its community. We acknowledge that our main campus, near the confluence of the Canning and Swan rivers, is of particular significance to the Nyoongar people of Western Australia. We also acknowledge that other Curtin locations are situated in lands of cultural importance and Aboriginal tradition.

The Curtin community recognises that one effect of the settlement of Australia in the past two centuries has been the dispossession of indigenous peoples. As a consequence Australian Aboriginals continue to face social and economic disadvantage, accentuated by prejudice and racism.

Curtin does not tolerate prejudice racism or harassment in any form. In pursing our educational mission we remain dedicated to the principles of social justice and will act in consultation with the Aboriginal community. In particular, we will

• promote an understanding of indigenous culture and history;
• direct strategies toward the increasing participation of indigenous peoples as students and staff in the full range of university activities;
• continue our commitment to Aboriginal research and development with an emphasis on health and education;
• develop our physical environment with sensitivity and respect for indigenous traditions and beliefs through consultation with the local Aboriginal community.

This statement of Reconciliation and Commitment has been endorsed by Curtin students, staff and Council.

1. Australian Reconciliation Convention May 26-28, 1997, Melbourne
3. Ethics and Social Justice Statement, Curtin University of Technology, November 1996
APPENDIX 3: Competency Framework

Aboriginal Terms of Reference

Consciously enacts
Aboriginal Terms of Reference
in a variety of settings

Evaluating
Assists to evaluate the effectiveness of directions,
development, outcomes and actions and how they
contribute to Aboriginal Terms of Reference

Determining Directions
Contributes consciously to processes of Aboriginal
people determining their own directions in
various settings

Policy
Participates consciously in the
processes related to determining
and implementing policies in
various settings

Managing a Project
Contributes to the effective
management of specified activities
using appropriate Aboriginal ways

Consciously means
– works to a set of principles
– in a planned way
– understanding processes involved
– makes judgements

At the beginning of this year were given a diagram showing how the major competencies related to one another. We have added more arrows to this diagram to show further the relationships between the competencies.

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1. WORKS OUT WAYS OF MAKING SURE THAT THINGS ARE DONE SO THEY FIT WITH ABORIGINAL WAYS

CONSCIOUSLY ENACTS ABORIGINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE (ATR) IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS

1.1 WORKS OUT HOW THINGS CAN BE DONE SO THEY FIT WITH ABORIGINAL WAYS IN OWN SETTINGS

IDENTIFIES WAY IN WHICH ATR CAN BE APPLIED IN SPECIFIC SETTINGS EG ORGANISATION/COMMUNITY

1.2 CHECKS HOW WELL OWN GROUP DOES THINGS THAT FIT WITH ABORIGINAL WAYS

JUDGES THE DEGREE TO WHICH OWN ORGANISATIONS/COMMUNITY ENACTS ATR

1.3 WORKS OUT WAYS OF IDENTIFYING IDEAS & ACTIONS THAT FIT WITH LOCAL ABORIGINAL WAYS

IDENTIFIES APPROPRIATE CRITERIA FOR ATR IN PRACTICE

1.4 EXPLAINS CURRENT SITUATIONS IN OWN LOCAL/REGIONAL ABORIGINAL SETTINGS

PROVIDES AN ANALYSIS OF ABORIGINAL LIFE/SITUATION IN LOCAL COMMUNITY/REGION USING UNDERSTANDINGS OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL LIFE

1.5 KNOWS ABOUT THE MANY THINGS THAT INFLUENCE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE TODAY

DEMONSTRATES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE RANGE OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL LIFE

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2. JUDGES HOW WELL PICTURES OF FUTURE, PROJECTS & POLICY FUT TOGETHER, & WORKS OUT FROM THIS HOW THAT BUILDS ABORIGINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE

EVALUATES THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICY AND OUTCOMES OF MANAGING PROJECTS, DETERMINING DIRECTIONS & POLICY IN COMBINATION AND HOW THIS CONTRIBUTED TO ATR

2.1 TELLS GROUPS WHAT JUDGEMENTS I MADE AND HOW I GOT THEM

PRESENT FINDINGS OF EVALUATION TO TARGET AUDIENCES IN APPROPRIATE MANNER AND FORM

2.2 WORKS OUT WHAT ALL THE INFORMATION I COLLECTED TELLS ME

CONSTRUCTS FINDINGS FROM THE INFORMATION GATHERED USING APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE STANDARDS AND ABORIGINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.3 GETS INFORMATION NEEDED FOR MAKING JUDGEMENTS

PUTS THE EVALUATION PLAN INTO ACTION WITH RELEVANT GROUPS/PARTICIPANTS

2.4 WORKS OUT WHAT HAS TO BE DONE TO GET INFORMATION TO MAKE JUDGEMENTS

CONSTRUCTS AN EVALUATION PLAN THAT CATERS FOR THE NEEDS OF RELEVANT INTEREST GROUPS

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3. HELPS OWN GROUP WORK OUR CLEAR PICTURES FOR THE FUTURE (STRATEGIC PLANS)

CONTRIBUTES CONSCIOUSLY TO PROCESSES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE DETERMINING THEIR OWN DIRECTIONS IN VARIOUS SETTINGS

3.1 HELPS GROUP WORK OUT AND CARRY OUT STEPS NEEDED TO MAKE PICTURES FOR THE FUTURE BEGIN TO HAPPEN

ASSISTS THE GROUP TO IDENTIFY MORE SPECIFIC ACTIONS NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTING THE AGREED DIRECTIONS

3.2 HELPS GROUP TO WORK OUT CLEAR THINGS TO WORK TOWARD THE FUTURE (GOALS)

DEVELOPS WITH GROUP AGREED GOAL STATEMENTS WITH MATCHED WAYS TO TAKE

3.4 HELPS GROUP TO DEAL WITH CURRENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

ASSIST GROUP TO WORK ON CURRENT CONCERNS

3.5 HELPS GROUP TO DECIDE ABOUT MAKING PICTURES FOR THE FUTURE

ASSISTS GROUP TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO BUILD FUTURES & APPROPRIATE PROCESSES TO USE

* PICTURE BUILDING OF CURRENT SITUATION

3.6 HELPS GROUP TO KNOW WHAT MAKING PICTURES FOR THE FUTURE IS ALL ABOUT

EXPLAINS TO PEOPLE IN APPROPRIATE WAYS, WHAT FUTURES BUILDING IS

© CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL STUDIES 1990
4. WORKS WITH OTHERS TO MAKE POLICIES & PUT THEM INTO ACTION

PARTICIPATES CONSCIOUSLY IN THE PROCESSES RELATED TO DETERMINING AND IMPLEMENTING POLICIES IN VARIOUS SETTINGS

4.1 JUDGES WHETHER THE POLICY IS A GOOD IDEA OR NOT, HOW WELL THE POLICY IS WORKING AND HOW WELL IT WAS PUT INTO ACTION

JUDGES THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE POLICY AND ITS SUCCESS IN IMPLEMENTATION USING APPROPRIATE CRITERIA FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SOURCES

4.2 CHECKS THE RESULTS OF HOW POLICY IS BEING PUT INTO ACTION AND MAKES CHANGES IF NEEDED

MONITORS THE OUTCOMES AND PROCESSES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND RE-Negotiating Program Elements as Required

4.3 HELPS TO MAKE POLICY WORK BY GETTING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES NEEDED

4.4 WORKS OUT WHAT MY OWN JOB IS IN PUTTING POLICY INTO ACTION

Determines Own Role & Plans Course of Action in the Policy Implementation Process-Program Design, Formal Functional/Political

4.5 WORKS OUT WHAT MY OWN JOB IS IN MAKING POLICY

Determines Own Role & Plans Course of Action in the Policy Development Process

4.6 HELPS GET CONCERNS WORKED OUT AND DISCUSSED BY PEOPLE WHO MAKE POLICIES

Participates Actively in the Definition of and Gaining Consideration of an Issue by Policy makers

4.7 WORKS OUT WHICH POLICIES DIRECTLY AND CLOSELY AFFECT OR ARE AFFECTED BY MY JOB

© CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL STUDIES 1990
5. LOOKS AFTER (MANAGES) A PROJECT OR ACTIVITY IN AN ABORIGINAL WAY

CONtributes TO THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES USING APPROPRIATE ABORIGINAL WAYS

2.2; 4.6; 3.3

5.1 JUDGES HOW WELL PROJECT OR ACTIVITY HAS WORKED

JUDGES OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF MANAGEMENT OF SPECIFIED ACTIVITY USING APPROPRIATE CRITERIA FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SOURCES

5.2 CHECKS HOW WELL PROJECT IS GOING & MAKES CHANGES IF NEEDED

MONITORS AND ADJUST THE OUTCOMES & PROCESSES OF THE SPECIFIED ACTIVITY AS APPROPRIATE USING STANDARDS & INDICATORS WITH REFERENCE TO FINANCIAL & NON-FINANCIAL PLANNING & CONTROL ASPECTS

5.3 PUTS PLANS FOR PROJECT INTO ACTION WITH OTHER PEOPLE

IMPLEMENTS PLAN FOR SPECIFIED ACTIVITY WITHIN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING AND USING APPROPRIATE HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTICES

5.4 WORKS OUT ALL THE THINGS NEEDED TO MAKE PROJECT OR ACTIVITY WORK PROPERLY

PROduces A DETAILED PLAN FOR SPECIFIED ACTIVITY THAT INCORPORATES:

GOALS/OBJECTIVES
TASKS
RESOURCES: FINANCIAL
NON-FINANCIAL

3.1

5.5 WORKS OUT IF PROJECT OR ACTIVITY IS A GOOD IDEA TO DO

JUDGES THE FEASIBILITY OF SPECIFIED ACTIVITY USING A VARIETY OF CRITERIA INCLUDING:

• OWN MANAGERIAL SKILLS
• RELATIONSHIP OF ACTIVITY TO OTHER ACTIVITIES
• FINANCIAL VIABILITY

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APPENDIX 4: Press Statements of the Inaugural Graduation 1992
Black degree graduates make history

A GROUP of WA Aboriginal students will create a little history later this month when they become the first graduates from Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

Seventeen students will receive their Bachelor of Applied Science—the first awarded to graduates from the centre's three-year degree course, which began in 1989.

The Aboriginals come from many parts of WA—the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Murchison, Perth and the South-West.

Most are mature-age students who hold key positions in Aboriginal organisations and government departments.

WA Aboriginals will take great pride in the graduations on Tuesday, April 28.

As well as the 17 pioneers, 19 other Aboriginals will receive two-year diplomas in the university's graduation ceremony at the Perth Concert Hall.

Centre head Ms Pat Dudgeon said:

"We are extremely proud of our students and our pioneering program. "This is a positive story of Aboriginal achievement and we are keen to ensure it is told to the wider community."

Denise learns new ways to tackle life

Ms Denise Conway, 23, is one of the Centre for Aboriginal
A First for Aboriginal Graduates

Employment, Education & Training

Appendices
Aboriginal students make their mark at university

Thirty-eight Aboriginals, some from WA's remote areas, celebrated when they became the first graduates from Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

The grads, most of them mature-age students, received degrees at the university's arts and social sciences graduation ceremony at Perth Concert Hall.

Among them was Teddy Carlton, 36, who received an outstanding achievement award for his efforts.

Mr Carlton said he never dreamt of going to university after leaving school 20 years ago to become a horse-ringer in the North-West.
University graduates find key to new world of opportunities

If education holds the key to the future for Aboriginal people, then five recent graduates from the Curtin University course in Aboriginal Community Management and Development (Bachelor of Applied Science) are off to a good start.

Colleen Sarkage, Kevin Poonamu, Phillipa Cooh, Elaine Maher and Wayne Wigan travelled to Perth recently to receive their degrees and certificates—and celebrate their achievement. It was a day to remember. The students were congratulated by their families, friends, and colleagues, as well as by the University and the local community. They were also presented with a special certificate, which recognizes their hard work and dedication.

Mrs. Sarkage works as a consultant in Aboriginal organizations and holds a number of executive positions. She said, "I was enormously proud of the work that Mr. Poonamu did in the course. He is a very bright and hardworking young man."

Mr. Bower works as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Department of Social Security. He decided to do the course to challenge himself. "I had gone through life before knowing about the opportunities that are available to Aboriginal people."

Mr. Maher works as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the Department of Community Management and Development. "I was encouraged to do the course, and I am very glad that I did."

Wayne Wigan said, "I also wanted to be an example for my children, my success and my ability to do anything I want, and not just be defined by my background."

The university has given me more confidence in communicating with people, which has allowed me to meet other Aboriginal people.

Theoretical learning has given me more confidence in communicating with people from all over the state."

Out of 492 Curtin University students graduating this year, I was very proud to have been a part of it.

New Commonwealth Program
Richard Bligh and Patrick Egan found the courses enhanced their occupations.

Problem areas clarified

Richard Bligh, Aboriginal Hostels' community support liaison officer, said the course gave him an understanding of issues and the way to handle them.

He enrolled for an Associate Diploma because he felt it could help his job managing AHI operations around the state.

Richard has worked for the company for seven years, first in Queensland, and the last four in Perth.

"Course stuff were fantastic. They did everything they could do to help, but were everwilling coping with all the students," he said.

Richard expects to upgrade his diploma to a degree, which takes another year of study. Other AHI staff plan to follow his example.

Patrick Egan knows better than most that Western Australia is a big state.

His job, as regional administration officer for Aboriginal Hostels, involves visiting the six company and 16 community hostels.

"I'm constantly in touch with communities and organisations," he said.

"I felt I should increase my knowledge of financial management and communication skills.

"When I heard about the Associate Diploma course at Curtin I thought it was just what I needed.

"My employers were very supportive. They saw it would benefit me and others.

"I feel more Aboriginal people should be in positions of control. This course gives them the knowledge they need for promotion.

Patrick, 30, came to Perth with his family from Northern Territory. He was unemployed until he was 21.

In 1986 he studied in the Aboriginal Access Program at TAFE and has worked for Aboriginal Hostels for six years.

By the end of this year Patrick hopes to have completed the degree course.
ATSIC students graduate from Curtin University

The inaugural graduates of Curtin University's degree course in Aboriginal Community Management and Development include a number of ATSIC people.

The course, run by the university's Centre for Aboriginal Studies, is open to mature age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who hold key positions in Aboriginal organisations and government agencies.

About 150 students from Western Australia and the Northern Territory are enrolled in the three-year course which seeks to increase skills in policy evaluation, financial management, Aboriginal terms of reference and community development. Other subjects include management, Aboriginal ways, political structures and determining directions.

Says Margaret Beattie, a graduate,

Left to right: Lorna Howie, Acting Regional Manager, Derby Regional Office; Richard Bligh, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd; Margaret Beattie, Office of Indigenous Women, Canberra; Derek Macale, Kimberley Land Council; Denise Conway, ex Kununurra and Derby Regional Offices and now with Curtin University; and Patrick Egan, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

and now with the Office of Indigenous Women, Canberra: 'The people in the course come from diverse backgrounds: remote communities, resource centres, local Aboriginal enterprises and government departments.

'It's a very flexible course which caters to the work environment of students. Students travel to Perth for parts of the course and do workshops in home regions.'

Seventeen students graduated this year with Bachelors of Applied Science degrees and 19 with an Associate Diploma in Aboriginal and Community Management and Development.
‘Competent’ students graduate

Since then he has been appointed Chairman of the Aboriginal Development Corporation at Roebourne, a general agency which provides a service facility for Aboriginal people, including secretarial and accounting services, help in community and organisations' land claims and advice on environmental issues. It runs workshops to assist communities in planning their own development.

"This course will continue to assist me in formulating the appropriate development of policies with Aboriginal terms of reference. A lot of policies for Aboriginal people were made by government ministers in years past by Aboriginal people," Mr Perriam said.

"It was a cause that we were born into the University of Western Australia, 288
Innovative Community Degree for Aboriginal Students

Last year, the University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies began associate diploma and degree courses in Aboriginal Community Management and Development.

The innovative program, based on one developed at Redclif College in the Northern Territory, is designed as a professional development course for Aboriginal community leaders, managers, supervisors and agency and government department employees.

Participants spend eight weeks a year at the University in four two-week blocks, with a weekly two-hour tutorial in the workplace.

"It is a competency-based curriculum which looks at the way good managers work in the real world and the standards they need to reach in various areas to do their job efficiently," said Darlene Oosthout, associate coordinator of the program.

"Students do not study subjects as such but learn in a variety of situations which are constantly evolving, gradually applying this integrated knowledge in all aspects of their work.

"This enables learners to move between competency and sub-competencies as they work and living situations change. They then need to capitalise on these changes for their learning, rather than study a subject without any idea of how it relates to real problems."

"This style of curriculum design is appropriate for Aboriginal people as it resembles the types of learning and teaching methods predominantly used by them."

"It has the advantage of ensuring that management and community development occur in a manner compatible with Aboriginal cultural knowledge, understandings and practices."

"It is appropriate for areas of practice where ways of operating are very strongly culturally based."
APPENDIX 5: Overview of Curriculum Development and Delivery

Philosophy, Principles & Aims of ACMDP Courses

Competent ACMD Practitioner
Performance Outcomes of ACMDP Practice
Knowledge, Skills, Values, Attributes

Course Design & Structure & Delivery

GOAL STATEMENTS

Units of Competence

Elements of Competence

Performance Criteria

Range variables & Conditions
- Workplace
- Community contexts

TEACHING METHODS SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Teaching
Content & Process
Mixed Mode
Blocks & Workshops
Interactive group processes

Professional Development Groups
Field Visits & Workplace Discussion clarification & feedback
Critical Incidents
Learning Log (1st Year)

Journal & Folio

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Role Play & Group Process
Worksheets & Workbooks
Peer Community & Employer Verification
Onsite/Workplace Feedback
Self Assessment
Journal & Folio

Ongoing Action Research Process

Mechanisms established to ensure internal & external input on continuous basis
e.g. employer / community / discipline / theoretical shifts (see report for details)
APPENDIX 6: ICMDP CASE STUDIES
Empowerment, Education, Employment & Economic Outcomes 1993-1996
The mission of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies is empowerment through higher education programs and services.

The six case studies below highlight the different and very practical ways in which the Centre's programs and services empower individuals, organisations and communities and contribute to positive educational, employment and economic opportunities and outcomes.

The following case studies are just a small sample of the many success stories of Indigenous students. Every student who completes a CAS competency-based course in Indigenous community management, development and/or health contexts has demonstrated some positive contribution in and with their community or workplace as part of their course requirement.

The first three case studies were recorded as part of a strategic review of the CAS in 1993. They concern empowerment within the context of an Indigenous community organisation; empowerment within a non-Indigenous organisation; and economic empowerment in a community. Locational details have been blurred to respect the individuals and organisations concerned. These and the latter case studies were included in submissions to DETYA and ATSIC when AFB funding appeared to be threatened in 1997.

In the last three years I have had encountered ICMDP graduates involved in each of the first three case studies. The projects described below have continued well beyond the initial outcomes affirming the importance of Indigenous direction and control in ensuring capacity building and community sustainability.

Case Study 1: Empowerment in an Indigenous Community Organisation
A traditionally-oriented male from a rural region joined the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program. Reading and articulating the way non-Indigenous Australians do was not his strong point. During his years in the Program there were lots of discussions and clarifications both ways — between him and the staff — for example, to demystify 'strategic planning'.
The participant had started as an Alcohol Worker under a non-Indigenous Coordinator. He had been frustrated for some time about its internal focus owing to control by one family; he wanted the organisation to adopt a community development focus.

Throughout his three years as a student he analysed the community situation, built up a vision for the future in discussions with the community, and developed three strategies with them:

(i) the Indigenous organisation would stop working for the benefit of one family and become community oriented

(ii) strategically, what had been a remedial service delivery alcohol program should be integrated into the developmental objectives of the Indigenous organisation. This would be done by adopting a preventive approach geared at linking people with a drinking problem into the activities of the organisation, especially its employment-based activities

(iii) a project was formulated which aimed at enabling people to re-learn their culture, involve themselves in making Indigenous artefacts, and step-by-step ease themselves into local employment in accordance with their individual vision for their future.

These three strategies were discussed and eventually agreed across communities in 79 out-stations. The ICMD student/practitioner began the process of identifying the most suitable and feasible location in cultural, economic and environmental terms for his project Centre. This was eventually resolved with the support and endorsement of the Indigenous community. Funding applications were submitted to five organisations, each was rejected. Small amounts of funds came in from a couple of sources, but neither the host Indigenous organisation or the Alcohol and Drug Authority provided any funds.

People in the communities began to question what the ICMD student/practitioner was going to do. He was in a difficult situation as everyone’s expectations had been raised. He decided he needed leverage. He become more involved in the Indigenous community organisation and became its Chairperson and Coordinator. He convinced the community to look to its own assets to get the project started. With a demountable here, some road building equipment there, and a couple of staff the project got off the ground. The project
has not looked back since. Neither has this individual; he went on to become a Regional Chairperson of ATSIC.

**Case Study 2: Empowerment in a non-Indigenous Organisation**

Indigenous staff employed in a public sector welfare organisation in non-metropolitan regions met in 1992 to discuss their dissatisfactions. The staff were very unhappy with the inappropriateness of programs they had to implement; and they were unhappy with the lack of career opportunities, even when the student graduated from the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program.

Participants in the program proposed the formation of an Indigenous Working Party to address these grievances. The head office of the organisation agreed that this was a genuine organisational development initiative, and resourced it with funds to facilitate meetings. The Working Party has to acquit these funds. It reports to the Policy officer.

Four ICMDP student/practitioners working with the organisation were personally empowered by their engagement with the concept of Indigenous terms of Reference. All of them, strategically placed in non-metropolitan regions, became members of the Working Party.

The Working Party set out to develop two sets of terms of reference:

(i) to review all Indigenous service provision programs and recommend how to make them more efficient and appropriate, by adopting a community development process which built in community ownership and control

(ii) to review the issue of career mobility for Indigenous staff in arenas of selection, transfer, Aboriginalisation, and career paths, thereby empowering the Indigenous staff.

Both sets of terms of reference have been presented to and accepted by the welfare organisation. They are now being processed.

**Case Study 3: Economic Empowerment in a Community**

Two student participants from a women's group entered the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program in 1990. The women's group was small and
informal. It had decided to incorporate so as to be eligible to receive funds for its basic
economic activities, and to continue its self-esteem and mutual support projects.

After incorporation, the women's group nominated three more women members to
become students in the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program.
The deliberate aim was to develop the skills within the group to manage its affairs and its
growth.

Over the period of their participation in the ICMDP Program, the five students have played
a big part in making the incremental changes to the women's group. Today it has two
wings - a women's resource agency, and an enterprise arm. The enterprise arm is
managed by a sub-committee of the women's group. It is a not-for-profit business.

The women's group still holds to its original intentions and values; but they now have a
business wing involved in producing garments using tie-dyeing, Indigenous artefacts, and
paintings. The business arm purchases the products, and markets them. One ICMDP
student focused on improving the marketing aspect of the business, while still keeping the
enterprise within the bounds of the founding Indigenous community values.

One of the part-time tutors from the Indigenous Community Management and
Development Program worked as a planner consultant with the women's group on a part-
time basis. The women's group completed its strategic plans in 1993 for both the
resource agency and the enterprise arm. The objective is to cross-subsidise from the
enterprise arm to help fund the operations of the women's resource agency, which now
include:

- a mobile toy lending library for remote areas
- a bus used for meetings in the bush, and for a meals-on-wheels service
- sewing skills training for young women
- domestic violence workshops
- regional conferences for information sharing.

Second & Third Year ICMD Associate Degree & Degree Students 1996

Case Study 4: Child care project to support women into employment

A second year student in Northern Territory in 1996, focused her project management skill
development around the establishment of a childcare centre to service the needs of
Indigenous women wanting to access employment through CDEP and then into
mainstream positions. The student worked with local women to plan the childcare centre. This involved developing a model of service provision that was culturally appropriate; costing and planning renovations to an existing building; negotiating building approval and planning job creation and training for women to work in the Centre. The Childcare Centre planned to create several Care Worker positions, as well as casual positions for activity leaders in specialised areas such as arts and cultural education. The development of the Centre directly addressed the needs of Indigenous women wanting to access employment through CDEP but who had been unable to do so because of childcare issues. Via the Centre, these women would become able to take up a range of positions available through CDEP or negotiated with mainstream employment, and contribute to the costs of running the childcare service.

**Case Study 5: Development of an Indigenous arts industry**

A current second year student is working to develop an Indigenous Arts and Culture Centre in the far North West of WA. This Centre aims to support the development of Indigenous artists and in particular skill them in knowledge of copyright, commissioning etc in order for them to operate commercially. The Centre intends to work to support and skill artists on a regional basis as well as offering a commercial venue for their work. The development of an artists register will enable mediation between tourists and other commercial interests, and Indigenous artists seeking to operate on a commercial basis. The project blends enterprise and community development goals in fostering and developing Indigenous culture while enabling Indigenous control over both economic and cultural outcomes.

**Case Study 6: Creating local business opportunities**

The third year of the Indigenous Community Management and Development course teaches evaluation research in Indigenous contexts. Each student examines the effectiveness and appropriateness of a program currently being implemented in their organisation or community. The main purpose is program improvement of direct benefit to indigenous peoples. As all students are encouraged to work towards the achievement of greater indigenous self-determination and self-management, economic development is sometimes an unintended positive outcome.

In 1996, for example, one student evaluated the operation of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) in a small West Australian town. Data was collected from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, including local businesses who had regular dealings with the project and its participants. The research utilised questionnaires
to examine the extent to which local non-Indigenous business people in town were prepared to employ Indigenous people. It was found that ‘new positions were not available’ primarily because the profitability of most local businesses was marginal. However, given an economic upturn, local business were prepared to ‘give Indigenous people a go’ in a diverse range of positions.

The study also found that non-Indigenous people in the town and outlying areas knew very little about the activities of the local Indigenous organisation, and in particular its production of furniture and other work crafts. The study recommended a publicity campaign to promote the organisation’s activities. The student subsequently acted on this by holding a stall at the local Spring Fair. This strategy generated increased interest and sales. Demand now significantly exceeds productive capacity. The resultant profits have been re-invested in the business in the form of equipment and materials. The end result has been a rapid expansion of the business, increased employment for Indigenous people and an untied source of income which is utilised to supplement otherwise inadequate CDEP wages.

The long term vision is to get all people off CDEP and into a self sustaining enterprise. Retail outlets in the town and Perth are planned and training and development options in all aspects of production and business management are currently being negotiated.

**An Interview With A Graduating Student In 1996 - Developing Skills in Community Management and Community Development**

The ACMD program offers a mix of skills in both community management and community development. This combination is essential for the success of development initiatives in Indigenous communities. Much infrastructure is funded in communities and sound management practices are necessary for the upkeep and maintenance of plant and facilities. However good management alone does not create the culture of community ‘ownership’ that ensures that well-managed plant and facilities are also used by community members — that they achieve the ‘development’ in people terms for which infrastructure is intended. Factionalism, lack of a shared vision or the perception of imposed solutions frequently means that infrastructure development is not matched by community use and ownership. The following comments from an interview with a graduating student in 1996 illustrate the point:
During this year I have seen changes in the organisation I work with. I actually got a Maintenance and Repair program going for the community and I’ve got two training programs up and running.

I used to hate walking up to a whiteboard. Like in Regional Council meetings when you put up ideas. I try to use every opportunity to write now. At work I have a big whiteboard and I try to write everything up. When people come in they can see it. Like our policy about working hours. I put it up so people can suggest changes. I welcome critical feedback. This way people can see and make comment.

I want good communication so there’s no secrets. I put it up and then there’s nothing that’s just in here [my head] - everyone knows what is going on. Open communication is so important because there are 26 groups in town. I always say - if you have a problem, come and talk about it. I put up photos too so you can see what we do. Its good to have photos. I think people are proud when they see themselves maybe operating a machine or a piece of equipment they didn’t know how to use before.

I try to get that ownership thing across. There’s 26 groups so whenever I see people in the street I say “Don’t forget to come into the workshop. Its for everybody.”

Some people are impatient, but in the Indigenous way you can’t rush things. I always say “Come out and have a look at what we are doing”. A bus load of committee members came out last week. They were rapt.
APPENDIX 7: ABORIGINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE

I give permission for the discussion paper, ‘Aboriginal Terms of Reference: A course paper for the Indigenous Studies Program, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, (Oxenham 2000) to be included in full in this thesis (Appendice 7) for the purpose of providing a detailed account of the concept as it has been developed and used at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

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Darlene Oxenham

2005
Aboriginal terms of reference:

A course paper for the
Indigenous Studies Program

Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

Written by Darlene Oxenham
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Published by:
Curtin Indigenous Research Centre,
Curtin University.

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Acknowledgement

Since its inception, many Indigenous staff have been involved in this ongoing debate on “Aboriginal terms of reference”.

As this paper draws on materials from the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Program it is appropriate to acknowledge particular individuals from this program. Scott Fatnowna, Ricky Osborne, Barb Shaw, Jan Bibby and Sondra Ramirez have all made substantive contributions to the developments of “Aboriginal terms of reference” whilst employed at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. Particular acknowledgement needs to be given to Charlie Dick ad Jim Lewis, who in 1995 in their work within the third year of the ACMDP, better delineated “Aboriginal terms of reference” as a scope of inquiry. Collaborative work is a tradition in the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Program—working as a group, throwing ideas in the ring, bringing those ideas that work together and then continually working on those ideas each year. This is how ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ has been developed over the years. Thanks should also be given to Roz Walker, who in 1994 acted as a ‘wordsmith’, and brought together the Indigenous staff members (mentioned above) collective picture of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’.

Preface

This paper was initially written and published as a CIRC discussion paper for the purpose of engaging Indigenous staff of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in a discussion on Aboriginal terms of reference. The original discussion paper was titled: 27/1999 Aboriginal terms of reference: the concept at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

This discussion paper was later modified (and re-titled Aboriginal terms of reference) for inclusion in the Working with Indigenous Australians: A Handbook for Psychologists, primarily targeted at a non-Indigenous audience. This text will be available in August 2000.

Further modifications have been made to this present course paper to make it inclusive of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners who will potentially be working in a variety of Indigenous contexts.

Darlene Oxenham
Introduction

This paper introduces the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ and principally concentrates on interactions, power relations, philosophical standpoints and ethical practice within and between Aboriginal groups; and, between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains.

‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ — what is it? This is a frequently asked question. It is also frequently answered in that both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people use ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ to describe Aboriginal ways of doing things and protocols. I believe that the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ means more than this. Hence, although the initial question appears to be simple, in my view, there is no immediately transparent answer. This paper is part of a much larger research project, and begins the exploration of the opaqueness of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’. I am using, as the starting point, the 1996 developments of the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies (Curtin University of Technology) in order to examine the components and complexities of the concept.

Lilla Watson (1985) first coined the phrase ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ and used it to describe and articulate an Aboriginal worldview. In Lilla’s words:

*Murri terms of reference, or Murri law, include the following:*
  *The Earth is our Mother*
  *Preservation and conservation*
  *Sharing and caring*
  *Each other’s keeper – accountability*
  *Group-based society*
  *Decision making by consensus*
  *Harmony between people, and between people and the land*
  *Knowledge to be sought, acquired, given and used in a proper way. The importance of the oral tradition needs to be explored and understood in this context.*
  *These terms of reference are distinctive, and often the antithesis of those embodied in educative institutions in this country: e.g., hierarchical, authoritarian, individualistic, competitive, knowledge is power, etc (p. 2).*

Moreover, Lilla Watson (1988) outlined how an understanding (and incorporation) of an Aboriginal worldview could be of benefit to the broader Australian society:

*People who come from outside of Australia need to realise that this country is not a European country, and neither are the indigenous people of this country European people. They need to know that indigenous knowledge can only enhance their life experience in the country in which they now live and which they have chosen to call home. For those people it should mean: Learning the laws of the land, from the land. Taking on the same responsibilities as Aboriginal people to ensure the history of this land stretches as far in front of us as it does behind us. Developing a group-based society where the relationship between people, and between people and the land, is non-competitive. As a consequence, individuals will neither aspire nor be allowed to become rich and powerful at the expense of the land or of other people (p. 178)*

Following on from Lilla Watson’s work, the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Program (ACMDF) at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies adopted ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ in 1990 as the title of an area of competence in the degree and associate degree courses. Thereby incorporating ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ into course curricula. This inclusion was a definitive commitment to teaching and learning in culturally appropriate ways, and, to the creation of space that recognised and validated Aboriginal knowledge.
The concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ was developed within courses specifically designed for Aboriginal students, and continues to be developed through internal Aboriginal debate. As such, this concept is framed around the Aboriginal practitioner and assumes that an Aboriginal practitioner will apply the concept. The possibilities of how the non-Aboriginal practitioner might engage with this concept are still being examined. Careful consideration of this matter is required in terms of boundaries and limitations. I do not wish to pre-empt the outcomes of these current discussions, however, I feel that there are definite boundaries around how non-Aboriginal people can engage with this concept. I believe that the non-Aboriginal practitioner should not be involved in the construction of Aboriginal knowledge. However, they should be aware of Aboriginal ways of doing things, those things Aboriginal people value, and Aboriginal worldviews. The concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ advocates that these things must be taken into account when dealing with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal issues, and provides a framework in which this can be done effectively. Non-Aboriginal practitioners interacting with Aboriginal people should certainly be aware of these factors; and, be committed to taking these factors into account in their own ways of working; and, when necessary, advocate that these factors are taken into account in other relevant contexts.

In light of these considerations this paper has significance for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners. This paper offers the non-Aboriginal practitioner information on principles and values that guide ethical (and appropriate) practice in an Aboriginal context and/or when interacting and working with Aboriginal people. I would encourage non-Aboriginal practitioners to very carefully consider the matters raised in this paper and urge them to critically reflect on possible boundaries and limitations for their own practice when working in cross-cultural contexts.

Components of the concept

The concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ continues to be debated and refined within various programs at the Centre Aboriginal Studies. In 1996 ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ was described as a concept that consisted of the following components: a definition; a set of principles; a set of core values; a conceptual framework; and, a process.

‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ was developed as a holistic or integrated concept, meaning all individual components are building blocks of the whole, and each individual component has a relationship with each other component.

Each component of the concept will be discussed beginning with the definition, then exploring the principles, core values, conceptual framework and lastly the process. Comments have been included on the practitioner and stakeholders, which, although not stated as components of the concept as such, are nevertheless intrinsic to it.

Definition

After adopting the notion of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ it became apparent that it required definition to fit the context of, and use at, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies. It is my belief that programs within the Centre used ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ in a different sense to the worldview that Lilla Watson had written about. As with Lilla Watson, the aim of the inclusion of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ within Centre programs was to produce more culturally sensitive programs and delivery, and facilitate the incorporation of Aboriginal knowledges into courses. In addition, we sought to make the concept futures-oriented and inclusive of the various expressions of Aboriginality, without prescribing an actual worldview for Aboriginal people. We also sought to find ways in which students in their daily lives could problem-solve issues within the current socio-political contexts in which they (and their communities) are situated. Accordingly, the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Program and the Aboriginal Health Unit at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies constructed a definition in 1992, which was later expanded by the ACMDP. The definition of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ in 1996 was:
The concept of Aboriginal Terms of Reference incorporates a set of principles, core values and a process for applying a framework to determine an Indigenous viewpoint on an issue in an Indigenous context.

This encompasses the cultural knowledge, understanding and experiences that are associated with a commitment to Indigenous ways of thinking, working, and reflecting, incorporating specific and implicit cultural values, beliefs and priorities from which Indigenous standards are derived, validated and practiced. These standards will and can vary according to the diverse range of cultural values, beliefs and priorities from within local settings or specific contexts.


This definition foreshadows various relationships and standpoints such as: guidelines for principled practice in Aboriginal contexts, relationships between marginalised groups and dominant society, and, the positions of Aboriginal knowledge within dominant discourses etc.

Within the definition reference is made to ‘an Indigenous viewpoint’, this refers to the view of a collective on a particular issue (be it a local, state or national issue) within a specific context. For example, this could be the viewpoint (of the collective) of an Aboriginal community. Or, it could be the viewpoint (of the collective) of all Indigenous Directors of all land councils in Western Australia. Or, it could be the viewpoint (of the collective) of Aboriginal legal services in Australia.

‘Aboriginal terms of reference’, at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, was developed within a specific context for a particular purpose. The purpose is enshrined in the definition. Fundamentally it is to acknowledge, derive, validate and promote Aboriginal knowledge and ways of doing things. The concept was developed within competency-based degree and associate degree courses for Indigenous students. The core construct, around which the curriculum was developed, is the ‘Aboriginal community management and development practitioner’. As such, central themes running through these courses are the roles and responsibilities of the practitioner and stakeholders. It is therefore useful to briefly explore these themes in relation their applicability to ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’.

**The Practitioner**

In terms of the practitioner, the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ is premised on the following:

Individual practitioner’s would be responsible for engaging or applying the concept within their local setting.

The practitioner would be an Aboriginal person. Moreover, it was assumed the concept could be used by any Aboriginal person as it was developed to reflect and be relevant to everyday realities of Aboriginal people.

Given the competency-based design of the ACMIDP, the student/practitioner would demonstrate competence in real life situations and hence be working on ‘real’ tasks.

The practitioner is linked, or would become linked, to the Aboriginal community within which they live and work. Therefore, the practitioner would have already established relationships or be in the process of establishing them.

The practitioner, through their employment, would contribute to, or be responsible for, the development of programs and services for Aboriginal people.
The practitioner would facilitate and/or lead processes that would enable Aboriginal stakeholders to have voice on those matters that impact on their lives.

The practitioner would utilise the principles and core values within the ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept to guide their own work practices. In particular it was expected that the practitioner would use the concept to ensure that projects, programs and services they worked with would be culturally appropriate to Aboriginal stakeholders.

The practitioner would engage the conceptual framework within the concept to undertake analyses of particular initiatives that they may have responsibility for. It was expected that the practitioner would synthesise, with the critical reference group, any such information from the analysis to articulate the Aboriginal viewpoint (of the critical reference group) on an issue.

**Stakeholders**

Two types of stakeholders are implicit within the concept. They are the ‘critical reference group’ and other stakeholders. The critical reference group are the Aboriginal group who are meant to benefit from the project, policy or program. Stakeholders, on the other hand, are those (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) organisations or agencies that have, to some degree or other, a role in addressing the issue or stake in the outcomes.

The role and positions of the practitioner and the stakeholders are further explained in the following principles which underlie the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’.

**Principles**

The principles have been established to guide the practitioner’s actions and have been developed to take into account Aboriginal opinion on various areas of debate and/or contention within the broader political context and Aboriginal settings. These areas are inclusive of, but not limited to, the impacts of past injustices, processes of assimilation, defining Aboriginality, and the (mis)representations of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people and the motives behind these representations.

The principles are applicable to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. They affirm the authoritative position of Aboriginal people in any interactions where Aboriginal knowledge and matters are under consideration. In addition, they are ‘ideals’ to which practitioners can turn to reflect on their own processes and actions. We, Aboriginal people, should give consideration to these issues to ensure that we do not perpetuate those attitudes and actions we rally against.

Principles within the ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept 1996 are indicated below in bold italics and have been extracted from the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Workbook, *Workshop 2: Aboriginal Ways of 1*, 1996, pp. 26 – 27.

A conscious commitment to:

1. **Acknowledging that the authority for the construction of Indigenous meanings and knowledge rest with Indigenous people.**

This principle aims to address the many non-Aboriginal interpretations of Aboriginal knowledge. This principle alludes to the various dynamics surrounding ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ constructions and interpretations of knowledge. An underlying assumption is that non-Aboriginal interpretations may not necessarily reflect our truths. In fact, these interpretations may be judged ‘incorrect’ by some Aboriginal people. We recognise that non-Aboriginal interpretations will be influenced by the individual’s gender, cultural background, religious beliefs, life experiences, entrenchment in a discipline of knowledge and so on. Hence interpretations are filtered through various lenses.
2. Acknowledging that Indigenous people have the right to have those things that are valued [by themselves] to be fully considered in any interactions.

This principle aims to subvert racist practices and attitudes arising from notions such as social Darwinism. The premise of these practices and attitudes was that Aboriginal people were lower on the evolutionary scale than Europeans and therefore our cultural knowledge and ways of life were of less value because we represented the ‘primitive’ as defined against the ‘more advanced’ Europeans who colonised Australia.

3. Ensuring that Indigenous world views are taken into account in all negotiations or dealings which impact on Indigenous people.

This principle grows out of principle 2 in that it gives equal weight, if not primacy, to Aboriginal worldviews. In addition this principle also challenges those initiatives and services which have not met Aboriginal needs because they were conceived of with limited, or no involvement of Aboriginal people. These initiatives and services often involve non-Aboriginal standards, priorities, and values in, firstly, developing the services and programs; and secondly, in measuring success. In these cases Aboriginal priorities and values are absent from the developments of such initiatives.

4. Recognising the diverse experiences, understandings, and way of life (in Indigenous societies) that reflect contemporary Indigenous culture and account for diversity in the application of Aboriginal Terms of Reference.

This principle challenges the notion that Aboriginal people are a homogenous group. It also challenges the assumption that there is an authentic Aboriginal person. In doing so this principle seeks to affirm the variety of expressions of Aboriginality to counter the stereotypes imposed on Aboriginal people both by non-Aboriginal people and our own groups.

5. Ensuring that the views and perceptions of the critical reference group (the Indigenous group you work with) is reflected in any process of validating and evaluating the extent to which Aboriginal Terms of Reference has been taken into account.

This principle acknowledges that it is necessary for the group to have an authoritative voice and input into any process that effects them. This principle challenges individuals who have power within a group (either attributed or assumed power) to be accountable to the group. This principle requires individuals to consciously consider whether their actions and processes enable the group to determine immediate and future directions, or whether they do not. In addition this principle calls for both the individual worker and the group to be self-reflective and to assess the extent to which Aboriginal perceptions, views, understandings, standards, goals and aspirations were taken into account.

6. Negotiating within and between Indigenous group(s) with the aim of establishing appropriate processes to consider and determine the criteria for deciding how to meet cultural imperatives, and social needs and priorities.

This principle promotes negotiation, getting many views and opinions, and then collaboratively determining constructive ways forward to achieve desired futures. This principle acknowledges Aboriginal people’s feelings of ownership over ‘country’. This principle is a response to tensions that might arise within and between Aboriginal groups stemming from historical events such as the forced relocation of people and groups. These historical events may serve to confuse issues: on the one hand claims of traditional ownership; and, on the other, claims of ownership because one’s family has been resident in that area for several generations.

7. Addressing issues in a specific and defined context, thus acknowledging that the appropriateness of the outcomes achieved are issue specific and context bound.
This principle challenges the assumption that what has worked in one Aboriginal situation will work in all other Aboriginal situations. This assumption is premised on, once again, Aboriginal people being a homogenous group. This should not be assumed and each situation should be considered on its own merit, within its own particular context.

As ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ seeks to derive and promote the Aboriginal viewpoint, an underlying assumption is the acknowledgment of cultural difference and a re-positioning of who has the authoritative voice. In doing this, we recognise that there may be competing values/interests between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains given the different cultural practices and traditions.

Although a minority group in Australia, Aboriginal people do not live in isolation from mainstream Australia. These principles indicate some of the complexities and tensions that may arise during interactions between Aboriginal Australia and mainstream Australia when taking Aboriginal ways into account. The overall concept, inclusive of the principles, points to the need for conscious consideration and exploration of these complexities and tensions if and when they arise.

These principles have been established to acknowledge the diversity amongst Aboriginal people; to acknowledge and consciously consider Aboriginal assertions of our right to self-representation, self-definition and self-identification; to acknowledge Aboriginal cultural ways and affirm that these ways should be recognised and validated.

Core Values

The third component I will discuss is the set of core values within the ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept. Values are those things that are seen as having worth, and are often indicated through the use of particular words like good, bad, right, wrong. Within ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ the set of core values are those things and actions that are/were perceived of as good, and that ought to guide individuals’ actions. The following set of values is premised on the understanding that they reflect current Aboriginal situations and aspirations and cultural practices, such as the importance of the collective.

The core values in the ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept (1996) are indicated below and have been extracted from the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Workbook, Workshop 2: Aboriginal Ways of I, 1996, pp. 27.

- **the worth and validity of contemporary Indigenous culture(s).**
  This is valued as it acknowledges the ongoing survival and continuity of Aboriginal cultures. To value this challenges the view that Aboriginal cultures are remnants of the past.

- **the right of expression of Indigenous realities through processes of deconstruction and reconstruction.**
  To value this is to acknowledge that Aboriginal people have the right to ‘speak back’ to the dominant society. This includes ‘speaking back’ to historical and contemporary constructions of Aboriginal people and culture. To consider these representations of Aboriginal people and, if necessary, to reconstruct them from an Aboriginal perspective. This value also includes the right to maintain, affirm and revive cultural practices; and, the right to view and interact with the world in ways that reflect our cultural traditions and current realities.

- **self-determination and self-management**
  These terms reflect a certain philosophical standpoint. To value self-determination and self-management is to position one’s self in a way that promotes the political and social development by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people.

- **the right of Indigenous groups to work and make decisions within own cultural terms.**
  To value this is to acknowledge the validity and currency of Aboriginal cultures and to view Aboriginal cultural knowledge and practices as different from, but equal to, other cultures.
• **Indigenous control**

To value this is to acknowledge the authority and responsibility that Aboriginal people have over their own lives. Aboriginal control is the responsibility of both the individual Aboriginal person and the Aboriginal collective. Specifically, Aboriginal control refers to the day-to-day management and leadership enacted by Aboriginal people. I distinguish between ‘control’ and ‘self-determination and self-management’ in this way: control implies immediate action whereas, self-determination and self-management belong within philosophical and political spheres—as something that is set as the goal, something that is continually striven for. Self-determination and self-management can and should be a goal for all individuals (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) involved in Aboriginal affairs; whereas Aboriginal control can only be enacted by Aboriginal people. This means taking direction from Aboriginal people, according to Aboriginal interests and priorities as determined by Aboriginal people.

• **positive social change.**

The emphasis on positive social change is twofold: firstly, on the ‘positive’, as negative social change can occur; secondly, on the ‘social’, meaning broad attitudinal and structural change within society. To value this is to be committed to conscious constructive social change for the wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

• **social justice**

Again, this is both a philosophical standpoint and a goal that has been entrenched in Aboriginal affairs for many years. It encompasses Aboriginal rights to equal opportunities. Hence, to value this is to acknowledge the impacts of past and contemporary injustices, such as the removal of children and the limited governmental acknowledgment of the stolen generation, and to make a commitment to working to change this situation.

• **the recognition and acceptance of Indigenous diversity.**

To value this is to acknowledge and affirm the different expressions of Aboriginality.

• **reconciliation of contending interests between Indigenous people**

To value this is to make a commitment to working in harmonious and constructive ways for the betterment of the collective, as opposed to adopting competitive/adversarial positions to promote the interests of individuals or one group over another.

• **the worth of the group**

To value this is to recognise our inter-dependency with the collective, to recognise the importance that Aboriginal people place on the group and the responsibilities that the individual has within the group. In addition, this may also mean that the authority for the construction of Aboriginal meaning and knowledge may rest with the group rather than the individual. This construction should be done with others and that meaning and knowledge should be shared.

A commitment to the principles and core values of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ influence and guide individuals’ engagement with the conceptual framework and the process.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) outlines an approach for addressing issues within an Aboriginal context.
The conceptual framework is multi-faceted and includes: the issue; the four dimensions (aspirations, experiences, cultural elements and understandings), and the specific elements listed under each dimension; domains; and the interface. The conceptual framework outlines those things that should be considered when applying the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ to an issue.

**The issue**

The issue is at the heart of the framework and is analysed through the lens of each dimension. The issue reflects Aboriginal realities and as such can be a variety of things covering many topics. For example, it could be a project that seeks to address truancy amongst Aboriginal students at high school; or it could be the development and implementation of an Aboriginalisation policy within an Aboriginal organisation; or it could be undertaking a feasibility study of an aquaculture enterprise in an Aboriginal community. Potentially the scope of the issue can vary from very specific to very broad.

**The four dimensions**

There are four dimensions within the conceptual framework that the practitioner and stakeholders should consider when undertaking an analysis of an issue. These dimensions are *Experiences*, *Aspirations*, *Understandings*, and *Cultural elements*.

**Experiences**: This dimension focuses on the experiences of Aboriginal people in relation to the issue under discussion. Consideration of the elements listed below builds the picture of *Experiences*. This dimension holds past and present considerations.

- **Socialisation**
  This element is focused on the backgrounds and upbringing of Aboriginal people. It requires the practitioner and individuals within the Aboriginal stakeholder groups to reflect on these influences as is appropriate to their local setting. It also requires the practitioner to consider how these factors affect the views of individuals and groups on the issue under discussion. By reflecting on these things there is potential to recognise the diverse experiences of Aboriginal people on a given issue.

- **Interaction**
This element is concerned with the interactions that Aboriginal people have experienced in relation to an issue. Using the example of juvenile crime as the issue, the practitioner and stakeholders might need to acknowledge the, often, hostile interactions that Aboriginal people have/had with the police.

- **Historical factors**

  This element is concerned with Aboriginal people’s history, specifically the treatment of Aboriginal people throughout Australian history. By considering this element the practitioner recognises that the distant and immediate past has implications in the present. Again, using the example of Aboriginal people’s relationship with the police, it should be acknowledged that this relationship of hostility and suspicion has its roots in history as the police were often appointed as the ‘protectors’ of Aboriginal people in the past. Recent historical writings show that under the protection period, Aboriginal people were mistreated. ‘Protection’ in fact was often severely lacking (McGrath, 1995).

- **Feelings**

  This element is concerned with how Aboriginal people feel about things related to the issue under discussion. This is the emotive component to the Experiences dimension. The emotional side of things should be recognised and given voice because to do this is to begin a healing process (if this is required).

- **Current situation**

  This element is concerned with Aboriginal people’s immediate realities. Again using juvenile crime as the example, any analysis of the current situation by the practitioner would have to include the fact that Aboriginal people have the highest incarceration rates in Australia and are the highest group of offenders. This raises the critical perspective as to why this is so.

**Aspirations:** This dimension holds present and future considerations. This dimension focuses on what the critical reference group wants to achieve in relation to the issue under discussion.

- **Goals**

  This element requires the practitioner, with the critical reference group, to set goals for the issue under discussion.

- **Priorities**

  This element focuses on the priorities that the critical reference group set in relation to the issues facing them.

- **Future directions**

  This element focuses on what the critical reference group wants to see happen in the future to achieve these goals and priorities.

**Understandings:** This dimension has a focus in the present, and, on possible future ways of doing things. Within this dimension the practitioner focuses on the stakeholders’ understandings of the issue; as well as judging if deeper understandings may be required. If required, the practitioner could facilitate a process that reveals to the Aboriginal stakeholders knowledge and practices from other areas—that may sit outside the Aboriginal domain—which equip them to fully understand, analyse and problem-solve the issue. Or at least, to understand the issue to a depth which the critical reference group determine is necessary. This dimension is concerned with the deliberate, conscious and informed incorporation of ‘new ways’ into an Aboriginal cultural framework. In a sense this incorporation involves the Aboriginalisation of these new ways of understanding—that is, the adopting and adapting of information and attributing Aboriginal meaning to it.

*Knowledges and practices resulting in appropriate ways of...*
The above statement deliberately uses ‘appropriate ways of…’ to indicate that Aboriginal people can draw/have drawn on knowledges and practices that sit outside our cultural practices, but that we can/have Aboriginalised these practices and possibly give/n the knowledge ‘new’ (Aboriginal) meaning. Therefore, we have borrowed information and have given it Aboriginal meaning to make it culturally appropriate to our cultural situation in response to the issue under discussion.

**Cultural Elements:** This dimension is situated in the present as it encompasses current cultural practices; it is based in the past as it draws on cultural traditions and practices; and obviously, continues into the future as a living and dynamic culture.

- **Obligations**
  Aboriginal cultural traditions are based on mutually dependent relationships and reciprocity. We are using the word ‘obligations’ to describe these relationships and reciprocal arrangements. Hence, obligations need to be considered when exploring the issue under discussion. The obligations of individuals involved in the issue should be included in the overall analysis as this can impact on the way things progress.

- **Kinship**
  There are two main considerations within this element. Firstly, the practitioner needs to position themselves in their overall kin relationships as these may bring with them certain obligations and protocols that must adhered to, and that may impact on the progress, process and nature of the analysis. Secondly, regarding the stakeholders, the practitioner should consider the relationships between families. Both, good and bad relationships between families can impact on the progress of the issue/project and also the outcomes possible. Good relationships may expedite the issue/project; tense relationships may delay the process.

- **Behavioural expectations**
  This element is linked partly with the kinship element in that the practitioner needs to be aware of behavioural expectations on them and others. For example, the age, gender and kinship of individuals may determine/influence the expectations that others have of them. They may also determine/influence the way in which the individuals can behave and interact with others and who those others may be.

- **Aboriginal history**
  This element is included in this dimension in terms of cultural identity—Aboriginality—and the diverse expressions of Aboriginal identity. This element acknowledges that many historical factors have created or resulted in this diversity.

- **Spirituality/religion**
  The spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal individuals and groups need to be considered for two reasons. Firstly, these guide people’s actions and thoughts; and, secondly, these beliefs may vary amongst Aboriginal people given the history of some groups. For example, some Aboriginal people may hold Christian beliefs; others may adhere to traditional spiritual beliefs; and, others may adhere to a combination of the two.

- **Values**
  The values held by individuals need to be considered as they too guide people’s actions and behaviours.

- **Beliefs**
The beliefs held by individuals need to be considered as they influence people’s actions and behaviours.

Family structures

The structure of families should be considered as this may influence the type and amount of engagement individuals may have in the process and how individuals are included in the process. Examining the structures within families might assist in determining whom the appropriate person/s are who should be consulted on certain issues as these individuals may have final decision making responsibilities and/or great influence/authority within the family. Thus, for the issue to proceed successfully, it may need the support of particular individuals.

Heritage

Acknowledging people’s heritage also recognises the diversity that exists amongst Aboriginal people.

Domains and power relations

An examination of the concept of domains serves at least two useful purposes:

- it enables us to separate out areas of ‘whitefella’ and ‘blackfella’ business as reflected by differences in lifestyle, beliefs, standards and ways of doing things; and
- it is an analytical tool which enables us to examine the extent to which one culture impinges on another.

Over the last two hundred years the non-Aboriginal domain has intruded on the Aboriginal domain in many ways. This intrusion has not occurred in a uniform way. For instance, in many remote areas of Australia, Aboriginal people have maintained a large measure of control over their social and cultural world (their law, songs, dances, traditional country), whilst having almost lost much control over the provision of services eg housing, health, employment, education.

Application of the ATR framework may vary according to the degree to which the issue under consideration lies within the Aboriginal domain, or lies at the intersection of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains:

(Aboriginal Community Management and Development Workbook, Aboriginal Ways of 2 workshop, 1996, pp. 19)

The notion of domains (or spheres of influence) was included in the conceptual framework as it provided a visual representation of power relations—areas of potential control, authority, ownership and influence—within and between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains. Locating an issue within the domains requires thought about who identified the issue as an issue, who initiated and determined the responses, who set the goals and outcomes sought, and so on. Hence, the construction of this visual representation may prompt individuals to ask certain questions and therefore may assist in identifying the power dynamics that surround the issue. For example, when one is dealing with an issue within the Aboriginal domain, questions could be asked around who has the power, authority and influence that may determine and/or impact on the decisions made, the processes used to address the issue, and the outcomes of the issue. What power relationships exist between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains when dealing with the issue?

In 1995 my colleague Ricky Osborne said that he believed that the purpose of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ was to ‘resist assimilation’. The inclusion and visual representation of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains symbolically represents cultural difference and hints at unseen, yet real, relationships between the two in terms of the coloniser and colonised, the ‘mainstream’ and marginalised, etc. We intended for this representation to serve as a prompt for the practitioner—a prompt that would initiate a conscious deliberation of those things that fell within each domain, and result in informed decisions that enable Aboriginal stakeholders to consciously resist assimilation,
consciously maintain and strengthen cultural traditions and practices, and the determination of future directions.

The conceptual framework can inform the analysis of an issue at a macro (societal/community) level; in addition the framework can inform the situation at a very micro (individual/personal) level as well. When engaging with this framework the practitioner, as well as the stakeholders, can position themselves in relation to their work, their goals, their cultural affiliations, and the issue under discussion. The conscious positioning of oneself often requires an analysis of a variety of factors, including age, gender, reputation, relationships, affiliations, obligations, networks and so on.

The interface and power relations

The interface has been included so that the practitioner and stakeholders would consciously consider the implications of working between two cultural contexts and reflect on the relationships that exist between the domains. Many Aboriginal people unconsciously utilise different or varied ways of working within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal settings. Aboriginal people working at the interface may experience conflicts of interests and may be faced with dilemmas and tensions arising from how best to represent Aboriginal interests whilst working within (or engaging with) non-Aboriginal structures and practices. Some Aboriginal people may have the experience of ‘being caught between a rock and a hard place’. Likewise, working on one’s own people brings different challenges and dilemmas.

It is my belief that this framework rests on a basic assumption of the marginalised position of Aboriginal people within Australian society and, because of this, we are often in a mode of resistance and reaction at the interface of both domains. The ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept clearly comes from an Aboriginal perspective, with the emphasis on pro-active, critically reflective and conscious practice. Thus, the conceptual framework (along with the principles, values and process) assumes that we are striving to ensure Aboriginal cultural standards and aspirations are considered and taken into account. I would suggest that the interface can been seen in a variety of ways. It can be seen as a space of negotiation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains; as a space of interaction between the domains where two-way learning can potentially take place; as a space of knowledge that Aboriginal people can draw from and Aboriginalise; and also as a space of assimilation. Further, at the interface of both domains, we are striving for negotiation of standards and the incorporation of our cultural traditions, practices and standards in any matters that affects our lives. This is clearly reflected in the process within the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’.

Process

The process was established to guide the practitioner on how to apply the concept to their situations, thus attempting to combine the theoretical and the practical—praxis. The process reinforces the need to use the framework (analysing the issue through the lens of each dimension) whilst remaining committed to the principles and values. Thus a comprehensive picture is built and all factors (for example, knowledge, goals, tensions, and contending interests) are held in this picture.

Although the intent of articulating a staged process was to provide a guide to actions there is a danger that it may become prescriptive, constraining and inflexible. However, we felt this danger could be overcome if the practitioner could consciously reflect on the issue and context and mould the process to suit their situation. Thus, excluding those points of the process that may not relevant or applicable to the issue and context.
Appendices

The process of the ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ concept (1996) is indicated below and has been extracted from the Aboriginal Community Management and Development Workbook, Workshop 2: Aboriginal Ways of 1, 1996, pp. 27 – 28.

1. Define the issue/problem/concern/topic under discussion. In doing this, determine where the issue has been generated from. Determine if goals/future directions/aspirations have already been set for this issue.

This step of the process asks the practitioner/worker/researcher and the critical reference group to carefully consider all aspects of the issue. This includes asking who has determined that the issue is an issue, and whether or not goals have already been set for this issue, and if so, who has set them? The assumption within this step is that the practitioner will begin to consider the implications of whether the issue is imposed or owned. Therefore what is/are the opportunities for Aboriginal people to guide, control, influence or exert authority over the issue.

2. Outline the context (including how the issue may impact on other activities of the group(s)).

This step asks the practitioner and critical reference group to analyse the context of the issue. This involves asking the following questions: Does the issue only have relevance to, or impact on one group? Does it impact on others? If so, might tensions between groups arise? Are there contending interests to consider? If the issue effects other groups, are they already doing things to respond to the issue? Might there be a duplication of services? Can cooperative arrangements be made?

3. Examine the dimensions of cultural elements, experiences and understandings; and the interactions (discourse) between these dimensions.

This step asks the practitioner and critical reference group to build a broad picture and place the issue in the broader socio-political context. What cultural elements need to be considered in view of their potential influence on this issue? What are the Aboriginal experiences (attitudes, opinions, perceptions) relevant to this issue? What understandings of this issue do Aboriginal people have? Are these understandings limited? Would broader understandings better inform the situation? Can other areas of thought and practice inform this issue? If so, can the Aboriginal stakeholders benefit from this? What does this all mean when it is put together? What are the overall dynamics involved in this analysis of this issue?

4. From the consideration of the dimensions (point 3) determine aspirations for this issue or review aspirations already set.

This step asks the practitioner and critical reference group to consider the previous analysis and articulate their aspirations on the issue. If the goals have been pre-determined by an external agency, they should be reviewed to ascertain if they match the aspirations, goals and priorities of the critical reference group. If they do not there should be a process of negotiation to amend the goals to ensure they reflect the aspirations of the critical reference group.

5. Consolidate and articulate the knowledge gained from the exploration of the four dimensions and the interactions between the dimensions into a comprehensive picture. This picture will represent the Indigenous view of the issue under discussion.

This step asks the practitioner and group to clearly synthesise and articulate knowledge of the issue, outline what they hope to achieve, and why they wish to achieve it. The assumption underlying this step is that the practitioner and critical reference group will be consciously aware of what they want to achieve and have begun to consider options for how they will achieve it. This may include ‘adopting’ new ways of doing things, the expectation being that this ‘adoption’ has been a very conscious act and that these new ways have been Aboriginalised and integrated (in a complimentary fashion) into Aboriginal cultural practices.
6. Where necessary negotiate within and between Indigenous groups.

This step asks the practitioner and critical reference group to consider their priorities and goals in relation to other Indigenous stakeholders; and if there are contending interests or tensions, that the stakeholders be prepared to negotiate these and come to a shared understanding.

7. From this Indigenous view, determine the best course of future action to achieve the group(s) goals and aspirations.

This step asks the practitioner and critical reference group to work out how they will achieve their goals, after considering the previous analysis, negotiations and options for the future.

8. Establish terms and conditions for external negotiations

This step acknowledges that the practitioner and critical reference group have identified the boundaries of the issue and set their own goals and priorities. Therefore, the critical reference group has determined what is acceptable to them and what is not. The outcomes of these deliberations provide the criteria on which to base external (e.g. governmental agencies) negotiations and possible cooperative arrangements. For example, when accessing government funds Aboriginal stakeholders may decide that the conditions that come with the grant may not be acceptable to them as it compromises some of their goals or ways of working and living.

**Practical application**

Although the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners’ engagement with the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ may differ in that there may be limitations on the latter, I believe that it is still able to inform the individuals’ practice and ways of working. As such I outline several points for your consideration, with the conditions that: the list is by no means complete; and specific work contexts and specific issues may bring with them different considerations and dynamics.

Applying, using, referring to, or engaging with ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ means that individual’s or organisation’s wishing to work with Aboriginal people should:

1. Place Aboriginal people at the centre of any issue impacting on them. If non-Aboriginal organisations want to involve Aboriginal people then they should employ the skills of appropriate Aboriginal people. This may mean, establishing an Aboriginal reference group/s that would guide and advice; and/or involving Aboriginal people in a liaison capacity.

2. Consider, and be prepared to commit to the principles as guidelines for behaviour and action. In particular, to be committed to:
   - Acknowledging that the construction of Aboriginal knowledge is the business of Aboriginal people;
   - Working with Aboriginal people on the basis of cooperative arrangements where Aboriginal ways of doing things and Aboriginal aspirations are given equal weight to Western ways of doing things and non-Aboriginal aspirations;
   - Achieving outcomes that are mutually beneficial. If Aboriginal people are to participate in an activity or project then they too should benefit from it.

3. Consider, and be prepared to be committed to the core values as they should guide any dealings with Aboriginal people. In particular, self-determination and self-management; Aboriginal control; and social justice. Obviously, if the matter being dealt with is a non-Aboriginal initiative then values such as (the extent of) Aboriginal control may require negotiation.
4. Undertake an environmental scan to become familiar with the Aboriginal community you may be working within and/or interacting with. If appropriate, this could be done by (or in conjunction with) an Aboriginal liaison officer or involve the Aboriginal reference group.

5. Have an awareness of the different positions/status of individuals within an Aboriginal context as this has implications for the selection of ‘appropriate’ people to advise and the matters on which they can advise. In terms of the dynamics surrounding ‘Insider’ and ‘Outsider’, this could include positions of:
   - Insider, generally an Aboriginal person;
   - Outsider, generally a non-Aboriginal person;
   - Insider Insider, a local Aboriginal person. For example, a Noongar would be an ‘Insider Insider’ when living and working in the southwest of WA;
   - Insider Outsider, an Aboriginal person from another area or region. For example, a Noongar would be an ‘Insider Outsider’ if they worked in Port Hedland;
   - Outsider Insider, a non-Aboriginal person very entrenched in, and accepted by the Aboriginal community in which they reside.

6. Be aware of the dangers of generalising ‘successful’ outcomes from a specific context, to all contexts; and, appreciate that the dynamics within different situations will vary depending on the context of that situation or issue. Examples of activities that may involve Aboriginal people are:
   - Working on a project which directly addresses (perceived) problems or needs in an/the Aboriginal Community;
   - Conducting direct or comparative research which specifically addresses Aboriginal people, culture or issues;
   - Working on a project or issue which addresses problems wherein Aboriginal people are significantly involved or disproportionately represented;
   - Working to extend a mainstream program which has not addressed Aboriginal people or issues in the past and may be of some concern to, or have some impact on Aboriginal people;
   - Working on a project or issue which may be of direct concern to Aboriginal people;
   - Working on a project or issue which involves areas within which there are or may be native title rights or other cultural issues; etc.

As indicated, the above list is not complete. However, by considering all the components of the concept of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ and applying them to a specific issue within a particular context, the practitioner might be in a better position to determine the relevant factors that need to be taken into account.

**Conclusion**

There are many layers to this notion of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’, many complexities currently being explored, many exciting possibilities yet to consolidated. I believe the potential of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ is vast. Other possibilities that will be examined throughout a larger research project is ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ as epistemology, as a paradigm, as cultural discourse, and as counter-discourse. From my perspective ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ is a concept that has significance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal people it is an affirmation of the validity and currency of our cultural practices. For non-Aboriginal people it can increase their awareness of Aboriginal matters and positions. In addition, it can guide the practice of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

To illustrate this significance to which I refer, I draw on anecdotal comments from Aboriginal students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are direct and immediate benefits to students.
Students have indicated that on being introduced to the notion of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’ they have felt that it has:

- affirmed their identity,
- made them more conscious of seeing things from an Aboriginal perspective.
- made them more confident in representing the interests of Aboriginal people.

The importance of these three points should not be underestimated. In my view, they are key factors in the empowerment of Aboriginal people. As such we draw encouragement from comments such as this, and indeed they urge us on to further consolidate this notion of ‘Aboriginal terms of reference’.
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Transformative Strategies in Indigenous Education:
A Study of Decolonisation and Positive Social Change

The Indigenous Community Management and Development Program
Curtin University

Roz Walker (BA Honours) University of WA

This thesis is presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
University of Western Sydney, 2004
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge Pat Dudgeon, Darlene Oxenham, Ricky Osborne and Rob McPhee for giving me the opportunity to share in many intellectual activities and strategic tactics and to work transformatively in Indigenous education. These people were also my Indigenous Reference Group providing direction and support on ethical and methodological issues throughout this project. Other colleagues, Kim Collard, Jeannie Roberts and Glenys O’Grogan also co-authored papers contributing to ideas discussed in my thesis. John Ballard and Cheryle Taylor participated with me in research to develop Indigenous research and evaluation methodologies and frameworks at the cultural interface for the Australian Housing and Urban Institute. This research both reaffirmed and influenced the ideas developed in this thesis. I am especially grateful to Indigenous Community Management and Development Program (ICMDP) colleagues and students/practitioners who have generously shared their ideas and stories with me over the years. It is impossible to adequately acknowledge everyone who has significantly influenced my thinking and practice, however, Anne Blinco, Heath Greville, Jim Lewis, Sondra Ramirez and John Scougall were always willing to ask the really hard questions and to seek creative solutions to the social/political/cultural predicaments that confirm the intent, complexity and necessity of the ICMDP reflected in this thesis. Erin Wilson and Helen Cheney (also ICMDP staff) helped to confirm that it is individuals’ everyday stories linked to social realities that challenge and delimit the theories and discourses which simultaneously serve to impose limits upon us. Several other people (in addition to my reference group and supervisor) have provided critical readings of particular chapters and offered insightful suggestions to improve their clarity. Among these I want to thank: Tim Walker; Jane Armstrong; Dr Tracy Reibel; Dr Bill Genat; and, Dr John Fielder. I also want to thank Lisa Thomas for her considerable editorial support. I am grateful to Kerry Rotumah for her invaluable technical assistance in the final editing of the research.

I am immensely grateful to Professor Bob Hodge, my Supervisor — his patience, insights and incredibly timely phone calls and emails full of generous yet incisive observations have been an ongoing source of support and inspiration. They have helped me to keep the momentum and theoretical connections when all the practical contradictions and ambiguities slowed me down.

Finally, I am indebted to my amazingly wonderful and generous family for their unwavering love, support and patience. They have helped me keep everything in perspective and believed in me throughout this long journey.
I declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Signed by ........................................

ROSALYN DAWN WALKER
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<td>Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<td>Australia Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training</td>
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<td>Higher Education Contribution Scheme</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>HEEP</td>
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<td>Ideological State Apparatus</td>
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<td>National Aboriginal Education Committee</td>
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<td>National Aboriginal Education Policy</td>
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<td>NTB</td>
<td>National Training Board</td>
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<td>NTEU</td>
<td>National Tertiary Education Union</td>
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<td>NUS</td>
<td>National Union of Students</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PDGs</td>
<td>Professional Development Groups</td>
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<td>RCIADIC</td>
<td>Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody</td>
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<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>RSA</td>
<td>Repressive State Apparatus</td>
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<td>SACSIETC</td>
<td>Social and Community Services Council Industry Employment &amp; Training Council</td>
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<td>SESDA</td>
<td>State Employment and Skills Development Authority</td>
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This thesis is located within the social and political context of Indigenous education within Australia. It is an area fraught with competing readings of education, as either an instrument for the further colonisation and oppression or the emancipation and empowerment of Indigenous Australians. While intellectuals contest theories, representations and standpoints, appropriate curriculum approaches and pedagogy, and while policymakers debate the reasons for persistent poor academic outcomes (DETYA 1999; Encel 2000) Indigenous people continue to experience unacceptable levels of disadvantage and social marginalisation.

The struggle for Indigenous students individually and collectively lies in being able to determine a direction which is productive and non-assimilationist — which offers possibilities of social and economic transformation, equal opportunities and cultural integrity and self-determination. The challenge for teachers within the constraints of the academy is to develop strategies that are genuinely transformative, empowering and contribute to decolonisation and positive social change. From the micro level of an Indigenous Centre, situated in a specific university with a particular group of individuals developing a particular transformative curriculum project and pedagogy, this thesis brings everyday life to bear on the diverse knowledge systems and theories regarding emancipatory education, individual agency, race, class and gender relations and their interplay with various levels and spheres of the institutional state apparatus.

This thesis explores how the construction of two theoretical propositions — the Indigenous Community Management and Development (ICMD) practitioner and the Indigenous/non-Indigenous Interface — are decolonising and transformative strategies. The interface is revealed as the site of turbulence, negotiation and possibility, in which the ICMD practitioner works to provide/mediate the space to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in highly productive and transformative ways. It investigates how these theoretical constructs and associated discourses are incorporated into the Centre’s policy processes, curriculum, and pedagogy to influence and interact with the everyday lives of students in their work and communities and the wider social institutions. It charts how a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff interact with these propositions and different ideas and discourses interrupting, re-visioning, reformulating and integrating these to form the basis for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous futures in Australia.
When I first began this project I found myself writing things like ‘the curriculum has always been dynamic — subject to ongoing examination and review by those involved in its development and implementation.’ I expanded on this statement with things like ‘students, staff and other stakeholders have provided feedback about what does and does not work in terms of course content, structure and delivery.’ ‘These processes firmly ground the Indigenous Community Management and Development Program (ICMDP) in Indigenous experiences of, and understandings about, the possibilities and constraints on its ability to ‘deliver the goods’ within the multiple and diverse contextual realities in which ICMD students operate.’

I drew on Keeffe (1992), who cited Schwab, to support the idea that the ICMDP curriculum development has always been a critically reflexive ‘curriculum in action’ process. I wrote for example, ‘that Schwab (1971, p. 5) suggests that “curriculum in action treats real things, real acts, real teachers, real [people], as richer and different from their theoretical representation” (cited in Keeffe 1992, p. 7). I was using this quote to support a claim that the curriculum development and revision process serves as a ‘reality check’ to ensure the ICMDP’s relevance and efficacy for student realities and avoids becoming a reflection of our own theoretical and philosophical ideologies and regimes of truth (Foucault 1977; Gore 1993) at the expense of broader Indigenous interests and priorities.

And then I stopped — the picture I was painting of the curriculum development as ‘a critically reflexive “curriculum in action” process’ suggested a purposeful coherent and pragmatic process. Which in some respects it was. Yet I had failed to capture the everyday raw emotion, painful realisations, positive unforseen discoveries and defining moments that actually defined and reinforced our commitment and informed our academic practice from early in the program’s development. Our everyday reality jarred with much of the theoretical material I was reviewing for my thesis. When I explained this dilemma to my supervisor he asked me to reflect on what had been my own defining moment — my ‘road to Damascus’ — in terms of shaping my commitment to telling this story (research is a story).

I knew exactly what had happened that had made me crucially aware of the gap between our curriculum and the contextual realities it was intended to address. It was Easter 1992.
My husband, son and I were visiting family in Kalgoorlie. What occurred that weekend was for me a truly defining and transforming moment.

On Easter Sunday we went on a picnic in Boulder Park. We had only just arrived, thrown out the blankets and placed the proverbial sausages and buns on the ‘barbie’ when a couple of Aboriginal people wandered over and asked me for some money. Not wanting to refuse them I replied that they were welcome to share our sausages and buns. One of the guys grinned and thanked us, whistled and motioned to his mob back under a tree to come over and join us. Before long we were all sitting around on the blankets, and a bit beyond, sharing sausages, buns, red cordial and life stories. Our kids thoroughly enjoyed themselves (although I could see my niece was a bit scared at first – her experiences of Aboriginal people had mostly involved witnessing anti-social behaviour outside their shop in Kalgoorlie).

It turned out that they were in town waiting to hear if one of their family ‘would pull through’ from a stab wound a few days before. Encouraged by our looks of concern they began showing us their various wounds which while serious had not seen them hospitalised. Others managed to find scars from previous scrapes, laughing and recounting their near misses. I have to admit that underneath I felt somewhat bewildered as to how I was supposed to be reacting. But somewhere it just felt okay to be talking, listening and nodding. It turned out they knew some of the students from the course and that cemented our relationship that afternoon. Someone caught sight of the camera too and asked if we would take some photos of them, of them with us, and with the kids, and send them to their post office address — which we did. Once lunch was over they wandered back to their spot, looking back, waving and smiling. It was one of those incredible encounters that stayed in my mind.

The next day when we were driving back to Perth we saw a group of Aboriginal people having a fight outside the pub in Southern Cross. There was blood and bottles everywhere and lots of angry shouting and kids crying. Before I knew it I was crying too, it was like a terrible emotional collision had happened. All I could see was the kids crying and all I could think about was those great people in the park the day before struggling to manage their lives; full of humour, pride and acceptance of one another. The sight of the kids crying and women yelling gave me the realisation that the same terrible violence and anguish had underscored the stories told with the humour and acceptance in the park the day before, minus the anguish and suffering of the children. Concerned, my family tried to reassure me that everything was okay. But it wasn’t okay …
I began thinking about the students who were out there working with their mob in places like Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie, Kununurra, Alice Springs, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. In fact, all over. They would tell us stories about how difficult (even impossible) it was to ‘get the group together’, to ‘identify project goals’ and to ‘determine future directions’ as part of their course requirements. In turn, we would assess their efforts, exercising our academic judgements as to whether they had incorporated supporting evidence, accessed an appropriate range of texts, suggested some good strategies and so on …

I found myself saying things like,

What we’re doing is wrong.
It’s all academic.
We’re just paying lip service to ideas like ‘context specific’, ‘reality checks’, and ‘real world problems’.
We sanitise it all, we don’t talk about this real stuff because it’s too hard, we hide behind textbook definitions and explanations.

That group we just saw back there is just like the group in the park — it’s just that we saw them at a different moment and they are just like the group one of the students was trying to tell us about when she was attempting to justify why she was having so much difficulty getting through the course elements.

Every semester we sit in judgement in our Board of Examiners meetings deciding whether we think students really tried hard enough, were really committed to Community Development principles or enacted Aboriginal terms or reference. We refer to assessment standards, stakeholder expectations — but who are the stakeholders and what is really at stake here? …and so on…

It was a truly defining moment and one that has stayed with me ever since. Sometimes I flinch when we talk about ‘relevant and appropriate teaching and learning processes’ and ‘meaningful academic responses to assessment’ which take ‘student realities’ into account in achieving ‘contextual specific outcomes’. During that day in the park and the day after on the road home I began to recognise and understand that decolonisation and transformation involves everyone everyday. It encompasses the monumental task of engaging with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous community realities and being part of the social transformation process.
Some days later I shared my experience with other staff who also shared their own personal realisations and struggles. Over the following months we began to really talk about the problematics of finding ways to deal with such profound issues and to translate them into a truly transformative curriculum practice (a resolve that requires continual renewal, as the following chapters attest).

But the story doesn’t end there.

It is layered by the student’s own defining moments about working ‘with the mob’ borne of their own reflexive practice. Their stories serve to remind us as academics of the profound personal engagement these decolonising, transformative projects require of students and the real lives that they touch. Nancy Gordon (1999), a graduate from the ICMDP shares her own story in As they sang I danced,

I am an Aboriginal person who has been shaped by the events of my life. In 1997 I enrolled in a Master of Arts in Indigenous Research and Development at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University. My research project seeks to capture and express the experiences of the Fringe-dwellers in the Kalgoorlie - Boulder area. As I near the end of my project it has become apparent that my varied life-experiences have influenced how I undertook my fieldwork and analysed the data with the fringe-dwellers.

When I began the research project I was aware of the defining principle that was driving the Postgraduate Program at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies: honouring Aboriginal Terms of Reference while combining the requirements of academic research. Initially, I thought it was going to be easy. I assumed that my previous experiences on the fringe had equipped me for this next journey. This was my third time being involved with the fringes of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, but as the research project progressed I was struggling. I could feel myself resisting the need to return and capture the fringe-dwelling experiences in an in-depth way. Even though I could master the art of code switching from one role to another, this did not alter the childhood feelings of loss, grief and rejection.

I realise today, that I had carried to the project many different filters and experiences that often obscured my perceptions about the fringe-dwellers. The major breakthrough for me came when I began to sit, interact and share the day with the fringe-dwellers on a Sunday — whether it was at Boulder Park, along the Loopline
where they camped on the Fringes, or at Nanny Goat Hill. Although I was not aware of it at the time, I was on a journey with them. I observed how they interacted with each other and as I listened to their stories, I was prompted to remember my own stories of living on the fringe. Unbeknown to me at the time, I was reliving and feeling my past. I recall telling my peers that I had to detach myself at times. As I think about it now, there was a transition that was taking place. It was a subconscious ritual of being with the people and gradually letting go of the past. I was uncovering the layers that had built up over the years that I had suppressed. I believe that it was important for me to come to terms with myself before I could walk with the people. That is why I am telling this story (Gordon 1999, p. 1).

The end of her story brings another perspective…

I realise now despite the intentions I had made to break the shackles of my ‘welfare’ background, I was still entrenched in this kind of thinking when I started my research. I believe these ‘shackles’ were borne from the religious teachings of the Mission and from watching my parent’s struggle for social justice. These childhood experiences shaped my perceptions throughout my adult years. This is evident in the career path that I followed, which I believe stemmed from my experiences of being ‘wounded’. I wanted ‘to fix’ other people’s ‘wounds’.

After some time I began to spend Sundays on the fringe. This was a day that was likely to be a rest day for the people, who would otherwise be walking the streets and looking out for who was getting money. I would spend all day interacting with them. There were occasions when they became industrious stringing gum nut beads to sell to the public for money. The visits were informal at first then they started talking to me voluntarily as a group or they asked to meet with me individually. Others stopped me as I walked down Egan Street and readily provided information to me. I started to feel comfortable with my own role as I thought I had shifted my thinking and way of doing my fieldwork in a way that left behind my previous assumptions.

However, when I started analysing the data, I felt a new sense of uncertainty. I could not ‘see’ what my data was telling me. I was stuck and was unable to discuss the material with my supervisors. I forced myself to draft a mind map to make the connections and was overwhelmed by what emerged. In the same breath I felt free, maybe the shackles had finally broken, and for the first time I felt an inner peace
within me, as there was ‘a new way of seeing’. I was seeing through the eyes of the people, I was hearing what they were saying; that they had a well planned life which they had developed for themselves. There was a community at work. The people shared and cared for each other. They shared their camp, sleeping gear, food, money, and alcohol. Their community had rules to operate in. They were happy, although they were not unaware of how they have been treated by the rest of the community. My hope is that the outcomes of my research will give the fringe-dwellers a voice to be heard by the wider community. Their story will show what self-determination means for the fringe-dwellers and will look at ways to target long term funding. The ultimate goal is to develop a program which will let the people themselves determine what is best for them and will not treat them as powerless….

I have come to the conclusion that my traditional life and the years living in the Mission have shaped who I am and how I value life and people. It has also shaped the journey I have undertaken during my research. In the beginning of my research I assumed a knowledge of the Aboriginal fringe-dwelling situation in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder area. However, as the research has progressed and new knowledge unfolds I know that I have only scratched the surface. This journey of personal and intellectual discovery is evidence that hope does exist. As I reflect on my journey through this story, I would like to borrow the following quote by an Aboriginal Elder, the late Don Sinclair. I remember during a family visit he saw craft chairs being made from local bush wood and he wanted to teach his people. He said, ‘things are easy, but little bit hard’ (1992).

My journey is not over yet! (Gordon 1999, p. 19).

Nancy’s story is important precisely because it reminds us that we all bring our own history and experiences with us to the teaching and research act. Nancy’s story also illuminates the critical reflexivity that students bring to their own practice as well as her ability to embody the principles she had engaged with firstly in the ICMDP and then the Postgraduate program. It highlights the complexity and ambiguity of the context, the different readings of the situations. Importantly it cautions us against engaging superficially with the groups with whom we are working and imposing our values in the process of addressing the effects of marginalisation, oppression and unequal distribution of resources in achieving positive change.