Indigeneity as a foundation for patterned Northern Territory remote Aboriginal student achievement within a stratified western education system

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Statement of originality

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own, original work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Gary Fry
31st July 2020
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And finally, I need to acknowledge the many powerful Aboriginal voices that have, over the course of my life, helped me to understand what this voice looks like from the inside, and what it means to be true to this voice. My world view has been shaped by each of you, my heroes, past and present. I acknowledge your long fights to prosper through Aboriginality as the defining foundation to engaging education for Aboriginal children. You have each inspired me to keep this fight strong. This Story is your Story.
Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, waters and sky in which I have been privileged to live and work, while undertaking my research and writing my thesis. I pay my respects to the people of the many Countries of the Northern Territory and their Elders, Community Leaders and Knowledge Holders, past, present and emerging who retain a deep connection to Country and continue to live their lives and cultures, and fight for pride, dignity and strength for themselves, their Community and their children and grandchildren.
Abstract

Over the past decade, national testing in literacy and numeracy for primary and junior secondary education reveals NT remote Aboriginal children have consistently performed at a much lower level than all other groups across Australia. This performance is situated within a broader and stratified education system, of which ongoing education reforms have failed to address. This entrenched pattern by wealth has NT remote Aboriginal students located at the bottom of this layering, underpinned by an Aboriginal racial identity as a defining characteristic. For NT remote Aboriginal families this layering is bound within a deepened embeddedness of racism, interacting with an economic ordering that has relegated NT remote Aboriginal families to a life of socially–constructed marginalisation, on their own lands.

This study applies Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a primary tool of analysis, Aboriginalising its tenets to respond to the unique narrative of NT Aboriginal education. Drawing on research with remote North Australia Aboriginal principals (head teachers), Aboriginal communities and educators, critical race methodology is used to explore the intersecting roles of colonial history, ‘race’ and wealth inequality in the construction and deployment of NT remote Aboriginal education inequality. This investigation privileges the voices and Stories of Northern Territory remote Aboriginal families, strengthened through my lived Aboriginal experience of 25 years employment as a teacher and senior education administrator in Northern Territory urban and remote communities. In this study, the CRT tenet of interest convergence/interest divergence is utilised alongside Indigenous CRT frameworks.

Underpinning this study, a form of NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism is shown to be at the epicentre of a progressive NT remote Aboriginal education policy architecture, wrapped around Indigeneity and its existential dimensions, as a foundation to improving the pattern of NT remote Aboriginal education performance.
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### Key concepts and acronyms

<p>| <strong>Aboriginal</strong> | Used interchangeably with Indigenous, though commonly used in the context of the Northern Territory. This category is not homogenous and is used regarding the points in which identity interacts with social justice in education. |
| <strong>ACARA</strong> | Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority |
| <strong>AITSL</strong> | Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership |
| <strong>Capitalism</strong> | This study employs a free-market form of capitalism in discussions of Australia’s economic system. |
| <strong>Centrist, third-way</strong> | Used in conceptualising the middle ground between socialism and capitalism, fascism and democracy. |
| <strong>CERD</strong> | United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination |
| <strong>COAG</strong> | Council of Australian Governments |
| <strong>Critical pedagogy</strong> | Used to investigate the structural dimensions of government policy movements through the institution of education and the organisational spaces of schools. |
| <strong>Critical race theory (CRT)</strong> | Used to investigate the structural inequalities that Australia’s Indigenous First Nations people experience, along the fault line of ‘race’. |
| <strong>Critical theory (CT)</strong> | Used to challenge ideology at the societal level. CT is used to investigate mainstream structural inequalities around the intersections of wealth. |
| <strong>Diaspora</strong> | Used to conceptualise the displacement of First Nations people and the contemporary issues this has produced for rights claims. |
| <strong>Diasporic identities</strong> | Refers here to First Nation (Indigenous/Indigeneity) identities in the adaptation of a majoritarian Australian western culture and capitalism. Term used to investigate NT Aboriginal identity shifts within fluid, social complexity. |
| <strong>Dialectical materialism</strong> | The interaction between the physical world and human consciousness. Marxist philosophy, offers insights to social constructivism that people make up their worlds at the same time their worlds make them. |
| <strong>Direct Instruction (DI)</strong> | Refers to a US commercial instructional program in English and Mathematics, aimed at disadvantaged ESL students. Premised on a scripted curriculum and delivery by teachers and support staff trained in the program. DI is premised in part on western cognitive theory. |
| <strong>Education</strong> | Describes the education system, nationally and on a jurisdictional level. Term used in discussions concerning the system of education in the NT. |
| <strong>Existentialism</strong> | Defines the inner world from which individual members engage and make meaning and purpose to their existence. |
| <strong>First Nations</strong> | Refers to Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This category is not homogeneous and is used regarding the points in which it interacts with social justice. |
| <strong>Hegemony</strong> | Describes the dominant position of a set of ideas and their associated tendency to inhibiting the articulation of competing and/or alternative ideas. |
| <strong>Hyper-capitalism</strong> | Used to conceptualise a heightened expression of neo-classical economics, where materialism and a belief in an unencumbered free market are the defining goals of human action. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Used in respect to the generic categorisation of Australia’s First Nations peoples. This category, which also is used to refer to international First nations groups are not homogenous and this term is predominantly used regarding the points in which this collective identity interacts with Australia’s social justice in education and schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majoritarian</td>
<td>Majoritarian is a CRT term used to describe the dominant non–Indigenous population and its colonising account of Indigenous realities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neocolonialism</td>
<td>Refers to the ongoing colonisation of Australia’s First Nation’s people and is presented as functioning in binary exchanges with neoliberalism. Neocolonialism has a projected claim of equality, while retaining a colonial/colonising relationship with the Indigenous community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism</td>
<td>Refers here to rampant individualism where economic ends largely justify the means, enshrined in the singular belief in the market and the maximisation of profit as the goal of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT DoE</td>
<td>Northern Territory Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTER</td>
<td>Northern Territory Emergency Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT remote Aboriginal Existentialism</td>
<td>Draws on existential theory to define the processes of identity formation and maintenance in NT remote Aboriginal communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political economy</td>
<td>Describes the role of government and its inter-related connections in race/racism/racialisation, law, politics, hegemony, choice and meritocracy in the national distribution of wealth and social justice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>Racism is a system that privileges and advantages some while excluding others, based on racialised narratives of deficit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Is used in discussions concerning the organisational properties of education service delivery, as pertains to the primary and secondary sectors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCRGSP</td>
<td>Steering Committee for the Review into Government Service Provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capitalism</td>
<td>Social capitalism is defined as a socially-minded form of capitalism, where the goal is making social improvements, rather than focusing on accumulating of capital in the classic capitalist sense. It is a form of capitalism with a social purpose.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1. The nature of Northern Territory (NT) remote Aboriginal education inequality

1.1 Introduction: Study context

In introducing this study, the first point I need to make is for the reader to be aware that this is a long thesis. This is because there are many layers that need to be carefully unpacked around Northern Territory (henceforth NT) Indigenous educational inequality and the inter-relationships these have within a sea of social ambiguity (Lees, 2007; North, 2006). This particularly concerns the ‘structural masking’ that arises across the intersections of wealth, colonisation and ‘race’ (Gillborn, 2015; Vaught, 2011). The second point I make is that this study is led by my Aboriginal voice; one that challenges ‘white’ Anglo, education policy aimed at NT remote Aboriginal families (Blair, 2015). In this study I borrow from Blair (2015) and employ the term ‘Story’ in capitalised form throughout this thesis, to signify my voiced departure from westernised Anglo approaches that have long pathologised Aboriginality as the ‘problem’ of education advancement (Moodie, 2018). As reflected in the title of this thesis, my Story is about why and how Indigeneity is the foundation to improving remote Aboriginal children’s systemic education performance in the NT. It is therefore necessary in Chapter 1 to establish the context of this Story, and how it will unfold for the reader.

The NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment has long been the least performing of all Australian States and Territories, functioning to disengage, marginalise and prohibit Aboriginal children from gaining a quality education in the dual worlds in which they are born (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). Like the rest of Australia, the NT’s Aboriginal peoples have continuously occupied Australia for at least 60,000 years, and this history has only recently been severely impacted by the arrival of the British in 1788 (Tatz, 1999). While much has only been written about this history from contributors such as Gray (2001), little is acknowledged about how profoundly this colonial past is etched into the present NT Aboriginal education architecture, as highlighted in a recent Australian Education Review by Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017). In this Story, the struggles of Aboriginal families in the NT education system are underwritten by this history and its flows into the present (Tatz, 2009).
Education policies aimed at NT remote Aboriginal families appear within an Australian ‘moral society’, particularly where international comparisons locate Australia as a humane country (Jahan, 2016). This profile, however, sits within a national gravitation towards hyper-capitalism, inequality and a tailored flow around competition, greed and life-trajectories that prioritise materialism and gain over others (Bone, 2012). In this constructed world, neocolonialism is entangled across the Judeo-Christian values that have served as a ‘twisted moral justification’ to these ongoing acts and the resulting internal decay that situates deep within a contemporary, democratic, ‘white’ and capitalist Australia (Moodie, 2018; Stephens, 2008). After decades of policy actions, every social indicator reveals Australia’s First Nations peoples continue to be the most socioeconomically and educationally-disadvantaged group in Australia (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

At the core of this has been ‘white’ Australia’s treatment of Indigenous First Nations peoples as deficit subjects (Velardi, 2017), ‘legitimised’ through a national policy of Closing the Gap\(^1\) (henceforth CTG) that has sought to alleviate Indigenous inequality through ‘selling an imposed and bankrupted world’ of societal stratification (Bone, 2012) that education is anchored to. It is against this intersection of racism and classism that this Story conversely sources the NT’s remote Aboriginal condition as an opportunity to progress through this social mess. That is, in the counter–Story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) that later unfolds, it is the very essence of Aboriginality that remote education can plausibly advance in a patterned way, underpinned by a form of Aboriginal community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) and social-capitalism; both of which have received little research attention (Walter, 2016). For this study, the NT context matters to Aboriginal social justice efforts and those pursuing increased definition of the middle ground. This chapter thus frames the nature of the problem and my research approach.

There are two motivating reasons for this investigation. The first is informed by my experience of 25 years with the NT Department of Education (henceforth NTDoE). Over this period, I observed and experienced a growing level of institutional racism that seemed to be accepted by many as a ‘normalised’ outcome of the way education was ordered and applied across the NT education sector, as similarly reported by First Nations peoples globally (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Gillborn, 2014). That is, ‘white’ middle-aged male patriarchy seemed to have exclusive rights to senior positions of power.

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\(^1\) Closing the Gap is a government strategy that aims to reduce disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes (Australian Government, 2019).
and opportunity, based on a ubiquitous institutional form of merit over racially-different employees (Vaught, 2006). This racialised hierarchy (Werner, 2015) occurred across all senior executive areas within education corporate and in schools, shown in Table 1. After decades of hoping for this to change, I came to a realisation this seemed to be accelerating against an increased silencing of Aboriginal voices in education policy; a trajectory confirmed by Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer, (2017).

As an Aboriginal man descended from the Dagoman tribe in the NT, I have long known the ugly face of racism at the hands of ‘white’ people. I came to a view that this racialised hierarchy was part of the colonial raciologies directed at First Nations peoples (Vaught, 2006), albeit cloaked within subterranean trajectories towards a construction of Aboriginal social inequality masked across class layering (Page, 2015; Westwood, 2003). I came to experience institutional racism within the condensing of ‘white’ male privilege, power and opportunity, materialised upon the subjugation of the many thousands of Aboriginal voices within the NT (Moodie, 2018; Tatz, 2009). Against this injustice I felt responsibility to speak because it is my history, and it needed to be told through a sharpened Aboriginal voice. I wanted to employ a critical race theory (CRT) approach to produce a powerful counter–narrative in this study and privilege the voices of those who have been locked into poverty, discrimination and marginalisation, based on their identity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Walter, 2016).

The second motivating reason for this study is due to NT Aboriginal education outcomes being consistently and significantly lower than all other Australian jurisdictions, and the unlikely prospect this pattern would improve in my lifetime. This performance is expressed across urban and remote contexts, reported in National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results since 2008 (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). After working in the NT’s education system, I came to an understanding that remote schools had long operated as drop-in centres, offering little functional value in the lives of those targeted. This understanding is verified through a long-term decline in the schooling attendance of Aboriginal children, averaging little higher than 50% in most remote/very remote communities over the past decade (Northern Territory Government, 2011). This disengagement hasn’t improved, as the Term 4 2018 averages for very remote Aboriginal students was 51.9%, compared with 84.3% non–Indigenous (NTDoE, 2019).

For this study, this ideological outcome is situated within the sociopolitical dimensions of education, as Brayboy (2014) similarly commented on the US Indigenous education context:

Understanding not just how people engage the world, but also by how they are engaged by it, is crucial to understanding these tensions. The absence of these understandings (of how groups of people engage and are engaged by society) has led to a narrowing of education from a broad idea of teaching and learning in and out of schools to the end of being prepared for the world in which people are going to live to an idea we call schooling. (p. 399)
This Story thus problematises NT remote Aboriginal education inequality within the political economy, since the problem is widespread, systemic in nature and racialised in its construction, expression and treatment (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). The fact that most NT Aboriginal children in most locations of the NT are struggling in the education system reveals there are serious problems with the design of education on offer, rather than due to a condition of simply being Aboriginal. While a feature of capitalism is its propensity toward a layered society (Martinez, 2006), it is also about being Aboriginal that the sociopolitical discourses and their flows around power and domination take on acutely neocolonial dimensions, twisting in concert with neoliberalism to punish those that seek to resist the economic system of capitalism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). These entanglements situate across government institutions, as well as within the architecture of education policy (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Matthews, 2013).

This is evidenced in a western education standardisation (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Matthews, 2013) reflected within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, being a defining metric in producing standardised ‘clarity, quality and measurement’ of the teaching profession (see Australian Institute of Teaching & School Leadership, 2019). But as will be shown in this study, particularly in Chapter 4, national standardisation is problematic, as Hattie (2009) stated:

> National standards are typically introduced in the midst of despair, aimed to drive mediocrity out of the system, and the push for national standards is often driven by business and civics elites fearful of losing economic benefits. Many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, have walked this path, and the path has ended in limited evidence of any improvement in students’ educational achievement. (p. 1)

These standards, which underpin teacher credentials and registration in Australia, are an insidious form of legitimising the exclusion of Aboriginal members on a basis of their not attaining the ‘necessary qualifications and verification’ of their identity worth in NT remote classrooms (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). The data in Table 1 portrays a reality that, when the number of NT schools are factored, less than two Indigenous adults work in schools as teaching assistants, that most schools in the NT do not have an Indigenous teacher, and that Indigenous representation at the most senior school leadership is non-existant, after I left this role in 2018. This racialised outcome is significant, given almost half the NT’s student population are Aboriginal and most schools in the NT are in remote Aboriginal communities, as revealed in Table 2.

**Table 1: Proportion of Indigenous employees by worker roles 2015–16**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. staff</th>
<th>Administrative roles</th>
<th>Assistant teacher</th>
<th>Classroom teachers</th>
<th>School/Corporate leadership</th>
<th>At senior executive principal leadership level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>3,865</td>
<td>1105</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20
This ongoing marginalisation in the NT education system is deeply embedded and normalised, where assumptions of ‘white’ cultural superiority are embedded within the tenacious myth that western education policy approaches targeting remote Aboriginal families are correct. This is evidenced in the absence of philosophic policy departures since the early seventies, when formal government schooling commenced in the NT for Aboriginal communities (Devlin, 2009; Fraser, 2003). The most significant evidence of this marginalisation has been within the low participation figures in Table 1, as much as the racialised philosophic and sociopolitical dimensions that underpin this outcome, as the recent Australian Education Review (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017) highlighted. Instructive of this point are recent annual reports detailing the performance of the NT’s schooling system.

The NTDoE Annual Report (NTDoE, 2016, p. 6) highlighted this disengagement, as revealed in Table 2. While it is notable the proportion of non-Indigenous children’s attendance dropping significantly to 83%, of most significance is that Indigenous students in the NT attending school for four or more days per week is 33%. It is a crisis when 67% of Aboriginal children are missing so much school, yet there has been no Royal Commission and no audible calls for the system of education on offer to be placed under the microscope. Instead, there is a silence, of which Daniels-Mayes (2016, p. 234) stated: “What results is a top-down, or ‘tame’ (Australian Public Service Commission 2012) approach to Aboriginal policy and practice that excludes and silences the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples”. When considering a future scenario, the NT’s Indigenous population, shown in Table 3 is projected to increase by 56.6% within the next two decades, suggesting a heavy price will be incurred across all areas of the NT community.

Table 2: Summary of Northern Territory government schools’ demographic data (2016–2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016–17</th>
<th>2017–18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students enrolled in school</td>
<td>32,729</td>
<td>30,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools in remote and very remote areas</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of students living in remote and very remote areas</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Indigenous students</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student attendance</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of non-Indigenous students attending four days or more per week (Preschool–Year 12)</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Indigenous students attending four days or more per week (Preschool–Year 12)</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of students with a language background other than English</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>n.p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.p = not provided

2 In Australia, Royal Commissions are the highest form of government inquiry into issues of public importance.
### Table 3: Indigenous population projection, Northern Territory 2011–2041

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NT Total</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non–Indigenous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>231,292</td>
<td>68,850</td>
<td>162,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>253,330</td>
<td>74,264</td>
<td>179,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>275,128</td>
<td>80,285</td>
<td>194,843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2026</td>
<td>297,369</td>
<td>86,773</td>
<td>210,596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2031</td>
<td>319,533</td>
<td>93,471</td>
<td>226,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2036</td>
<td>341,655</td>
<td>100,415</td>
<td>241,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2041</td>
<td>364,207</td>
<td>107,849</td>
<td>256,359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NT Department of Treasury and Finance, 2014)

**The 2007 NT Intervention**

A key example of the racist treatment of NT Aboriginal families was the 2007 Intervention, where the Australian army marched in to seventy-three prescribed NT remote Aboriginal communities with populations over 200 (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Velardi, 2017). Triggered after the 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* Inquiry (Wild & Anderson, 2007), a collaboration with Aboriginal Elders to investigate widespread claims of child sexual abuse (Genovese, 2011), a federal Liberal government in its lead-up to an election used the report’s focus on alcohol and child abuse as validation to wipe away Aboriginal rights in NT communities, suspending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* to do so (Austin-Broos, 2011; Macoun, 2011). The first recommendation focused on ‘legitimate conversation’ with Aboriginal families; a view not supported by government determined to fix the ‘Aboriginal problem’ unilaterally on grounds of a moral crisis (D’Abbs, 2010; Matthews, 2013).

Recently retired federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and former professional fisherman, Senator Nigel Scullion, introduced this Bill to parliament, having stated: “In the Northern Territory…there is a national emergency confronting the welfare of Aboriginal children. Normal community standards, social norms and parenting behaviours have broken down and too many are trapped in an intergenerational cycle of dependency” (Gray, 2011, p. 1). The matter of child protection is a serious concern, however, a Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) Report (2011) highlighted that the level of substantiated claims in the NT were far less than elsewhere, including Canberra as the site of national governance (Graph 1).

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3 Right leaning conservative party, akin to the Republicans in the US and the Conservatives in the UK.
The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) Evaluation Report 2011 (Northern Territory Government, 2011) found that between 2007 and 2010 only a small number of offences involving pornography were recorded, much fewer involving children. The Intervention was thus later acknowledged by both sides of politics as galvanising further deep hostility and distrust by Aboriginal peoples toward ‘white’ government officials (O’Dowd, 2009; Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011; Velardi, 2017).

While there remains a duty in protecting children, and Aboriginal families are as committed to this need as their non-Aboriginal counterparts, consideration of the depth of the problems received minimal attention, particularly in respect to the falsified premise behind the Intervention (O’Dowd, 2009; Velardi, 2017). Marching an army into NT remote Aboriginal communities to deal with Australia’s most marginalised people against a nationally-widespread problem well known for decades, served to damage deeply the country’s race relations (Gray, 2011). Aboriginal lawyer Irene Watson (2011, p. 906) stated of this action: “The law facilitated the regulation of a population stigmatised as lacking acceptable social norms”, and Gruenstein (2008) argued the number of perpetrators was small and actions extended well beyond the recommendations of the report, with many of the provisions being unrelated to child abuse (Northern Territory Government, 2011). Such actions legitimised erosion of Aboriginal rights through instilling a public moral compass situated on children, whilst simultaneously dismissing the underlying issues (Gray, 2011).
In this regard, Macoun (2011) stated:

Architects and supporters of the Northern Territory intervention construct Aboriginality in a range of ways in introducing and justifying the program. Discussions of abuse of Aboriginal children function as a site for contestations about the nature and future of Aboriginality in which the discursive authority of Aboriginal people is limited through the construction of Aboriginality as implicated in abuse. (p. 520)

A decade on from the Intervention, remote communities in many instances were in worse shape (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Velardi, 2017). Senator Scullion spoke to this failure in 2017 during a visit to the NT remote Aboriginal community of Mutitjulu in Central Australia, which was at the front line of the NT Emergency Response. Of the mess created, the Minister stated:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, community, families have to be at the centre of the decisions, if we're going to make substantive and sustainable change. Hindsight is very easy if you've got it, but we learnt the lesson years ago that communities have to be front and centre of change. (Everingham, 2017, p. 1)

Investigation by the Menzies School of Health Research found the Intervention had not made a progressive difference (Everingham, 2017). Yet, the attacks on Aboriginal families have been unrelenting, as a visit to the NT in 2018 by the Morrison federal Liberal government’s ‘Indigenous Envoy’, former Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, demonstrates. Of this visit, one Aboriginal leader stated: “He supported the intervention, he's the one who pulled back the funding and everything. What Aboriginal community is going to sit down and listen to him?” (Judd, Vanovac & Schubert, 2018, Sept 27). While visiting Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in remote South Australia, Abbott advocated that police be placed in remote secondary schools to improve student attendance. When in the role of Prime Minister, Abbott advocated the closure of 150 remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and fuelled public division around his view that Aboriginal families had chosen a ‘lifestyle’ that taxpayers shouldn’t fund (‘Tony Abbott considering police-in-schools’, 2018).

It is in response to this ongoing and damaging political discourse that I have undertaken this study, to offer an informed counter–narrative beyond the policy dysfunction that overlays remote Aboriginal education services in the NT (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This includes challenges to the ideological and racialised political economy that underwrites these dynamics in social organisation (Altman, 2005, 2009; Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012) and this means investigation of the factors that intersect across the multiple layers of sociocultural dimensions of difference and social justice; one that considers the key variables that exist external to schools, but impact the education system (Keddie et

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4 Centre-right political party.
These include health impacts and how schools are synchronised around competing life priorities and how they fashion community attitudes to engagement. These intersecting variables are complex and interwoven with education policy (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012).

National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results since 2008 illustrate NT remote Aboriginal students are the most ‘underperforming’ group at every level in every jurisdiction across Australia (ACARA5, 2008-2018). While this performance is detailed in Chapter 4, it is relevant here to emphasise two key data sets which reveal the depth of the NTDoE’s policy under-performance. In Table 4 the data has been aggregated to reveal the level of schooling achievement for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, over the period 2015–16. This profile highlights that Aboriginal children are disengaged with the NT’s education system at every level and across every location. While not included here, by Year 9, only 33% of Aboriginal students in the NT are achieving at minimum benchmark level in reading (NTDoE Annual Report, 2016).

### Table 4: NT Student achievement at or above national minimal standard in NAPLAN & NTCET (Government schools) 2015–16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average reading achievement, Years 3,5,7,9</th>
<th>Average numeracy achievement, Years 3,5,7,9</th>
<th>Average reading and numeracy achievement, Years 3,5,7,9</th>
<th>Attained NTCET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>501</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Report, 2015–2016)

Across Australia there has remained an ongoing political subjectification of Indigenous peoples, described by O’Dowd (2009, p. 814) as a campaign of “attack, withdraw, placate and attack again”. This has left NT remote Aboriginal schools in a state of ideological dysfunction within a political ocean of division, underwritten by a social classification of Aboriginal members as ‘without merit’ within a society that values individualism and the simultaneous generation of social inequality and layering that flows from this value (Diamond & Spillane, 2002; Foley et al., 2015). Aboriginal lawyer and leader Noel Pearson stated of this political environment:

The Indigenous education achievement gap is a history of failure that has defied reform attempts for three decades now. There is a predictable cycle of public revelation and consternation about failure followed by a new policy review, a new policy framework and a new commitment. This Groundhog Day seems to occur every 3 to 5 years. (Pearson, 2009, cited in Hughes & Hughes, 2009, p. 1)

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5 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority oversees Australia’s annual NAPLAN tests.
This racism against Indigenous peoples is embedded in every corner of Australia’s education system, as a recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) found that “Indigenous people aged 15-24 were asked about unfair treatment both in and outside of educational settings in the previous 12 months. Over 1 in 3 (34%) reported being treated unfairly because they were Indigenous” (p. 10). In therefore problematising the education policy environment as behind NT remote Aboriginal education inequality, the interactions between Aboriginality, school organisational spaces and Australian capitalism are problematised. That is, while capitalism drives creative ingenuity through the pursuit and construction of social privilege, this leads to interlocked inequality, and social justice struggles reflect this architecture through the myriad ways inequality is constituted through hegemony and power, condensed and anchored by its beneficiaries (Brayboy, 2014; Gillborn, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). The following section outlines how this complex entanglement has been investigated in this study.

1.2 Conceptual framework

Ontology, epistemology and methodology

In tackling the complex nature of NT remote Aboriginal education inequality, a multidisciplinary approach is employed, one that is underpinned by rich interpretations and analysis (Matthews, 2013). This commences with a conceptual view of ontology, given this inquiry requires a defined position within complex human social reality. It is important to highlight here that I understand behaviour as being about purpose, as intertwined with individual and member group identities that reinforce each other in mutual and regulatory exchanges. These are the existential properties around what it means to be human and to experience life beyond the external and contrived constructions imposed by non-member groups. Brayboy and Maughan (2009) detailed this position and the underlying values that link to our gregarious condition of social coupling:

We understand ontologies as capturing the process by which individuals and communities come to think of themselves, are framed by others, and are integrated into their local communities. Further, inherent in both knowledges and ways of being are value judgments—what does it mean to live a ‘good’ life, to be a ‘good’ person, and what are one’s priorities in life? What is good, true, right, and beautiful, as we know these values to be deeply rooted in the ways Indigenous peoples view and engage the world. (p. 4)

While detailed in Chapter 3, it is important to preface that this Story employs social constructionist ontology (see Figure 1), which is concerned with the nature of reality (Andrews, 2012). In this regard, I have adopted an approach consistent with Berger and Luckmann (1991) in Andrews (2012, p. 40) that “reality is socially defined, but this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life, how the world is understood, rather than to the objective reality of the natural world”. That is, NT remote Aboriginal education inequality is not a manifestation of an objective reality of racial ordering, but rather an outcome of domination into patterned and habituated forms of social organisation (Ladson-
This stance thus employs a politically suspicious epistemology to investigate the political economy and the forms of power and cultural hegemony that racialise populations (Vaught, 2006), applying the theoretical framework of critical race methodology.

**Figure 1: Social constructionism: People make and are made by their worlds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social constructionism, socially constructed reality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspicious, political, observer constructing versions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical race methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deconstruction, textual analysis, discourse analysis, case research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theory applied in this study**

In this study, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is utilised as a mechanism of disruption and counter–Story telling to a dominant, ‘white’ narrative (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In respect to this importance of CRT as a tool of countering the consciousness behind Indigenous inequality, Ladson-Billings (1998) stated:

> It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (p. 9)

Similarly, Gillborn (2014, p. 28) highlighted that “CRT views policy not as a mechanism that delivers progressively greater degrees of equity, but a process that is shaped by the interests of the dominant ‘white’ population—a situation where genuine progress is won through political protest and where apparent gains are quickly cut back”. At the core of CRT is a deepening of nuanced knowledge and clarity and to assist in achieving this is my application of Brayboy’s (2006) TribalCrit. In Figure 2 is an outline of this family tree, as sourced from Yosso (2005, p. 71). This study’s application of CRT and TribalCrit are discussed further in section 1.5 (see pages 38-39).
Figure 2: An intellectual genealogy of critical race theory

In this Story, CRT and TribalCrit theory enable a nuanced approach in defining, detailing and discussing NT remote Aboriginal existential realities, as they intersect with an external western ‘white’ education policy environment (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Page, 2015). Within this framework the CRT tenet of interest convergence (Gillborn, 2014) is sourced as a mechanism for analysing NT remote Aboriginal education inequality as a symbiotic offset to mainstream majoritarian structural inequalities in education. That is, education is explored in the context of mainstream majoritarian inequality and layering (Giesinger (2011; Hulgin & Drake, 2011), using critical theory and critical race pedagogy as connected theoretic frames within CRT. These are sourced to explore the binary exchanges in neoliberalism and neocolonialism, as dominant political discourses reflective of an unhinged left-right diametric dualism and the embedded racism that has served to legitimate ongoing discrimination against NT remote Aboriginal families (Moodie, 2018).

CRT is a direct response to persistent and embedded racism and this situates at the core of its application in this study. In this Story, racism toward Aboriginal families by ‘white’ Australia is argued as embedded, and has existed since Europeans first landed on Australian shores, in 1788 (Moodie, 2018). Aboriginal researcher Daniels-Mayes (2016), in discussing the social embeddedness of racism in Australia, makes the following point:

Since the declaration of terra nullius by Captain James Cook in 1770, Australia’s Aboriginal peoples have been constructed in a myriad of destructive ways. Aboriginal peoples have, for example, been dismissed as actually existing, in need of Christianising and civilising, in need of protection, disadvantaged and, generally a deficient people with little or no value (Craven & Price 2012; Moreton-Robinson 2003). (p. 40–41)

Daniels-Mayes (2016) then emphasises “the resulting racism has become so common and embedded into Australia’s narrative that it is seldom questioned, with those of the dominant ‘white’ culture often
being conveniently oblivious to its existence (DeCuir & Dixson 2004)” (p. 40–41). Informed thus by Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth (unpacked in Chapter 8), Figure 3 outlines three layers to my conceptual outline used in this study. The first concerns my unpacking of the anchored nature of the NT remote Aboriginal education policy context (Tatz, 2009). This is followed by detailed description of the background to NT remote Aboriginal education dysfunction, as highlighted in the secondary data and contextualised by primary data and their inter-related connections with the NT’s sociopolitical context. I then turn to my proposed policy responses to the problem. At the core of my proposition is advancing Indigeneity as a foundation for patterned NT remote Aboriginal student achievement in a stratified western education system.

In telling this Story, I draw upon the key findings and analysis to identify where these point in respect to the advancement and functional value of NT remote education policy architecture. Further, and since this study is based within a theory of NT remote Aboriginal existentialism (discussed in detail in the following sections), it was relevant to problematise across the broader debates of social capitalism. This study is thus a flow of social constructionism that includes theory building, which I posit within this research as advancing a form of NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism, in an era of post-capitalism. This necessarily requires navigation of the key tensions that Walter (2015) highlighted around the bounded nature of social capital and social mobility.

**Employing the utility of critical race methodology**

At the core of a CRT framework is application of critical race methodology, which Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define as:

We define critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process. However, it also challenges the separate discourses on race, gender and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialised, gendered and classed experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

**The social construction of ‘race’**

In telling this Story, ‘race’ is understood as a social construction (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). That is, ‘race’ is not simply about the observables used to classify difference, but also the sociopolitical treatment of difference that leads to othering and systemic marginalisation (Gillborn, 2010; Palmer, 2003; Walter, 2016). For this reason, as Solorzano and Yosso (2002, p. 26) have argued, “a critical race methodology in education challenges ‘white’ privilege, rejects notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ researchers, and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color”. Resonating with these points, a key aim of this study is to challenge the pervasive view that the NT
education policy landscape has worked toward equal opportunity, objectivity, meritocracy, colourblindness, and ‘race’ neutrality toward NT remote Aboriginal families (Vaught, 2006). Figure 3 sets out this disruption.

Figure 3: Conceptual outline of study

A key strategy in telling this Story is to use an ‘Aboriginalised’ CRT approach to dislodging and challenging western, Anglo-centric policy actions around NT remote Aboriginal education (Blair, 2015). The history of NT remote Aboriginal education has been one dominated by western ‘white’ ideology and policy actions disastrously overlayed across Aboriginal social realities. This ongoing narrative of capitalism, which evidently has failed, has its foundations within a national education reform agenda of neoliberal performativity (Matthews, 2013; Ranson, 2003), but also in ongoing colonising attempts to assimilate remote Aboriginal families to a western lifestyle that has little appeal or connection to remote Aboriginal, existential realities (Lowell & Devlin, 2010). It is argued that this conflict is situated at the core of a failed education system, predicated on preparing students for a notion of lifestyle that is at odds with living on Country, with Country and in community.
In this study, CRT offers investigative clarity into the ongoing ‘underperformance’ in NT remote Aboriginal schools, through positing that the reasons for this are located within the structures of capitalism and its stratifying properties. While this education layering reflects a complex human world that includes interlocking forces of hegemony and their linked roles in social layering (Gibbons and Telhaj, 2007; Matthews, 2013), I argue this wicked, social mess (Rittel & Webber, 1973) is the result of human agency and within the realms of solution. I adopt a position consistent with Chiang (2010, p. 43) that diasporic “in-betweeness” goes beyond binary constructions of colonised and coloniser (centre and peripheral), serving as a model of resisting the hegemony of western modernisation that attempts to displace their identity and heritage, on the pathway to inequality.

Thus, to problematise what remains an extraordinarily complex and difficult social phenomenon that has local, national and global dimensions (Austin-Broos, 2009) is an attempt to name, describe and critique some of the key underlying causes behind problems in Aboriginal education and to seek more effective policy responses. This need to research policies in their broadened context was highlighted in an Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2004 publication titled The Case for Change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). This review argued that new ways of problematising were required in order for solutions to be found beyond the anchoring experienced. For me, this was instructive that there might be value in pursuing this challenge through investigating the extremes between capitalism and socialism, as well as democracy and fascism, to progress the educational literature toward new ways of understanding the nature of the problem and its solutions.

**1.3 The research questions**

**Main research question**

What policy approaches aimed at NT remote Aboriginal communities will facilitate NT remote Aboriginal students and their families engaging meaningfully and purposefully with a western education system?

In this study I raise questions about the types of education policies aimed at NT remote Aboriginal families. This is because the ongoing evidence suggests they haven’t worked, given the racialised nature of their performance (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This main study question is posed because the institution of education needs to have purpose for its member participants, particularly as connected with individual freedom to participate and where participation leads to improvement and opportunity, as socially constructed at the individual and group levels. That is, it starts with the individual and the choices they make about the complex internal world they occupy and decide whether to participate at all, participate passively or in a fully-engaged way. It is here that increased understanding of how choices are fashioned that policy is understood within the existential envelope of the individual. Webber
(2015) discussed existentialism as a defining framework to viewing beyond the contradictions of behaviour:

Existentialism itself is a particular existential ethical theory. It is a form of humanism in that it views human beings as valuable in themselves and nothing else as having such intrinsic value. But it is existential in that it sees this value as rooted not in human achievements or abilities, but in the structures of what it is to be human. (p. 7)

Intersecting across this inner domain, three elements that impact the trajectory of experiences and meaning are presented in this Story. First, within a world of fluid social complexity and change, identity is a defining point from which cultural members construct meaningful associations, particularly around identity reinforcement and identity politics (Commons, 2008; North, 2006; Smith, 2010). Second, the constructed social world people exist within also produces internal and external barriers, which impact their capacity to engage with education, particularly its level of accessibility within the lived realities of everyday life experiences. Third, the functionality of where education transports remote Aboriginal members is significant because the goal is living on Country, with Country and in community, functioning as a non-negotiable element of identity that is no different than other cultural groups. That is, Aboriginality is not a choice, but an existential foundation in living and experiencing the world (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

**Sub-questions**

To answer the main research question, additional sub-questions need to be answered. These sub-questions provide an opportunity to undertake critical investigation into these three elements of existentialism, as linked to the performance of official education policies targeting NT remote Aboriginal community contexts. These are:

1. Why does the inclusion of Indigenous cultural identities matter in the strengthening of education services targeting NT remote Aboriginal students, particularly since western knowledges and lifestyle are the basis of western education?
2. What approaches in service provision would make NT remote schools more accessible to NT remote Aboriginal students?
3. What policy approaches enable an effective pathway from school to employment on Country and community development, given most remote schools in the NT are small and reflect minimal economic profile?

**Contextualising the sub-questions within education policy debates**

The first sub-question concerning Aboriginal cultural identity remains nebulous and unresolved within contemporary education policy debates, and it is critical to resolve because identity is a fault-line in the NT Aboriginal policy environment (Austin-Broos, 2009). Most schools in the NT are located in Aboriginal communities (refer to Table 2) and this vagueness within policy is a serious structural flaw. Sub-question 2 investigates service accessibility because it is a core issue across a layered society, and service provision needs to flex around the structural obstacles to remote Aboriginal participation. And
third, sub-question 3 problematises education pathways and raises the unanswered existential question of education’s purpose in remote Aboriginal community development.

While there have been major reviews connected to various points within these domains, introduced in section 1.7, these have produced mixed insights into the complex challenges and reasons behind policy failures, as raised by Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017) in their review of Australia’s Aboriginal education policy environment. That is, where the goal of education is to build the knowledge and skills of children to participate well in a majoritarian, western society, a key challenge facing families is how to achieve this while staying Aboriginal. Since the early 1990s, it has been clear that national and State/Territory Aboriginal schooling policy environments were not working (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004) and after 2008, when national testing commenced, NT remote Aboriginal students have reflected schooling achievement levels much lower than anywhere else in Australia. As discussed in Chapter 4, this startling statistic continues to be reported, despite remoteness itself not being a major barrier for this outcome.

**Pursuing contexts to policy functionality**

This study is focused on (i) determining why the pattern of NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality exists, and (ii) identifying policy options that offer a significant difference to the learning opportunities for remote Aboriginal children. The three policy areas that have featured in education debates over the past 45 years of formal schooling in the NT are considered because they underpin questions about the purpose of education in remote communities, as well the type of service provision that enables such a purpose to be realised. Critical race theorists Ladson-Billing and Donnor (2005, p. 296) argued that education for marginalised groups should “move away from achieving more material goods and/or fitting people into the existing unequal structure. Education’s primary purpose must be governing”. If then education is about preparing NT remote Aboriginal children to survive within a western world, such an outcome arguably is achieved through a strengthened Aboriginal identity within the education architecture (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

While requiring purpose in the lives of those it targets, Australia’s adoption of national standardisation has limited the flexibility of school service design, despite a changing and fluid social world and Indigenous realities and identities (Matthews, 2013; North, 2006). This existential domain has largely been obscured or ignored, despite having long played a major pivotal role in shaping remote Aboriginal attitudes and engagement with western education (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). Each research sub-question is underpinned by complex and contestable foundations and these are reflected in debates concerning culture and school and their relationship to a national societal design and structure (Matthews, 2013). In telling this Story, I therefore acknowledge a need to also respond to these foundational challenges that have too often been positioned silently in the background, due to unchallenged assumptions. These foundational challenges are described in Table 5.
Table 5: Study question foundations: Triangulating discourses of culture, school and society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture discourses</th>
<th>School discourses</th>
<th>Societal discourses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is an Aboriginal person in a context of diaspora?</td>
<td>What does a progressive NT remote Aboriginal school look like?</td>
<td>How might NT remote Aboriginality situate within national education standardisation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Aboriginal rights to be different congruent with rights to be the same?</td>
<td>Do NT remote Aboriginal members have rights to an altered schooling system?</td>
<td>Does an Australian education system in standardisation apply to NT remote Aboriginal families?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is to blame for lowered NT remote Aboriginal schooling outcomes: the system or the individual?</td>
<td>Where might individual Aboriginal member responsibility situate in engaging schooling services?</td>
<td>How might a progressive NT and national Indigenous education paradigm look within a system of social and economic stratification?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study investigates spaces seldom visited in inquiries concerning NT remote Aboriginal education inequality and therefore offers opportunity to progress the research literature into new problematised domains (Pring, 2000). The layers within the cultural discourses are used to assist in locating remote families through the filter of Indigenous existentialism theory, which explores what being Indigenous in a NT remote community means for educational performance. This is important, given the intersections this has with a national Indigenous education policy environment and its associated reform toolkit in school discourses.

Aligned with the Effective Schools movement in the United States (US), which is discussed in Chapters 6–7, school discourses relate to government attempts to increase the internal specialisation of school service provision through improving teacher and school leadership quality (Alston, 2004; Hawley & Valli, 1999; O’Brien & Robinson, 2012). The questions relating to this discourse facilitate inquiry into the structural dimensions of schooling spaces and their components, as they are problematised in debates concerning NT remote Aboriginal student performance. This trend perpetuates schools as the main problematised site, commonly fixed on the technical internal features that often displace the pivotal role played by other external key factors that influence success, including institutional racism in education (Keddie et al., 2013; Moodie, 2018; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

Questions concerning societal discourses are also important, since it is where Australia’s education narrative is established within the structures of power. As Matthews (2013) stated:

> In an age of uncertainty, we need to be able to identify and critique processes of education within the confines of the nation-State, and also beyond, as they work through the processes and ideologies of globalisation and the power of the media/popular/consumer culture. (p. 166)

Societal design influences are seldom raised with nuanced detail within national policy debates, despite ongoing evidence that the performance of schools appears closely linked with their demographic
environments, signalling the structural flaws within mainstream, as much as NT remote Aboriginal education, policy settings (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Matthews, 2013). The macro structures of education policy are where the contradictions of policy are reified within a stratified society that is deepening (Davidson, Saunders & Phillips, 2018). These dynamics have overlaid complex forces that interlock to produce the patterns of education inequality across the NT and are investigated on the basis that solutions advocated in this thesis need to factor in these challenges, unpacked in the next section.

1.4 Significance of the study

1.4.1 Pursuing a relevant education design for NT remote Aboriginal contexts

This study is significant because it is concerned with improving an issue of profound public importance. Investigation into the systemic architecture of remote education has been scarce, particularly from an Aboriginal lens of inquiry into the complex policy interactions in NT remote community contexts (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This inquiry is conducted through the lens of an Aboriginal critical race theorist, investigating the systemic forces interacting within the institution of education and the degree by which these define and/or are complicit in producing educational inequality. It is to be noted that the NT context offers a narrative of potential flexing of the structural properties of education systems elsewhere, given this study is about the navigation of capitalism and the reproductive dynamics of education (Diamond & Spillane, 2002; Eisenberg, 2006; North, 2006). As Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) commented on the purpose of critical scholarship:

We argue that the work of critical scholars (from any variety of perspectives) is not merely to replicate the work of previous scholars in a cookie-cutter fashion but rather to break new epistemological, methodological, social activist, and moral ground. (p. 291)

In this study, Aboriginality is advanced as the foundation for improving NT remote education services through privileging a policy framework Story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) which is situated upon Indigenous cultural inclusion, strengthened access to school services, and pathways to employment and development on Country. Through this framework I reify a form of remote Aboriginal social capitalism that channels capital wealth toward a common Aboriginal benefit, as a foundation to improving educational purpose (Brayboy, 2014). And while social capitalism has etched dichotomisations between social and capital (Savage, 2011), this study offers in Chapter 8 its progressive iteration through an Aboriginal political economy long operating in NT remote Aboriginal communities (Altman, 2005, 2009). In telling this counter–Story, a compelling argument is presented that remote Aboriginal schools can be improved beyond their tiered condition through greater policy alignment with their sociological condition; a challenge that remains unresolved within the education literature (Kenway, 2013).
1.5 Locating the researcher

The uniqueness of this study is through the intellectual antecedents of my NT Aboriginality (Delgado & Stefancic, 1994; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005) and my experiences over several decades as a teacher and senior school principal in NT remote and urban schools. I am placed inside this study and this placement is used to investigate and analyse the systemic and localised forces behind NT remote Aboriginal schooling inequality. In this study I employ an emic perspective, as an insider member of the NT Aboriginal community, but I also adopt an etic or outsider perspective through an extensive background in working in the NT education system, to investigate the multi-layered interactions within education policy, across both dimensions (Moodie, 2018). Through this investigation I further adopt a culturally–responsive research approach that privileges Aboriginal world-views and voices (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

This study is also unique because there is a scarcity of education literature by Aboriginal scholars from the NT, on the NT context, particularly those with senior level experiences in remote and mainstream schools. These experiences include a background of working as a teacher and school principal in five regions of the NT (1990-2010), being East Arnhem, Katherine, Daly River, Alice Springs and Darwin (see Figure 4). It is through these experiences that I link the personal and professional with the academic to produce a ground-breaking study; one that challenges a ‘white’ Anglo-centric lens of inquiry along one battleground of inequality and ‘race’ from an inside emic location (Yosso, 2005), and as flows into the battleground of school organisational spaces and the outsider etic domain of western education philosophy and policy construction.

Figure 4: Map of NT regions where this researcher worked in schools
This alignment with the subject is used throughout the study to inject a unique and rich profile of knowledge and life experiences to nuance insights into debates relating to NT remote Aboriginal education (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). Through this investigation, I critically unpack an Aboriginal identity, particularly as linked to schooling since this study rests along a presumed definition and categorisation of Indigeneity; one that is plural and adaptive to a changing internal and external socially-constructed world (Vaught, 2006). I explore identity within the context of NT remote education, as expressed and problematised through the selection and treatment of the policies and key data that reports on Indigenous performance in education. In adopting an Aboriginal CRT approach to telling this Story, it is important here to define what I mean by this, given that CRT offer a range of tenets, and Brayboy’s Critical Tribal Race theory (2006) offers nine tenets.

*Story as theory*

Beyond reasons already outlined, I am compelled to tell this Story because there are relatively few that can speak clearly from the multiple layers and directions that I speak from on this subject. For me, it is about telling the ‘truth’ from an Indigenous perspective (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002); one that tells the Story of an NT education policy architecture underpinned by racism and marginalisation, in the simplest of moral, social and economic terms. It is in this context of Story that Brayboy (2005, p. 439), in discussing North America’s First Nations peoples’ ontological accounts of their history, outlined this view, that: “Story is not separate from theory; [as well.] they make up theory”. Story-telling is about putting faces to the statistics, to show the human costs inflicted, why and how these occur, and to offer an Aboriginal counter-Story around ways to liberate us all from this debilitating social condition (Moodie, 2018; Tatz, 2009).

As I revealed in the Acknowledgements to this study (see page 3), my Story is shaped by the many Aboriginal heroes of my life. Sitting in a room as a boy, listening to the powerful narratives of an Aboriginal life; feeling the existential ‘truth’ of my Aboriginal identity, and what this meant within ‘white’ Australia and my multiple experiences of racism and marginalisation. But now when I turn around to look back on these amazing people, most of whom are all gone, and the responsibility that I have is to tell this Story because readers need to hear and know this story and because it is also about us all, wherever we reside. As Moodie (2018) discussed:

> Importantly, storytelling also provides a way to build empathy, and reach people whose consideration of different perspectives and experiences may have been limited by erasive curricula or mainstream media. Moreover, whilst story has a corrective function in reasserting historically silenced voices, the oral traditions of many Indigenous people demonstrate the importance of story in transmitting information, strengthening identity and effecting cultural change. (p. 34)
Thus, this is a long Story because it is layered and entangled, and because it challenges a western consciousness through the tenets of CRT to reveal the Story and counter–Story, nuanced through bouncing off TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2006), as outlined in the next section.

1.5.1 Applying CRT
CRT is an analytic framework that emerged in the early 1970s from critical legal studies in the US to address matters of civil rights injustice concerning African-Americans (Brayboy, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Writer, 2008). Since then, it’s application has extended into critical race studies, of which Hiraldo (2010, p. 54) identified five tenets: counter–Story telling; the permanence of racism; ‘whiteness’ as property; interest convergence; and the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006; Yosso, 2005). CRT expresses the view that racism is not just about individual acts of discrimination, but also that capitalism’s historical, systemic and ideological manifestations of power is designed to serve, maintain, and protect ‘white’ privilege (Writer, 2008). Thus, expansion of CRT from the mid-1980s produced further tenets, including its application in examining Indigenous education inequalities (Brayboy, 2005; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

But of this, Brayboy (2006, p. 428) stated: “While CRT serves as a framework in and of itself, it does not address the specific needs of tribal peoples because it does not address American Indians’ liminality as both legal/political and racialised beings or the experience of colonization”. This limitation of CRT was challenged by Brayboy (2006), who argued that while it was useful in maintaining that racism is endemic in society, it was limited and he therefore introduced his theoretic framework of Tribal CRT (TribalCrit). For Brayboy (2006), TribalCrit was nuanced by Indigenous researchers undertaking research into Indigenous lives, and he commented in regard to America’s First Nations peoples: “Much of what TribalCrit offers as an analytical lens is a new and more culturally–nuanced way of examining the lives and experiences of tribal peoples since contact with Europeans over 500 years ago” (p. 430). In my study these tenets act as a guide because they offer defined frameworks for inquiry into the way ‘white’ power, privilege and opportunity operate in the construction of NT Aboriginal educational inequality.

Brayboy (2006) identified nine tenets of TribalCrit:

1. Colonization is endemic to society;
2. Policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, ‘white’ supremacy, and a desire for material gain;
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialised natures of our identities;
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification;
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens;
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the goal of assimilation;
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups;
8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being; and
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.

(p. 429)

For this Aboriginal researcher, a culturally-sensitive way of undertaking the research is thus about adoption of the tenets of TribalCrit because it is about a nuanced counter-narrative; one that shifts focus onto the systemic forces that shape and index Aboriginal educational outcomes, and this occurs by staying close to my own Aboriginality (Moodie, 2018). This means respecting and listening to what others are saying and treating their messages with ethical integrity, as detailed in my field research findings in Chapter 5. The best way this study achieves this is by avoiding the perpetuation of terra-nullius-styled research (Daniels-Mayes, 2016).

1.5.2 Understanding CRT tenets and their application

As outlined in Figure 3, CRT has relationships with critical theory, particularly in respect to the binary, political exchanges of neoliberalism and neocolonialism, and as reflected in the intersection of racism and classism. Hiraldo (2010, p. 57) described this approach as working to address the “intersectionality of ‘race’ and other social identities within their analysis”. This is used to strengthen my investigation into the structural components of Australia’s hyper-capitalism and the intersections of ‘race’ and its cloaking within economic stratification (Bone, 2012). As Vaught (2006, p. 84), for example, stated of the US context, “race has been and is used in American capitalism to control and maintain the class system that oppresses both Whites and People of Colour”.

Tenets within Brayboy’s TribalCrit (2006) are thus important because they have strong relevance in telling this Story. This is because it is about my unique voice materialising in a deeply nuanced way that offers authenticity in my application of CRT, based on the same guiding standpoints that:

- NT remote Aboriginal families are subjected to continued colonisation;
- A quest for material gain is at the core of a neoliberal agenda that dislocates and positions social policy as a separated domain to the ‘primacy’ of western economy (Berman, 2005; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Matthews, 2013);
- Aboriginal identities in the NT are politically racialised as inferior and archaic;
- At the core of this study is the advancement of remote communities, based on increased controls, empowerment and self-determination;
• The constructs of knowledge and power are theorised and reified in new ways through my nuanced Aboriginal lens of inquiry;
• This Story aims to disrupt, dislodge and deconstruct a government agenda of assimilation through education and offers capacity for integration;
• I aim to advance Aboriginal identities across changing human realities, as the defining existential plank to remote community advancement and educational purpose;
• I have undertaken field research across several NT remote Aboriginal communities to ensure the stories and voices of families and Aboriginal education representatives are strongly woven into this study (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tatz, 2009); and
• This Story is about social change and policy improvements to Aboriginal education, through an Aboriginal researcher working alongside Aboriginal families.

**Interest convergence and divergence**

In addition to TribalCrit, I also employ CRT’s tenet of ‘interest convergence’ to provide analysis of the interlocking nature of remote community Indigenous inequality (Moodie, 2018). In discussing this tenet, Gillborn (2014, p. 29) commented: “Interest-convergence points to the politics involved in social change and, more importantly, the uncertain nature of even the most impressive-looking victories”. That is, where policy actions appear as converging the interests of non-Indigenous and Aboriginal people, the structural anchoring remains. It is here that Gillborn (2014, p. 29) advanced a counter-weight in ‘interest divergence’: “It is strange that so much attention has focused on interest-convergence (which describes an exceptional set of social and political conditions) rather than its reverse—the much more common position, where racial interests are assumed to diverge”. This points to the insidious intersections across NT remote Aboriginal social justice and NT poor ‘white’ social justice, as, Gillborn (2014) stated:

> Just as Bell (1980b) and Guinier (2004) highlighted the important psychological benefits that poor whites draw from their sense of racial superiority despite their own continued economic marginalization, so periods of economic downturn make interest-divergence an even greater threat to racial justice. When economic conditions become harder, we can hypothesize that white elites will perceive an even greater need to placate poor whites by demonstrating the continued benefits of their whiteness. In both the United States and England, education policy has increasingly been characterized by a neoliberal perspective that actively promotes the supposed interests and concerns of white people. (p. 30)

Arguably, wealth inequality in Australia is a defining variable in the generation of interest divergence and the ‘clumping’ of remote Aboriginal social inequality within mainstream inequality. A recent publication by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and the University of New South Wales (2018) showed that Australia’s unequal wealth distribution is growing. This report by Davidson, Saunders and Phillips (2018) identified several key findings, including that:

> The average wealth of a household in the wealthiest 20% ($2.9 million) is five times that of the middle 20% ($570,000) and almost a hundred times that of the lowest 20% ($30,000). The wealthiest 5% had average wealth of $6 million and the wealth of the highest 1%
averaged $14 million. The wealthiest 20% of households own 62% of all wealth, while the lowest 50% own just 18%. (p. 51)

The findings revealed an increasing of wealth by the rich and a worsening of an Australian under-class:

The average wealth of the highest 20% rose by 53% after inflation adjustment (to $2.9 million) from 2003 to 2016, while that of the middle 20% rose by 32% and that of the lowest 20% declined by 9%. The wealth of the highest 5% grew even more rapidly, by 60% over this 12-year period. (p. 58)

This inequality is covertly reflected on the international stage. The most recent Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2018 identified Australia’s wealth inequality on one level was relatively lower than other countries, but revealed also a concentration of wealth within the elite. This report by Shorrocks, Davies & Lluberas (2018) stated of the Australian context:

High average wealth is combined with relatively low wealth inequality, with 6% of Australians having a net worth below USD$10,000, as compared with 18% in the United Kingdom and 28% in the United States; the proportion of Australians with wealth above USD$100,000, at 67%, is the fourth highest of any country, and approximately seven times the world average; and with 1,596,000 people in the top 1% of global wealth holders, Australia represents 3.2% of this top group, despite 0.4% of the global population. (p. 55)

This international portrait masks to some extent Australia’s structural inequality, particularly as it plays out in the NT, where Indigenous social disadvantage has long been used in claims of NT ‘white mainstream’ disadvantage, enabled through the political treatment of ‘Indigenous as mainstream’ (see Chapter 7). This insidious approach, which the NT Government and its education bureaucracy have long used, is predicated on a view that Aboriginal education policy can be addressed within mainstream majoritarian policy interests. NT DoE annual reports since 1990, show that Indigenous funding from the NT and Commonwealth have not been separately reported, making it difficult to know where the money has been spent, and in this context, Aboriginal educational inequality has perversely functioned as the unaccountable ‘cash-cow’.

The 2017 Indigenous Expenditure Report by the SCRGSP (2017) testified to this view. The report, which provided estimates of government expenditure aligned with the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) major building blocks, revealed unsustainable funding trends: “In 2015-16 the estimated direct expenditure per person was $44,886 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, around twice the rate for non–Indigenous Australians ($22,356) (p. xii)”. Reasons cited included a greater intensity of service use and higher costs of providing service, for example due to location and as targeted services were provided in addition to mainstream services (SCRGSP, 2017).

**Employing social constructionist ontology and epistemologies to navigate the social mess**

In navigating the social mess through application of CRT, I employ this theoretic approach within social constructionist ontology and its politically-suspicious epistemology to investigate the three layers of
individual, school and society. This inquiry standpoint of a social ‘truth’, that people make their social worlds at the same time these worlds make them, makes sense in understanding the social, political and power malaise we are all entangled in. This approach is adopted on a view of treating the subject matter in relation to the individual performer exercising personal choice and responsibility, against an external world; the school organisational level, being the structure, function and service design of education in serving the individual within an agenda of community development; and societal, involving the collective system of racialised western cultural hegemony that shapes school organisational design and function within the framework of capitalism.

This Story is therefore influenced by contributors concerned with Australia’s shift toward hyper-capitalism (Bone, 2012). Writing in the Journal of Australian Political Economy, Lloyd (2008), for example, offered advice around wading into the complex malaise of capitalism and social organisation:

> It seems clear that the way forward in the theory of capitalist political economy is to combine a critical realist conception of social reality, a methodological structurist approach to studying social process, a social systemics and social dynamics theory of structural integration and change over time, and an evolutionary theory of history as the long-run process of systemic dynamics. (p. 43)

While this Story does not use critical realism, my pursuit of problematising NT remote Aboriginal education inequality resonates with this point by pursuing nuanced analysis of the interacting layers of the individual with community and society. This pursuit equally interrogates and moves across the historical backdrop of racialised colonisation, wealth inequities, the embedded nature of ‘white’ Australian racism and the fluidity by which these structures operate in school discourses (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Moodie, 2018).

Aboriginal peoples pursuing local cultural practices and languages in NT remote settings adapt and embrace change in ways that occur within the existential envelope of Aboriginal realities (Blair, 2015). In this respect, I avoid perpetuating colonised accounts of Indigeneity as static, in the past and without relevance in a contemporary context (Brayboy, 2006; Gillborn, 2010; Keddie et al., 2013). The world is in continuous motion and a key caveat is to avoid problematising that fails to factor this movement. Aboriginal families in NT remote communities need to be participants in the opportunities that life offers, and that while this social universe is never static, one opportunity is to locate the general ‘truths’ of how this can be developed and sustained. This means Aboriginal families being equipped with the controls over individual and communal identity and its interaction with the schooling system; of which both are contained within the dynamics of Australian capitalism.
1.6 Challenges to the study and the importance of terminology

A view that NT remote Aboriginal children’s capacity to succeed in the western schooling system is best advanced through their Indigeneity travels through ideological chasms that flow dichotomised to a national Indigenous education policy environment. As exists at present, the policy narrative requires Indigeneity to be suspended behind a western, ‘white’ Eurocentric cultural pyramid (Keddle et al., 2013; Vaught, 2006). But while to these policy designers the Australian education system is more accessible and rendered functional to those making these accommodations, it has clearly not improved NT remote Aboriginal education engagement (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Rahman, 2013), as the data performances in Chapters 4–5 later reveals. This highlights a social world rife with variables, interacting from a multitude of directions, and, even where these may be grouped within large structures, are also subject to motion and change. The ‘truth’ thus becomes relevant to the select sociopolitical environment identified and discussed at the time of undertaking this study.

Throughout this Story, terminology, and its reproductive and discursive influence in shaping consciousness, is a significant consideration (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). As I bring an Aboriginal critical race theory perspective to this Story, care is taken in my choice of words, given this study is about disrupting a western consciousness behind the way Aboriginal families in remote parts of the NT are understood and problematised in education (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Yosso, 2005). This is a key challenge because colonisation is omnipresent and much of who I am and the way I live is reflective of these shaping and influencing forces. This is my challenge throughout this study: to balance my subjective self with an external objectivity and generalised truth. This is the point that CRT provides in looking at the world differently, through a language that enables deep critical analysis. Some key words therefore need to be outlined.

First, I use the term Indigenous alongside Aboriginal. While this term refers to the ‘quality of being Indigenous’, I see this as also a ‘white’ projected label, used to classify Australia’s First Nations peoples as one group (Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997). But alongside this view, this Story is about NT remote Aboriginal identity difference as it intersects across societal stratification, a history of colonisation, racism and classism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). In this way I apply Indigeneity in an explicit way to challenge capitalism’s trajectory of assimilating its population through the rewards given to those aligned within it and its punishment of those seeking to be different (Kuhn, 2004; North, 2006). Indigeneity is defined in this study against Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander plural identities under change, and as implicated across identity, heritage and social justice.

As this Story is based on an Aboriginal identity, it is important to define what I mean by this, given it is treated as a social constant in this research and directly tied to the problem I investigate. The first
point then is that I position identity within its social construction and application, beyond the frames of genetic categories. It is here that Apple (2009) outlined in his discussion on the US context:

Race is not a biological entity but instead is an historically produced and mediated social construct filled with and generated out of structures and identities of exclusion and inclusion. The fact that race is a social construction does not in any way lessen its power. (p. 652)

With this in mind, I argue that pursuits of being and remaining ‘Aboriginal’ within a NT remote milieu requires members to be and remain spiritually attached to Country, to speak an Indigenous language/s, live by local Aboriginal cultural customs, live on Country, and flow these existential qualities around the direction that remote Aboriginal community development takes. And this connection to land is not the same as a westernised standpoint, which looks at land as an opportunity to exploit. It is about recognising the deepest religious relationship between Indigenous peoples with land, as outlined by Blair (2015):

In Australia pre-invasion, Country could not be bought and sold, it could not be fought over. Country had/continues to have a spirit. People are guardians of this spirit. People are guardians of Country. Without Country we as human beings have no space on this earth. (p. xxiii)

For this study, an Aboriginal identity is developed and maintained through mutual identity recognition and the existential sense of belonging and window to a constructed social reality, which includes resistance to the dehumanising experiences of colonisation (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). This existentially-layered definition materialises throughout the telling of this Story, and acutely in Chapter 5, where the voices of NT remote Aboriginal community leaders come to the foreground through my 2017 field interviews.

The other key term used throughout this study, ‘white, also needs clarification. In this Story I use the term ‘white’ in two ways. The first is to highlight the term as a social construction (Daniels-Mayes, 2016), used interchangeably with the term ‘western’ to signal the tight and historic cultural connections. But while this connection also means others that are not genetically white can fit within this definition - for example, Werner (2015, p. 131), stated that “whiteness remains a shifting target with no clear definition” - I use the term ‘white’ also to highlight this term as a racial condition because it is this relationship with Australia’s history of racially ‘white’ British colonisation and brutality that is significant. This is important in highlighting the fact that remote Aboriginal families in the NT have suffered and continue to suffer extreme forms of racism from many ‘white’ Australians and governments (Velardi, 2017).

In telling this Story, it is relevant to also mention there are many colonising words that I come across in this study. The key colonising words I have deliberately chosen to avoid include evolution, given its
connections to Darwinianism and imperialism (Moodie, 2018), and the term ‘Aborigine’, given its etymology lists this term alongside animals and plants and is an extension to the previous concept of Indigenous. Daniels-Mayes (2016) summarised this point: “Aboriginal peoples were ‘protected’ under the myriad of Indigenous flora and fauna legislation, thereby implying that Aboriginal peoples were plants and animals” (p. 81). I and my family fall within this classification, and I have no desire to perpetuate this discursive practice and to propagate a racist narrative by employing essentialist categories of race and identity (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

1.7 Study outline

This study is layered in the way shown (see Table 6) because NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality is a complicated, social mess that is everywhere and ubiquitous across multiple dimensions of power and human relationships (Brayboy, 2014; Moodie, 2018). It is this messy Story that is told by me, an Aboriginal man from Katherine in the NT, and it is a complicated Story that, unless the reader has made this same inner journey, will need to walk with me. And it is not an obvious world, because much of me is colonised. But my ability to name this and draw upon my emic and etic capacities, as detailed in section 1.5 (p. 36), brings unique insights to this study. It is about Knowing the problem from an Aboriginal perspective and it is to be told through my Aboriginal voice; one that is reflective of the thousands of Aboriginal voices that challenge a ‘white’ Anglo interpretation of our shared world (Blair, 2015; Tatz, 2009). As Australian Indigenous academic Nerida Blair (2015) stated:

Story, then, is a pivotal point of ontological and epistemological difference. To continue to layer western lenses of interpretation being guided by their concept of story distorts, devalues and misinterprets Indigenous concepts of Storying. We must realise and appreciate the differences if we are to productively engage in transformative dialogue. (p. xxv)

In telling this Story, it is this long journey that I necessarily take because NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality is complex and needs to be carefully unpacked. Chapters 1–7 sets out this Story of Knowing, and as Delgado and Stefancic (1994/2006) explained, this concerns the story-telling of the intersections of colonisation, classism and racism to understand how these permeate the education performance of Indigenous children. This Story is confronting because I call out racism in education and the omnipresent ‘nameless, blameless’ beneficiaries of structural inequality, those whom Werner (2015, p. 134) identified as “people untouched by criminal prosecution and moral judgement”. But as Vaught (2006) reminds us, this is the point, and it is needed to understand Chapter 8, because it is different from the others. In Chapter 8, I present my counter–Story and it is different because it is my Aboriginal voice disrupting and disturbing and dislodging the dominant narrative (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Readers need to take in all these various components of argument, in order to understand my counter–Story.
This Story comprises nine chapters. In Chapters 1–3, I frame the problem by exploring the nature of NT remote Aboriginal education policy, and what this suggests about the nature of its solution. This includes the knowledge gaps identified within the literature and the methodology required in answering the main study question. In Chapters 4–6, I describe Aboriginal education inequality through examination of the secondary and primary data narratives, and the NT sociopolitical context these are expressed. In Chapters 7–9, I respond to the problem through attending to the policy gaps revealed in this investigation. Here, I conduct analysis of what this Story reveals about advancing education service provision for NT remote Aboriginal families, after which I turn to discussion on how this can be achieved. In Chapter 8, I advance my proposed policy framework on the basis that it responds to the barriers highlighted throughout this Story, and the unresolved debates concerning NT remote Aboriginal schooling. In Chapter 9 I focus on what this Story means in respect to future policy options and social imperatives.

Table 6: Chapter outline

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This study is strengthened through the sourcing of primary data, collected through field research I conducted in 2017, titled *A Case Study on the Impact of Three Major Northern Territory Aboriginal Education Policy Reviews: Learning Lessons Review (1999), Structural Review of the NT Department of Education (2009) and A Share in the Future (2013)*. This field work is integrated into the main study, particularly in Chapter 5, and investigates the impacts of the policy actions stemming from these reviews, with analysis conducted against the research sub-questions. This CRT-led policy analysis is guided by contributors including Gillborn (2014), in citing Ball’s (2006) commentary on the UK experience, and seeks to “expand the concept of policy to include multiple sites or contexts where policy is produced, contested, or reshaped and forms of discourse, including texts and ways of speaking about particular issues and possibilities for action” (p. 27). The sub-questions and their underlying layers of
investigation are thus employed as the foundation to my claimed new knowledge, as reflected within the policy framework described later in this chapter.

**Locating the im/moral dimensions of NT remote Aboriginal education inequality**

In contextualising this challenge, the moral dimension of Indigenous education inequality is considered in this Story since it defines the political discourses, as expressed within a democratic State and the role that national values play in ideals of social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For this Aboriginal researcher, morality sits obliquely across an Australian secularism that employs a ‘mythical’ Judeo-Christianity as a frame guiding national values and political conduct, as raised by Stephens (2008) in discussing the 2008 national Apology. This dislodgement is represented in two national data profiles. The first being a United Nations Human Development Report (2013, p. 143), which highlighted Australia was internationally ranked second behind Norway in the Human Development Index⁶, which included data trends relating to 185 countries between 1980-2012. This index on social and economic data revealed Australia as having performed well in the treatment of its overall population.

Against this, national schooling data for the past decade reveals Indigenous students nationally are the least performing in literacy and numeracy, of which the NT was consistently the lowest performing. An Australian Government Productivity Commission Report by the SCRGSP (2016) identified the most significant variable in producing these widened gaps was the variability in the groups, rather than across the schools. However, such reporting masks a national education system that reflects outcomes tied to cultural and economic factors flowing into schools. The popular reform standpoint that quality teachers sit at the core of pupil learning capacities (Hattie, 2009) is misrepresented as analogous with the teacher professional standards and a standardised student (Matthews, 2013).

As Daniels-Mayes (2016) stated:

> Hattie (2003) asserts that national attention needs to focus on the specific actions of teachers that influence student education outcomes. Conspicuously absent in Hattie’s meta-analysis, however, is any recognition of the significant role culturally-located teaching practices and, more broadly, Aboriginal culture in general are likely to have in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. (p. 58)

In therefore positing the system of education as a site of problematisation, this study investigates NT remote Aboriginal student underperformance through examining how this im/moral education policy environment is related to the structures of Australian capitalism, as a macro landscape influencing such policy conditions, and what this implies for improving the systemic patterning of NT remote Aboriginal education outcomes. Throughout this investigation I attempt to disrupt and dislodge key assumptions

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⁶ Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.
underpinning present debates concerning the national Indigenous and mainstream education environments. While investigations have been treated extensively within the social justice literature and considered by some including Ritchey (2011 p. 7) as wicked or mutually interlocked problems, this Story is guided by a view that socially constructed problems are within the realms of solution. One aim will be to identify and unpack this proposition through a defined set of parameters, guided by the research questions. Within this reside the entanglements of the social and capital, and my theoretic challenge in tying these together, given the dichotomising relationship these polar ends experience.

1.8 Summary

In closing, this chapter has outlined what I consider to be the nature of NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction, and how this Story is to be told. Focused on the NT remote Aboriginal education policy context, this study is ambitious in its attempts to link the Aboriginal existential world of the individual with community, the organisational spaces of schools and the macro external world of fluid variability. This approach is taken because the evidence within unyielding societal layering fuelled by a pervasive belief in the primacy of capitalism (Berman, 2005; Carling, 2009) reveals the need to observe policy actions within their vertical and horizontal planes. This is relevant when moving beyond terra nullius, racialised ‘social-biological’ lines, as an ‘outcome of being Aboriginal’ (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). In Chapter 2, I move to a review of the literature, of which a key focus is to identify the knowledge gaps underpinning the problem and where responsive policy responses reside, considering the issues raised in this introduction chapter about the nature of NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction.
Chapter 2. Identifying progressive research options

2.1 Introduction

Pathways to employment on country? I don’t think they’d be recognised it is important. They simply have never addressed that fundamental question, which is schooling for what? They’ve never thought that step ahead; that’s what hasn’t happened, what’s the purpose of schooling here, and it may be a United Nations declaration that says universal access to education for everyone, but still doesn’t answer the question of what for? You can get a job and leave community, but if there’s no jobs or thinking about how people can be employed in remote communities, then what’s the point? (R2 DoE policy worker).

This chapter tells the Story of the gaps within the educational literature, and at the core of this challenge is critical analysis of the more dominant domains of knowledge, discourses and policy approaches that I argue have failed to improve NT remote Aboriginal student schooling achievement (Matthews, 2013). Calls for new approaches to understanding the nature of systemic underperformance of Australian Indigenous students were raised in a 2004 Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) publication, The Case for Change: A review of contemporary research on Indigenous education outcomes (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). This review found that, nationally, education policies aimed at Indigenous children were often short-sighted and devoid of policy gearing, and argued that future research needed to observe policies within their broadened envelopes to understand better their translation into schools (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004).

In pursuing this challenge, Chapter 2 reviews the discourses of ‘culture’ and ‘school’ and what these mean within an NT remote Aboriginal community educational context (Austin-Broos, 2009; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). While much has been contributed to this field (i.e. Langton, 2011, 2019), a view within this Story is that most of this has been devoid of an expanded contextual framing of the relationships that exist between the individual, community and society, how these link and why they matter (Brayboy, 2014; Yosso, 2005). This absence drives a need for improved models of education policy inquiry, which includes a need to unpack what it means to be an Australian Indigenous person, given the issue revolves around identity, and why this is an issue for education services (Keddie et al., 2013). To achieve this, a review is required in respect to Australian capitalism and the boundaries and limitations this presents for the institution of education and its relationship to cultural and school discourses (Austin-Broos, 2009; Matthews, 2013).

This literature review provides explanation of why the main research question and sub-questions matter, including how each are treated across the study. A key goal of this chapter therefore is to achieve identification and unpacking of the key issues contributing to NT remote education policy dysfunction, as bound within discourses of culture and school, as they are reified and embodied within discourses of society (Keddie et al., 2013). A pursued outcome of this chapter is to extend the educational literature
concerning NT Aboriginal education inequality through problematising the interacting forces that shape the journey and interactions of the individual and their community with government education policy actions. In doing so, this chapter establishes new ways of problematising NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction by progression through the ‘wicked social mess’ of a tiered Australian education system that is locked internally by structural inter-dependencies (Ritchey, 2011; Ranson, 2003). This discussion commences with a review of the structural dimensions of capitalism and its treatment within the left-right political spheres, followed by the flows through individualism and collectivism within the sociopolitical dimensions of Aboriginality and its intersections with a western education system.

2.2 Capitalism and NT remote Aboriginal social inequality

2.2.1 Indigeneity, collectivism and individualism across a societal condition

As commented in Chapter 1, a key challenge in pursuing Aboriginal social justice pathways is that it is bound within economic and cultural hegemonic forces that lock groups to the periphery of social advantage (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015; Moodie, 2018). Thus, while responses by governments to social justice are tempered, these are also subject to the interactions of materialism on individual values and social mobility (Walter, 2015). That is, where a pursuit of collectivism rather than individualism is pursued, being explored cornerstones in this thesis, within a context of rapid, national modernisation, a dichotomisation emerges between such pursuits. For example, Chiang (2010) explored how ideals of pluralism and cosmopolitanism polarise ethnic differences and the ‘ethnic absolutism’ that leads to racism and oppression.

**Individualism and collectivism**

For my Story, debates of individualism and collectivism, with the latter a core element within the NT Indigenous cultural discourses, thus situate obliquely with the gregarious qualities of ‘humaness’ that bind individuals within community-building and the economic world that gives rise to sustenance and prosperity. As Bauman (2000, 2004) outlined, this plays out within social complexity in ways that create perpetual imbalance between individualism and collectivism. And, of further consideration, competition as a force in driving creativity, ingenuity and gain are founded upon individualism and rewards for effort that reify the privileged as ‘deserved’ recipients of a life that marginalizes others (Solomon et al, 2005). This deep conflict between social and capital, individual and collective, have significant philosophic and practical tensions concerning my pursuit of ‘Indigeneity as solution embedded within ideals of social capitalism’.
2.2.2 Keynesian economics and gravitations to the neoliberalist, free market

In my Story, jousts between socialism and capitalism reflect diametric locations in individualism and collectivism within a trajectory of western globalisation dominated by gravitations to neoliberalist, free-market principles. For example, during the early 20th century, Keynesian economics emerged, founded on a belief that government regulatory intervention was needed as a response to stabilising European countries experiencing economic depression. As discussed by Murray (1996), this form of regulated capitalism advocated that full employment (labor was the most pivotal element of production), controlled investment and government controls over fiscal policy (taxation, public spending), rather than monetary policy (money flow), was at the core of economic stability. In simple terms, this view held that economic downturns could be corrected by governments stimulating the economy through large-scale public investments and lowered taxation to stimulate employment and consumer spending (Murray, 1996).

However, by the end of WW2, attempts at State intervention capitalism were denounced by many as unworkable, given in part a dominant view at the time that much of the atrocities of conflict were by nation-States that had pursued similar, socialist ideals (Murray, 1996). Bone (2012), for example, discussed of this period:

Integral to the form of capitalism that emerged from the neoliberal counter-revolution was that capitalism should once again operate as freely from regulation and constraint, political or otherwise, as possible and, crucially, that profit maximisation and the enhancement of shareholder value should supersede all other considerations, including the wider social impact of business practice. (p.655)

Murray (1996, p.62) highlighted that against this backdrop, neoliberalism accelerated from 1938, through the anti-Keynesian, Mont Pelerine Society in Paris, a group of Europeans known as the “Austrian School, whom escaped WW1 Nazi prison camps and rejected ‘all things collective’, believing this was the pathway to totalitarianism”. As discussed by Lloyd (2008), State controls were reduced and the tempered deregulating of financial markets dominated the following 80 years, and along with this the recurring tensions within the design properties of a neoliberal form of capitalism remained, not just within debates concerning economics, but also as Bone (2012) discussed, concerned the reshaping of social and moral dimensions of a capitalist narrative:

What seems clear is that the unrestrained greed that capitalism at the moment seems to be propagating is the chief threat to our morality, traditional or otherwise, as well as being socially and even economically destructive. The structure of moral ecology in our society is badly torn. (Bone, 2012, p.654)
But, and while for my Story these outcomes and contests of the political right are well detailed (Ranson, 2003), others including De Vylder (2008, p.79) identified that 20 years after the 1980’s, an expanding tension in social and economic inequality has also emerged from leftist, Keynesian-styled government invention. In discussing this tension concerning the 2008 US subprime crisis, Swan (2009) argued such approaches had also failed to prevent hyper de-regulation occurring, stated:

One of the defining features of the subprime crisis is to see it as a natural outgrowth of a policy of utilising both public funds and regulatory pressure to increase home ownership, especially by minorities such as African-Americans and Latinos. (p.124)

Such challenges underline what Lloyd (2008) highlighted as the incapacity of centralized governments in pursuing balanced economic policy and a gravitation to the political right; despite social unrest reflected in anti-capitalism, anti-free market remonstrations, such as that experienced in Melbourne city during the 2011 ‘occupy Melbourne’ campaign (South & Levy, 2011).

2.2.3 Anti-capitalism movements and anchored gravitations to neoliberalism

Such structural tensions thus have significant challenges for this Story, given my attempt to navigate these forces within a sea of continuous change. For example, Bramle & Minns (2005, p. 105) outlined the problematic options facing social movement have moved beyond the scope of government controls, which “focused mostly on the alleged decline in the power of nation-States in the face of rampant multinational activity (Bove & Dufour, 1999; Klein, 1999; Monbiot, 2000; Bircham & Charlton, 2001)”. In this regard, these structural tensions contested within the political left-right duel seem unlikely to be successful where they have been about halting, rather than strengthening capitalism or observed to be expanding Australia’s social welfare net.

Within this social milieu, the position I therefore have adopted in searching for a middle position (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005), where the social and cultural frames serve to strengthen an NT remote Aboriginal economy and its linked education performance (Altman, 2005; Tatz, 2009), is worthwhile. As I gestured in Chapter 1, to pursue just a political left, which much of Australian Indigenous rights movement has historically been allied (Langton, 2011), has for me perpetuated pursuits of Indigenous cultural presentation that lack a factoring of the fluidity in Indigenous Australian identities that also require functional calibration within the political economy (Bramble and Minns, 2005).

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7 A US national financial crisis 2007-2010 and real estate market collapse, led by government regulatory invention to increase home ownership rates for underprivileged families, and also by risky and predatory financial lending practices to those on low incomes.
2.2.4 **Problematising Indigenous education inequality within Australia’s political economy**

For my Story, this presents significant challenges, but also opportunities, particularly as concerns my goal of Indigeneity as solution, within a broader western ocean of individualism and materialism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). In discussing this impact of capitalism, Bone (2012,) stated:

> Both the ideological perspective of neoliberalism, together with the deregulated organisational arrangements and structures that it has demanded and fostered, have coalesced to drive a process that de-socialises the human psyche, undermining civility and empathy within an increasingly disorderly and conscienceless socio-economic milieu. (p.653)

Thus, and while this anchoring presents significant concern for ideals of social justice and Indigenous educational inequality in the NT (Harris, 2006), my Story explores and responds to the hidden undercurrents that influence and shape discourses of culture and school, and with it, opportunity to define potential systemically-responsive policy platforms toward improving Indigenous education outcomes in the NT. These platforms are discussed later in section 2.5, though prior to this, the interactions of Indigeneity and the NT’s sociopolitical context are discussed because this context and its history of colonisation and embedded racism (detailed later in Chapter 6) is the epicentre of my Story.

2.3 **NT Indigeneity and sociopolitical discourses**

2.3.1 **NT remote Aboriginal education inequality: Locating the dominant discourses**

A scan of the literature concerning Indigenous social inequality reveals a broad range of contributions situated around culture and conflict, including a standpoint that culture shapes behaviour and its extensions in participation and engagement (Taylor, 2010). This includes identity as a central plank from which member groups interact with their external worlds (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015) and that raciologies are at the core of Indigenous social and economic inequality (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Reynolds, 2005), coupled against a dissecting theme in the right of Indigenous members to be Indigenous (Brayboy, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Stewart-Harawira, 2005). This standpoint has been pervasive in shaping discourses of cultural relativism in the education literature over the past 30 years, treated through qualitative studies to explain cause and effect relationships concerning Indigenous social inequality and its extensions into educational inequality (Fisher & Ziviani, 2004; Keddie et al., 2013). In canvassing the literature concerning NT remote Aboriginal educational underperformance, two dominant discourses emerge.

First, since 1972 debate has been ongoing around a view that NT remote Aboriginal schools require bilingual programs, as a model more relevant to Aboriginal children’s learning and cultural needs, and
at the core of this has been international research testifying that children learn best if they understand the language used in school. This means learning through their first language and it means learning through their Aboriginality, rather than despite it (Benson, 2015; Devlin, 2011). For example, in commenting on the African experience, Walter (2000) stated:

The evidence suggests that countries which do not develop and implement mother tongue education programs will incur long-term disadvantages outweighing any short-term gains that result from using only one language of education. (p. 2)

Bilingual education was delivered across seventeen NT remote Aboriginal communities between 1972 and 1995 (Devlin, 2011), however, declined by 1997, based on NT Government claims it had been a failure (Collins & Lea, 1999). This action, fuelled by a national policy trajectory in building schooling accountabilities, failed to consider that the model represented a recognition paradigm of social justice that placed identity as a foundation to education (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). Since then, bilingual education has remained captured within conservative political debates within the NT, much the same as in the US (Fitts and Weisman, 2009; Hulgin & Drake, 2011). Consequently, and since this time, discourses of culture in the NT have remained wrapped within constricted debates concerning language, identity and schooling social justice (Collins & Lea, 1999; Devlin, 2011; Fabac, 2010).

Alongside this discourse has been a government policy environment constructed along standardisation frameworks, including teaching and curriculum (Hughes & Hughes 2009; Matthews, 2013; Rahman, 2013). This approach, which forms the NT’s policy trajectory, pursues a paradigm that has demonstrated limited success in changing the patterns of inequality along lines of ‘race’ and wealth in Australia, as much as elsewhere, such as the US (Hulgin & Drake, 2011; Klenowski, 2011; Laguardia & Pearl, 2009). Commenting on the New Zealand (NZ) context, Hattie (2009, p. 5) stated: “Sooner or later the success of the NS [National Standard] policy is evaluated. A typical finding is that it is very hard to change the mean score of the nation”. At the core of this belief is that quality education outcomes are achieved through school workforce specialisation, accountability, specialised toolkits and standardisation in curriculum, assessment and reporting (Rahman, 2013; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

**The limitations and boundaries of culture and school discourses**

Considering the performance inertia revealed in reports such as NAPLAN (see Chapter 4), these two dominant discourses are understood in this study as a by-product of their policy separations, reflective of their positivist and interpretivist dualistic locations, as discussed by Hulgin and Drake (2011); this despite their individual limitations in achieving ‘truth’ around the nature of patterned NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality (Bond & Fox, 2001; Lees, 2007; Savage, 2011). That is, I argue that where such discourses have sought to define the phenomenon of NT remote Aboriginal schooling performance as either about culture or school specialisation (Keddie et al., 2013), each have often
spoken past the other; offering parts of the solution, but rarely extending beyond the vertical nature of their policy locations, across context (Allen, 2004; Fisher & Ziviani, 2004; Sensevy et al., 2007).

These ontological jousts struggle to reconcile their limitations in linking cause and effect between the micro world of individuals and the macro environments they and community are situated (Cliff & Nesbitt, 2005; Pring, 2000). Thus, an objective truth either found within the existential world of the individual (culture and lived experience define engagement with an external world) or that universal social laws govern individual and group social journeys (i.e. good schools produce good kids) have served to drive as well as to divide understanding into Indigenous educational inequality (Cliff & Nesbitt, 2005; Tatz, 2009). For this researcher, such milieu has fuelled an ideological and political maelstrom flowing through an Australian education policy environment, limiting its capacity to shift schooling patterns (Allen, 2004; Coppieters, 2005; Ghesquière, Maes & Vandenberghe, 2004).

While such knowledge inquiry has produced inroads into the lived experiences of Indigenous children within the schooling system, this has achieved scant clarity in the structural relationships defined between the sub-layers of a tiered Australian society or spatially across time and social complexity. Bauman (2005), for example, was seminal in drawing attention to the interactions of the individual with their constantly changing world, and it was in this regard that Ghesquière, Maes and Vandenberghe (2004) argued that observation and interpretation are continuously interwoven in daily life, where social reality and knowledge exists in continual flux, and that certainty cannot be obtained (Bell, 1998; Cliff & Nesbitt, 2005). While such tensions are known and reflected in movements toward social constructionist ontology that investigates social phenomena within their environmental and political dynamics (Blanche and Durrheim, 1999), this recognition is not reflected within Australia’s neoliberal education policy architecture targeting NT remote Aboriginal students.

As a result, there has long existed within official Australian government education policies a gravitating focus toward the improvement of schools premised on vertical and narrowed policy modelling (Corrigan and Mellor, 2004; Matthews, 2013). At the core of this condition has been what Ball (2013), about the British context, stated:

Despite the relentless and repeated criticisms of State schooling and the ongoing reform of the school system, the relationships between opportunity, achievement and social class have remained stubbornly entrenched and have been reproduced by policy. Inequalities of class and race remain stark and indeed have been increasing since 2008. (p. 4)

Arguably, this condition has resulted in a state of problematising situated in ideological inertia where the ‘truth’ concerning NT remote Aboriginal educational ‘underachievement’ has been left suspended in open-ended “phenomenological debates that have struggled in achieving practical relevance to improving such state” (Cliff & Nesbitt, 2005, p. 14). Central to this Story has been Indigeneity and what
it means in a changing world of social inequality and the entanglement of identity categories, particularly as concerns identity, heritage and needs, now discussed.

2.3.2 **NT remote Indigeneity, identity change and diaspora**

As a discourse concerning Indigenous educational inequality, what constitutes Indigenous culture and membership have been contested through diasporic identity shifts that corrupt its location, but also due to the deeply etched politicisation of this identity (Keddie et al., 2013; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). For example, after analysing seven hundred separate pieces of legislation dealing with Aboriginal families, McCorquodale (1986, p. 9) identified that since ‘white’ settlement there had been at least sixty-seven classifications and definitions ascribed to Indigenous peoples, fuelling legal ambiguity and arbitrary and variable treatment within legal debates. This has been the case for Indigenous groups nationally and within the NT, including for this researcher who has long had to justify an Aboriginal identity against a national Australian identity, despite the latter construct being situated ambiguously within a broadened national multicultural reality of mixed racial identities (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

Intersecting across identity, Indigenous culture has been encapsulated in racial difference as a source of conflict, as implicated with extreme colonial violence and its radiation into national ideals of reconciliation (Moodie, 2018; Tatz, 1999, 2007, 2009). This has been my experience of being categorised as Indigenous by the State, where a personal heritage of Indigenous and non–Indigenous ‘pedigree’ has been subjected to scrutiny from both groups, functioning in ways that galvanises members into groups via defined participant entry (Code & Zaparyniuk, 2010). Such ‘markers’ have superficially concerned skin colour and lifestyle connected to a traditional historic path, of which attachment to Country and an Indigenous language have been validations of identity (Carlson, 2013). These experiences are not unique. Ang (2001), for example, has been a significant contributor in exploring diaspora involving racially Chinese members that do not speak a Chinese language nor practice Chinese culture.

Therefore, several factors are relevant when seeking to articulate what it means to be Indigenous within a world of hybrid and dynamic identities and the challenges these produce from a social justice perspective. While what constitutes a ‘real’ Australian Aboriginal member from the perspective of ‘racial pedigree’ and ‘lifestyle’ has been pervasive within social justice debates (Carlson, 2013), these reflect scant departure from the period of Australian colonisation, when mixed heritage members were classified full blood, half-cast and quadroon (Austin-Broos, 2011; Gray, 2011; Rowse & Smith, 2010). These exchanges have not produced inroads into understanding such conditions and situated members into confused identity constructs struggling to reconcile identity linkages of an historic past and rejecting the premise of being forced to do so (Jenkins, 2000; McCorquodale, 1986). The expressions
of such dynamics are witnessed across Indigenous communities that are often labelled as dysfunctional; dislodging Indigeneity as archaic and without worth (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

In this way, the problematic treatment of Indigeneity has conversely illuminated conflicts within a western identity struggling to ‘normalise a civilised, moral encoding’ against a backdrop of discrimination and economic and social marginalisation of Indigenous families (Austin-Broos, 2011; Stewart-Harawira, 2005). Consequently, Indigeneity has emerged as a political construct defined by a ‘white’ cultural hegemony nestled within a tiered economy, and its flows into fragmented public and social policy modelling (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). It is here that Walter (2000) illuminated the less tangible costs to consider in mapping a school learning design that is incongruent with the lives of those targeted, and highlighted the political, social and cultural costs that are an unsustainable burden carried by the host society and its class system (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012) - a point made also by Ornstein (2007) in discussing a US trajectory.

Against this social maelstrom Indigenous identities remain, are adapting and are valued by a growing number of Australians who view their Indigenous heritages as having an existential role within contemporary Australia. A *National Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Survey 2008* (Australian Bureau of Statistics (hereafter ABS), 2008) offered evidence to this claim. As revealed in Table 7, identification of who is an Aboriginal person is as important as how to integrate this identity across a national psyche and education system. This is because inequality is bound along political and economic lines, of which racial difference flows and is conflated as a key causal agent (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). Reconciliation is thus about how ‘white’ Australia reconciles its own non–Indigeneity, and as Table 8 reveals, this is particularly acute in the NT where the ratio of the Indigenous population is large and remote.

**Table 7: Selected indicators of cultural attachment, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people aged 4 years and over, by remoteness area, Australia (2014-15)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural attachment tags</th>
<th>Non-remote %</th>
<th>Remote areas %</th>
<th>Australia %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifies with clan, tribal or language group (age 15+)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks an Australian Indigenous language (age 4-14)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks an Australian Indigenous language (age 15+)</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaks mainly an Indigenous language at home (age 4-15+)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in last 12 months</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2016)
Permeating discourses of Indigeneity in the NT has been the crucible of violence, echoed from an historic past into contemporary debates that seek to lighten the darker shades of ‘whiteness’ by so-called history wars, where the narrative of colonisation has been contested by those arguing that genocide never happened (Tatz, 1999). For instance, in National Identity and the Corruption of History, controversial Australian author Windschuttle (2006) argued that evidence used in constructing historical images were fabricated. He claimed, “the direction taken by the theory of history under the influence of postmodernism is ultimately self-destructive” and that historical events were imaged through political and racialised divides, leading to Indigeneity being used as an excuse for non-participation in western lifestyle (p. 34). Lester (2006) called this a naïve position, arguing that “Windschuttle would like us to give credence only to officially recognised ‘witnesses’ of atrocities against Aborigines [sic], most of whom were actually participants in the events” (p. 238).

In discussing this violent history, Halloran (2006) pointed out that during Australia’s early colonial period these injustices included war and slavery, theft of land, theft of women and attempts at destroying key Aboriginal institutions of law, education, health and religion/spirituality, on top of introduced diseases (see also Ober, Peeters, Archer, & Kelly, 2000; Reynolds, 2001). As McQueen (2010) also stated:

The colonial neither represents the legal or illegal, but rather represents the lawless. Certainly, in Australia there were, by the early nineteenth century, many who saw it as no sin to remove or drive out Aborigines [sic] from tribal lands without compensation. (p. 260)

This violence was always destined to infiltrate an Australian societal foundation seeking legitimacy within a future democratic State that based itself on equality and fairness, including its treatment of Indigeneity (Gray, 2011). O’Dowd (2009) described this history as fermenting illegitimate ideals of a future nation-State, impacting what Duffy (2008) argued was a central ideology and policy-formatting across a developing nation-State marketing its identity on notions of ‘civility and morality’. While movements in social democracy permeated Australian politics (Bailey, 2009; Langton, 2011), this became increasingly tempered within capitalism. That is, while the 1967 referendum delivered the right to be included in the national census, assimilatory measures propelled Indigenous members toward a western economic system and the complexities this produced for ideals concerning integratory shifts (Austin-Broos, 2011; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

From the late 1960s statutory mechanisms designed to generate Indigenous self-determination, governance and rights accelerated, underwritten by an assumption that the lives of Aboriginal members, such as myself, would improve through increased autonomy. In constructing economic opportunities for Indigenous families, the Whitlam Labor\(^8\) government in 1972 established an Indigenous Land Rights

\(^8\) Centre-left political party
Commission (Nettheim, 2007). However, the assimilatory dynamics that tagged economy to racial categorisation remained confounded. From 1970 an attempt of classifying Indigenous people through biological evidence became problematic, especially for this researcher’s brown skin, which denoted an identity paradox of both and neither. At this time the acting Commonwealth statistician, JP O’Neil, in recognising the limitations of biological markers, introduced sociological categorisation, enabling the choice of identifying as Indigenous (Rowse & Smith, 2010).

Throughout this history an assumed higher-order moral ‘whiteness’ was positioning Indigenous members as deficient subjects of inquiry in need of fixing, underpinned by an embedded western imperialism and racism aimed at First Nations peoples (Austin-Broos, 2009, 2011; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Tatz, 2009). For example, while this ‘maturing’ enabled Indigenous participation, economic currents influenced the racialised categorisation and treatment of Indigenous families, including my own diasporic identity (Austin-Broos, 2009, 2011; Carlson, 2013). I became aware of my state-categorised ‘half-caste’ labelling from the 1970s, and the ‘need’ to justify proportions of my Indigeneity, and how this would be legitimised within an ambiguous legal system. McCoruodale (1986), for example, identified that this led to convolutions within the legal definition of Australian Indigenous groups, Cowlishaw & Morris (1997) summarised:

The question of ‘authentic’ Aboriginality persists. The significant question of ‘authentic’ non–Aboriginality does not. The stereotypes of ‘contemporary’ and ‘traditional’ Aboriginality, though different and opposed, both operate against the interests of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people will be, and are, blamed when the category falls apart, even though greater capacity to manipulate the representational processes rests elsewhere. (p. 62)

In telling this Story, Indigeneity has thus been politicised as policy measures have bounced between social and economic policy formatting, seeking to navigate Indigeneity as identity, heritage and need (Carlson, 2013). This dynamic is evident in former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard’s hostility in not apologising to Indigenous Australians for their treatment, and equally, in former Labor9 Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s discursive narrative of ‘closing the gap’ on Indigenous ‘deficits’ (Gorringe et al., 2011). In Australia, as in other western countries (Hulgin & Drake), there has been an ongoing agenda of assimilation through a western political economy (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; North, 2006). Altman (2005) argued this has been demonstrated in the erosion of Indigenous voices in land rights, native title, ATSIC10 and CDEP11, along with policy injections of private home ownership

9 Centre-left political party.
10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
11 Community Development and Employment Program
This trajectory is pronounced in the NT, of which Indigeneity arguably remains an unresolved fault-line in education (Austin-Broos, 2011; Tatz, 2009).

2.3.3 **NT remote Indigeneity: An intersecting fault line to inequality**

The NT’s demography is different to the rest of Australia and national Indigenous education policy approaches strike across its population in ways more abrasive to the rest of Australia. The NT has a small population with a small economy, with a lowered economic management profile against the nation’s highest per capita needs, and the highest ratio of Aboriginal peoples (see Chapter 4, p. 128). This demography, shown in Table 8, predicts the NT Indigenous population will grow to 94,000 by 2030 (NT Government, 2011, p. 11). This places remote Aboriginal families along structural fault-lines of inequality, particularly due to the way Indigeneity is reified within sociopolitical discourses as a barrier to progress (Austin-Broos, 2011). Arguably, policy then materialises in exchanges around three confounding domains of inquiry: inequality due to Aboriginality, inequality due to remoteness, and inequality due to both. Each, by extension, implicates economic and political relationships with broader societal structures.

### Table 8: Indigeneity: A national profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Major cities</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Outer</th>
<th>Remote</th>
<th>Very remote</th>
<th>ATSI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>172,620</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>37,990</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>155,825</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>30,430</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>69,664</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>19,625</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>56,776</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>5,185</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Reports, 2013–14)

Exploration of the literature suggests that positions that subjectify Indigenous members have ontologically stagnated. Central to this view has been criticism of non-Indigenous researchers as having facilitated a western cultural pyramid domination of how Australian Indigeneity is understood (Andrade, 2009; Collard, 2007). This ethnocentric state of social inquiry has slanted focus from privileged ‘white’ standpoints, referencing other Indigenous groups such as in the US and NZ that have masked the issues impacting Australia (Short, 2003). Moreton-Robinson (2011, p. 426), for example, commented: “Black identity formation in the United States is predicated on a narrative of slavery, not colonisation and dispossession; making claims against the nation-State for equality and civil rights,
rather than also Indigenous sovereignty as is the case in Australia”. Australian colonisation has thus continued through imperialist research etchings othering Aboriginal families. This official ‘white’ history has interwoven neocolonialist viewpoints into capitalism and its neoliberal narratives, as per the US experience (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; O’Dowd, 2009).

While insights gained from Indigenous academics have produced claimed Indigenous ontologies, debates from within have also occurred, particularly in the stifling of Indigenous voices (Altman, 2005; Tatz, 2009). Langton (2011), for example, has argued that many non-Indigenous anthropologists’ work has not been taken seriously, because they aren’t Indigenous:

This problem has contributed to a relative absence of analysis of the economic history of Indigenous Australians, fostering instead an approach that prioritises the political and cultural rights of Indigenous people above the kinds of life-enhancing circumstances that are necessary for them to participate in the economy and create wealth. (p. 1)

This standpoint, however, grates against the NT remote context, given Indigenous culture situates existentially at the core of remote Indigenous advancement. For this Aboriginal researcher, Langton’s (2011) view reveals that much problematising has not extended beyond the polar axis of individual choice, as exercised against an unrelenting system that punishes capacity to do so (Coppieters, 2005). For the NT remote Aboriginal context, this has been compounded by policy cycles constructed through government agencies that externally impose narrowed policy modelling across communities, to whom failed outcomes are commonly ascribed (Ball, 2013; Klenowski, 2011; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Whelan & Clarke, 2010). This binary coupling of neoliberalism and neocolonialism (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Noffke, 2009) was earlier observed by Stewart-Harawira (2005, p. 221) as reflective of a capitalist narrative in the “privatisation of goods and services and the contradictory advocacy of freedom and tightening of civil liberties”.

In this respect Ornstein (2007) argued that at the core of structural conflict was Indigenous sovereignty and how Australia’s legal system was used to deny this outcome. Gruenstein (2008) discussed how successive federal governments had, through legal ambiguity, used the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to argue that non-Indigenous rights were eroded through the legislation, despite the existence of international and customary law, as enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Nettheim, 2007). While acts by governments challenging the rights of Indigenous Australians through what Daniels-Mayes (2016, p. x) referred to as the “perpetuation of dispossessing colonisation”, Gruenstein (2008, p. 476) highlighted that the CERD generally discouraged preferential treatment of Indigenous groups. In Australia, this arbitrary legal debate has functioned to temper an excess of Indigenous inequality, rather than to produce social equality. Each outcome being a contemporary ‘white Australia’ im/moral identity conflict.
In this ideological free-fall, Indigeneity in Australia is contested amongst Indigenous scholars, particularly those frustrated with the limited outcomes of a rights agenda (Altman, 2005, p. 3). Presenting at a 2011 Berndt Lecture\(^\text{12}\), Langton (2011) for example argued a case of advancing economic debate over a cultural and political position that had left Indigenous groups with endemic and passive welfare. In discussing individual vs collective rights, Langton (2011) proposed a voluntary system to allow Indigenous communities to engage in interventionist programmes and employ policies aimed at encouraging economic advancement. These included income management and quarantining triggered by events including “child neglect or abuse, failure to send children to school, domestic violence, drunkenness and drug abuse” (Langton, 2011, p. 19–20). Along with Pearson, an Indigenous anti-welfare campaigner who referred to welfare as a “gammon\(^\text{13}\) economy” (Martin, 2002, p. 317), Langton (2011) signalled the inertia that resides within sociopolitical debates, particularly when constructed on vertical problematising.

In telling this Story, I argue that while such neoliberal standpoints, which draw upon rational-linear and essentialist logic (Duignan, 1988) act to legitimise intervention and punishment in the intersections of wealth inequality and Indigeneity, they also deflect Indigenous social justice and educational complexities across an Australian majoritarian population (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Westwood, 2003). For example, the well-documented abuse of children at the hands of a morally bankrupt Catholic church is a case in point. Budiselik, Crawford & Chung (2014, p. 567) argued that official responses to this cover-up were “driven more by political forces and less a government desire to establish a considered response to past abuse and to prevent it”. As discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 23) an earlier SCRGSP Report (2011, p. 275) identified that the incidence of Indigenous child abuse was in fact extremely high in Canberra, with substantiated claims almost double that of the NT.

In this discursive narrative, crimes attributed to NT remote Aboriginal families facilitate acts such as the NTER (2007) (Gruenstein, 2008), which are often diluted within a mainstream ‘white’ context and a consciousness that others Indigenous First Nations peoples against its own self-indulgent ethnocentric lens, despite its contradictory and dishonest construction (Moreton-Robinson, 2011). This deficit positioning of Indigeneity is devoid of the social frames in which human behaviour occurs, as highlighted by contributors such as Subasic and Reynolds (2009). For example, and while discussing that “reconciliation as a peacemaking paradigm emerged out of the need for an innovative response to the atrocities and human rights violations that occurred throughout the twentieth century” (p. 243), it is this contradictory sociopolitical dimension concerning ideals of Indigenous engagement that remains omnipresent and ingrained within a fractured, ‘white’ westernised psyche.

\(^\text{12}\) In honour of anthropologists, who spent many years researching the Yolngu people in Northeast Arnhem Land (NT) during the 1950s.

\(^\text{13}\) Gammon is an Australian Indigenous term that means non–genuine.
It is within this polarised and dichotomising dynamic that contributors such as Langton have sought to be practical and have less focus on the symbolic, but underpinned by a conflated assumption that Indigenous Australia wants to engage in a society that desires progress through assimilatory acts designed to delete their identity (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011). As McQueen (2010, p. 272) highlighted when discussing these sociopolitical impacts of colonisation: “This desire to be loved by those whose culture one had effectively destroyed, and whose existence had been reduced to a vertiginous state selectively ignores the footprints to contemporary contexts”.

Similarly, Subasic and Reynolds (2009) commented:

As a policy aimed to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, ‘practical reconciliation’ is also in sharp contrast with affirmative action approaches that (unlike ‘practical reconciliation’) explicitly recognize and aim to counter the effects of historical and ongoing prejudice and discrimination. (p. 244)

In wading within this social mess, neocolonialism and neoliberalism are considered here as expressions of power that manifest from a capitalist gravitation to materialism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). As Halloran (2007, p. 1) commented when discussing Indigenous reconciliation in Australia: “To afford primacy to neoliberalism and neocolonialism as concerned predominantly about economics and culture is an incomplete construct”. For this study, this means closer investigation of the intersecting points of practical action and affirmative action, since in this Story they are embedded within the bipolar core of a national Australian identity. This requires Indigeneity to be understood from the location of class, because it is here that poverty and otherness exchange and raciologies have foundation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). That is, it is this domain where the social webbing of a majoritarian society functions as an agent in the strengthening or weakening of Aboriginal social justice, and where Indigeneity cuts into a troubled ‘white’ identity and consciousness, fed by capitalism.

In this regard, where a Marxist theory of dialectical materialism holds that consciousness is shaped by the material world (Fuchs, 2015; Remley, 2012), it is embedded within class struggles, which Nixon (2012, p. 439) conceived as a “critical political economy”. Relevant to Indigenous inequality, this view asserts that human consciousness, as a product of material, drives conflict within, as much as between member groups. In discussing NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality, this assists in navigating the contradictions that situate within the politics of Aboriginal social justice, as much as the broader contests between the rights of the State and individuals (Westwood, 2003), which McCorquodale (1986, p. 24) said had “placed a higher faith in being white than in being democratic”. Thus, ‘white’ cultural members construct ideals of morality, justice and equality that are influenced by social standing, and NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality is impacted by this dynamic (see Chapters 6-7 concerning interest convergence/divergence).
It is in this regard to the tempering of Aboriginal social justice that investigation by Halloran (2006) on the enablers of advancing Australian reconciliation was conducted. This investigation is useful here because it points to a strengthening of non–Indigenous members’ sense of egalitarianism, as a political foundation to increasing Indigenous equality. For example, Halloran (2006) highlighted that the pursuit of inducing collective guilt was counter–productive, given the variation of ‘white’ standpoints across societal layers, and, similarly, Pedersen et al. (2004, p. 241) explored these shifting viewpoints when researching prejudice in metropolitan Perth, which highlighted this conflict when exploring the nature of guilt in the wake of a turbulent racial history. In that latter study, the researchers identified a so-called ‘old fashioned’ form of prejudice characterised by hostility and rejection, and those more covert and hidden forms centring upon individualistic values (Pedersen, 2004).

What emerged and of relevance here was that most participants viewed past injustices as personally detached and that individual guilt was linked to collective guilt (Pederson, 2004). It was in this regard Subasic and Reynolds (2009) argued that guilt and shame were emotions focused on individual illegitimate privilege, rather than another’s disadvantage. This investigation also found that guilt or empathy were relative to socioeconomic positioning, with increased prejudice in more disadvantaged contexts, but tempered in the case of increased resource distribution when governments sought to compensate for Indigenous inequality. Employing social-psychology to critique reconciliation and intergroup relations, Subasic and Reynolds (2009) further argued that individual identity has historical foundations that shape group identities, serving to function as social foundation when interacting with other identity groups:

> What is common to all reconciliation processes, however, is the psychological change in the relevant group norms, values, and beliefs, defining both ‘who we are’-the meaning of relevant social identities-and how groups should relate to each other. Change at the level of psychological group memberships or social identities allows for positive social change in the reality of intergroup relations to take place. (p. 249)

While these themes are revisited in Chapters 6–7 in discussions of interest convergence/interest divergence, an area of significance to this present discussion is to discuss another side to the ‘white’ privilege, briefly commented on in this chapter. That is, where debate has long centered around an Anglo-centric lens being employed by a vast number of social researchers who problematise ‘Indigeneity as deficit’ in discourses framed around human classification (Andrade, 2009; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Guess, 2006), it is relevant to this critique on guilt and support for Indigenous social justice. While such standpoints act to reduce guilt for non–Indigenous members, it is this absence that has also inhibited broader acceptance of non–Indigenous complicity behind Indigenous disadvantage, particularly in their own identity formation (McCorquodale, 1986). Subasic & Reynolds (2009) stated:

> The more non–Indigenous Australians see the inequality in terms of the intergroup relationship, where their group identity is inextricably linked to the experiences of
Indigenous people, the more they will see it as illegitimate and the greater the impetus for social change in solidarity with Indigenous people. (p. 251)

As I outline in Chapter 4, around 61% of Australians share in approximately 18% of national household wealth (ABS, 2012), opportunities to progress beyond this tiered condition are limited. Thus, the pathologisation aimed at Indigenous families materialises as a product of competition, as much as the falsified ‘utopian’ ideals of capitalism (Gruenstein, 2008). This has contributed to Indigenous peoples experiencing high levels of racism, impacting engagement from both an inter and intra racial context (Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997). For example, in discussing Indigenous children’s sense of identity, Kickett-Tucker (2009, p. 131) identified that those aged 8-10 years, and youth 12-17 years with mixed ancestry, constructed their racial identity in relation to physical attributes, including the degree of Indigenous ‘blood’ and darkness of their skin. This study described how colonisation was feeding inward (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015), fracturing the social identity of children with mixed racial backgrounds, leading to low self-esteem and depression (Kickett-Tucker, 2009, p. 131).

2.4 NT remote Aboriginal education pathways to inequality

2.4.1 Locating NT remote Indigeneity and remote school organisations

While these complex challenges within the cultural discourses and their turbulence around the central issue of identity impact the performance of NT remote Aboriginal children in education, they have not defined it. In this regard and where school is a site to build Indigenous social equality, it has been incapable, and instead arguably functioning to reproduce social and economic inequality. This is evidenced by systemic entrenched patterns that have defied improvement for Indigenous peoples and other marginalised groups, as discussed by those including Copland (2003), Diamond and Spillane (2002) and Perry and McConney (2010). It is in this regard that Apple (2000) commented on “the role that educational markets have played in a number of countries in exacerbating inequalities” (p. 430).

The literature within school discourses has mirrored jousting within the cultural debates. For example, while concentrated sites of attention, schools have remained subjected to continuous change at the organisational levels, seeking relevance within fluid social, economic and political environments. Therefore, literature regarding school enhancement has been driven predominantly through positivist scientific inquiry, interacting across the social frames of schools (see discussion on this by Brint, 2001; Coppieters, 2005; and Fenwick, 2000).

The question of how NT remote students might better engage with education has remained open-ended and unanswered (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). One explanation for this is that within Australia and countries including the UK, Canada and the US, conversations about improving school performances have remained fixed within early 20th century Fordism that have propelled positivist reforms, often gratingly, across socially-complex spaces (Fenwick, 2000; Robertson, 2005; Yates,
The Effective Schools movement that rolled out across Australian schools from the early 1990s, like the US policy design, emerged alongside moves into decentralisation, corporatisation and standardisation from 2000 (Alston, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Gleeson & Husbands, 2003). A key premise within these movements has been that schools can be improved to consistently high performance, achieved through the production of equalising learning opportunities to consistently and effectively rebuff inequality. However, these policy approaches have instead been viewed by scholars as problematic across structural inequality (Coppieters, 2005; Noffke, 2009; O’Brien & Robinson, 2012). For example, in discussing the South African context, Cele (2007, p. 229) argued the policy modelling was unable to change the performance trajectories of schools in challenged districts and instead was predicated on driving an authoritarian approach that weakened staff: “To the majority of the educators in the schools studied, ‘hard work’ means overtime and working over the weekend with no compensation. A significant number of educators vilify and blame senior education officials as custodians of policies that have, by and large, reduced schools to (dis)organizations”. This same issue was highlighted also by Lissovoy and McLaren (2003), when discussing the US context.

Against such policy matrices this Aboriginal researcher’s experiences as a principal of so-called ‘disadvantaged’ schools within the NT suggest evidence of this view; a phenomenon Rhodes and Brundrett (2009, p. 361) described as schools being “rooted in their sociopolitical environments”. Alongside this the agency of school communities has decreased against an intensified desire of central bureaucracies to control reforms from afar, thus creating power struggles that undermined principals and teachers, often encumbered with organisational failures (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1994; Honig, 2008; Poell et al., 2000). It is here that Australian education has gravitated, jostling between positivist and interpretivist ontologies, with each defining the range of problematising behind school performance, despite the dichotomies produced in the way policy platforms are reified (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Matthews, 2013). Jorgensen et al. (2010), for example, stated of the NT remote context:

Most [teachers] are from white, middle class, urban environments and have had little interaction with people from other ethnicities and social class (Allard & Santoro, 2004; Causey, Thomas & Armento, 2000) and no experience in isolated rural or remote settings. Teacher turnover is very high in rural and remote communities (Heslop, 2003). (p. 161)

In this environment of complex variables, Australia’s political-educational imagination oriented around the ideal school community as market-oriented, streamlined, enterprising, productive, modelled upon business approaches to accountability and performance management (Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011; Robinson, 2015; Savage, 2011); but as equally supportive and pastorally focused, nourishing and supporting the individual needs of each student. In this regard, discussion of the extended school reforms in the UK by Close and Wainright (2010) identified that debates about school
leadership lacked detailed understanding of the professional and organisational cultures that “make up multi-agency contexts and that guide assumptions about everyday practice” (p. 435). As discussed by Noffke (2009) and Hulgin and Drake (2011), attempts toward increased prescription of schools have led to increased ambiguity, facilitating a trajectory that has conversely cemented stratification within the Australian education environment (Matthews, 2013).

In the NT, Indigenous families have thus struggled to access a quality educational experience that is responsive to their Indigeneity; an experience that is necessarily disconnected away from either of the common problematised discourses of culture or school improvement (described earlier in this chapter), particularly as they situate within their essentialised and dualistic policy wrappings (Lees, 2007). This intersection of racism and classism, with a problematic education paradigm targeting remote youth, has resulted in significant lifestyle challenges for Aboriginal families, and these are detailed in Chapters 4 and 6–7. What is significant at this point in this Story is that the im/moral dimensions situated within a ‘white’ and westernised identity, discussed in this chapter, have coalesced around a national CTG strategy on Indigenous ‘disadvantage’.

2.4.2 Closing the gap on NT remote Aboriginal disadvantage

In 2008, Australian Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a formal apology to the Stolen Generations for the crimes and injustice committed against Australia’s First Nations peoples, and was celebrated as an important step for a national policy of reconciliation (Stephens, 2008). However, it was also about a majoritarian culture seeking to reconcile its own ‘immoral and fractured’ democratic values (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Gillborn, 2015). Initiated by the Social Justice Report (2005), CTG emerged as a response to a national strategy that government could plan and measure improvement. CTG is a national government strategy that aims within 25 years to reduce disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with respect to life expectancy, access to early childhood education, child mortality, educational achievement and its flow into employment outcomes. In 2009 it became clear that Indigenous families were well behind in every measure, and 9 years later, this remained the case (Australian Government, 2018).

In early 2018 Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull presented the 10th CTG annual progress report, which revealed that most of the seven targets were not being met, as shown in Table 9. This report finding on one level demonstrated the abysmal policy performances of the States and Territories, but on another level, reveals deep political etchings in the numbers. For example, the NT is shown as the only jurisdiction to be on track to halving the gap in Year 12 or equivalent attainment, which is at odds with every other target shown as not on track, including the education sector planks that give rise to such performance.
Table 9: Progress against the CTG targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Aust/Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child mortality</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and numeracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12 or equivalent</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy (proxy: mortality)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Australian Government, 2018, p. 10)

A key indicator of what I term ‘policy convolution’ is embedded within a key statement by the then Prime Minister, which highlighted the sociopolitical dimensions behind the contradictions of ideology and policy, at the highest levels of government power: “What is clear is we must continue to maintain a long-term vision of what success looks like, and importantly how success is defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves” (p. 7). This statement came from a government that had earlier and unilaterally threatened to force remote Indigenous people from their homelands in Western Australia (WA) and the NT, based on a view of Indigenous dysfunction (Griffiths, 2015). For this study, CTG has functioned more as a reflection of the dichotomy that exists within a ‘moralising’ nation-State conflicted with its neocolonial treatment of Indigeneity and a neoliberal gravitation into a national economic stratification that reifies such condition as a ‘natural’ and ‘im/moral’ State (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Souto-Otero, 2010).

2.4.3 NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment

Against these trends, the NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment has followed a national tide of educational, social and economic policy iterations that have locked remote communities into perpetual holding patterns (Stevenson, 2010). While the 1970s ushered in a left-leaning era of culturally–relevant schooling, expressed in the establishment of bilingual schools across the NT, this journey ended by 1999; swept up with the rest of an Australian schooling policy environment’s acceleration toward an era of accountability and the injection of economic doctrines within the matrices
of a national education policy environment (Robinson, 2015). Emboldened by decades of relatively uninterrupted economic growth, Australia has gravitated toward financial market deregulation without monopoly, relinquishing what Lloyd (2008, p. 32) stated as its role of “social-democratic owner and protector of public good”.

Against such headwinds the NT has reflected the lowest education performance, and the politicisation from this has been extensive, often without reference to the NT’s profile, as shown in Table 10. When this is positioned alongside data such as Indigenous imprisonment comparison rates, as shown in Table 11 (see also Chapters 1 and 6), an insight into the NT’s public policy landscape emerges, revealing the nature of a troubled national social policy architecture. While a national account presents alarming rates of Indigenous imprisonment, the NT’s 2013 Indigenous population of 26.8%, when assessed against an incarceration rate of Indigenous prisoners at 86% of the NT’s prison population, presents major policy fracturing that has shown little evidence of slowing. O’Dowd (2009, p. 813) described this public policy complexity as an ‘ideological abyss’ fuelling policy distortions in education, as a by-product of a larger social and economic policy malaise, driven in part by the NT’s unique demography.

Table 10: NT Aboriginal population trend 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NT Total Indigenous Population</th>
<th>56,776</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average occupants/dwelling</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total urban</td>
<td>11,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total remote</td>
<td>45,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2011)

Table 11: Prisoner profile in Australia 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Prisoner numbers</th>
<th>Population trend 2012-2013</th>
<th>Median age</th>
<th>ATSI %</th>
<th>Typical length of imprisonment</th>
<th>Rate of recidivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>1,436</td>
<td>Increase 2%</td>
<td>32.6yrs</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>1.3yrs</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>9,897</td>
<td>Increase 3%</td>
<td>34.2yrs</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3.6yrs</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>5,340</td>
<td>Increase 9%</td>
<td>35.3yrs</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3.3yrs</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>6,076</td>
<td>Increase 9%</td>
<td>32.9yrs</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>3.0yrs</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>2,226</td>
<td>Increase 9%</td>
<td>35.9yrs</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4.5yrs</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>4,924</td>
<td>Decrease 1%</td>
<td>33.3yrs</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>2.5yrs</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>Decrease 2%</td>
<td>32.7yrs</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2.0yrs</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>Increase 13%</td>
<td>31.2yrs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2.8yrs</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2013)
Key NT remote Aboriginal education policy actions
These outcomes have their foundations in the past, as earlier described in this chapter. Since 1978, after the granting of NT self-government, the NTDoE has not improved its policy environment targeting remote Aboriginal contexts. Hawkes and Moir (1997, p. 183) argued this early period in NT control was the catalyst of education emerging under a “ministerialisation” model that ultimately would empower politicians over senior departmental officials in the formatting of an Indigenous schooling policy setting. Since then, the education inequality experienced by remote Aboriginal families has been an outcome of polarised bureaucratic problematising (Eisenberg, 2006). In 2008, 13% of remote children were not enrolled in school (representing 2000 students), average attendance was 64% and 80% of remote Indigenous students failed to reach benchmarks in literacy and numeracy (Northern Territory Government, 2011, p. 60). This pattern had not changed, as revealed in the *CTG Prime Minister’s Report 2018* (Australian Government, 2018).

Bilingual education
Government education in NT remote Aboriginal communities commenced in 1972 through a Whitlam Labor government, and a schooling design was pursued that included local languages and cultural content. From 1973 bilingual schools were consequently initiated in the remote communities of Angurugu, Areyonga, Hermannsburg, Milingimbi and Warruwi (Devlin, 2009, p. 7). The intent was to educate children through a staged language model where instruction for the first 4-5 years of schooling was in the vernacular, moving toward 50% English by Year 4 (Hughes, 2008). This ‘staircase’ model (Figure 5) was troubled early on. For example, the *Second Progress Report on the Bilingual Education Program in Schools in the NT* highlighted difficulties in retaining trained staff, while a second issue concerned the choice of language used (Commonwealth Government, 1974), given the contrived development of NT remote Aboriginal communities (Tatz, 2009) had pooled diverse language groups, producing difficulties in bridging the diversity created (Austin-Broos, 2011; Moran, 2010).

Beyond these tensions a key debate also has concerned the functionality of bilingual schools in establishing effective Western curriculum access through Indigenous languages and culture. Some contributors for example have argued that schools could achieve this purpose (Devlin, 2011), while others such as Hughes (2008) argued it was the responsibility of families. These diametrically opposed arguments ensured the concept of bilingual schooling would emerge as an early political battleground in the structural tensions between integration and assimilation; tensions that would flow through every corner of NT remote Aboriginal education policy formatting, described by Devlin (2011, p. 271) as “unresolved and unstable”. Since this time the NT government has commissioned two major reviews into NT remote Aboriginal education and a third review which included a linked focus. Here a brief synopsis is provided and these reviews and their problematised policy tensions are discussed later in Chapter 7.

Learning Lessons (Collins & Lea, 1999) was initiated on the basis of “unequivocal evidence of deteriorating outcomes, linked to a range of issues, led primarily by poor attendance which has become an education crisis” (Collins and Lea, 1999, p. 1). This review highlighted that Aboriginal voices had been left out of policy and strongly argued this needed to change, if education was to remain relevant. Learning Lesson (1999) also identified government agencies operating in siloed ways, and a key proposal called for multiple policy levers to counter the education dysfunction experienced across most NT remote Aboriginal communities. While this review reflected national reconciliation, which began in 1996, the tide turned in 2007 under a Howard Liberal-National government with the Intervention and Basics Card14 (Velardi, 2017). These acts disregarded previous recommendations made with Indigenous participation, thrusting an Australian population into dichotomised positions on the worth of Indigeneity at a time of national ‘moral’ crusading (Gruenstein, 2008; Macoun, 2011).

Structural Review of the NT Department of Education & Training: Delivering the Goods (2009)

As the Intervention unfolded around a discursive portrait of ‘Aboriginal dysfunction’ (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997; Velardi, 2017), the NT government in late 2008 commissioned the 2009 Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (ASITF) (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009). The ASITF (2013) review emerged after the first national results on schooling performance revealed the NT as the poorest performing jurisdiction in Australia (ACARA, 2008). The review’s Terms of Reference identified its key objective as: “To refocus the NT Department of Education and Training (NTDET) to more efficiently deliver the government’s commitments to improved school attendance and levels of literacy and numeracy and meet future

14 The Basics Card was an Intervention policy which relaced Aboriginal families’ ability to participate within a cash-based society. This card is used for a select range of service but notably alcohol was not included, due to associated problems.
challenges in education” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 9). The ASITF (2013) focused predominantly on the NTDoE’s systems and processes and most recommendations maintained a vague and opaque connection to remote Indigenous communities, despite their central galvanising role behind the purpose of the review (see Chapter 7).

School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM)

In 2011 the NT government legislated to link family income with school attendance under the policy Every Child Every Day. At the core of this policy has been acts of punishment, through withholding welfare payments from remote Aboriginal families, where students do not attend school on a regular basis (Taylor, 2010, p. 690). At the time of its roll-out across the NT, researchers including Phillips, Franklin and Viswanathan (2011) argued that the policy was completely unworkable:

A ‘getting tough on parents’ approach will not contribute to better educational outcomes in the long term, and is likely to exacerbate financial hardship, for example through the imposition of fines or the long-term suspension of social security payments under the school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM) program. (p. 47)

In 2011 Indigenous children represented 43.3% of students aged 0-17 years in the NT (Northern Territory Government, 2011, p. 284) and Table 12 reveals the limited progress this punishment produced, as much as it signals the limitations that narrow, vertical public policies produce for Aboriginal students' engagement with an oblique education policy environment. In 2018 the federal government abandoned this policy based on evidence it didn’t work. In Chapters 6–7 the legacy of this policy is analysed, particularly as it offers insights to the NT’s political economy, given this jurisdiction has shown little deviation in its propensity to punish its Aboriginal population (Altman, 2009).

Table 12: Average student attendance by Indigenous status (government schools), 2007–2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Reports, 2006–14)

A Share in the Future 2013 (ASITF)

A third major review into NT remote Aboriginal education was conducted in 2013. A Share in the Future: a review of Indigenous Education in the NT (ASITF, 2013) (Wilson, 2013) contained 51 recommendations, of which the NT government favoured direct instruction, boarding schools and a community engagement charter, as key policy investments. These key policy planks are discussed in Chapter 5, which details this Aboriginal researcher’s fieldwork, and further unpacked in detail in Chapter 6.4, when discussing the NT’s sociopolitical context. Of significance, the ASITF (2013) recommendations came at a time when the NT Labor government, which was elected for the first time
on the remote bush vote, was moving to a re-election cycle. This review thus came during a highly politically-charged period, which was reflected in its introductory sections:

The issues are not merely technical. For many people, the resolution of the barriers impeding progress in Indigenous education is as much moral and cultural as educational. The data gathering and consultation processes for this review illustrated how difficult it is to reach agreement in the area. (Wilson, 2013, p. 2)

While these reviews are discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, the points raised here highlight that NT remote Aboriginal education policy mapping has gravitated around reforms that connect to, but simultaneously miss the existential location of Aboriginality in remote service provision. As discussed, this issue of failing to recognise Indigeneity is arguably due to an unstable national Australian identity and a political economy that is maintained through the intersections of racism and classism (Altman, 2009; Gillborn, 2015). As a result, the profile of policy interaction observed and responded to conceptually has been fixated upon narrowed ideals premised upon individual responsibility, rather than what Christie (2005) argued was a social paradigm problem. Consequently, opportunities for improving educational inequality in NT remote Aboriginal communities are bound with the strengthening of Indigeneity in NT remote education policy architecture. This includes its broadened conceptualisations of ‘Indigenous and community’ (Carlson, 2013).

2.5 Policy options toward NT remote Aboriginal schooling progress

2.5.1 Advancing NT remote Aboriginal education through responsive policies

One aim of this investigation then is to deepen investigation through this wicked social mess (Ritchie, 2011), with a focus to dissect popular and often destructive claims directed toward NT remote Aboriginal members and offer solutions to improving Indigenous schooling outcomes that are systemic in their calibration, rather than localised, context-specific models. With this goal, a model of schooling design that pays respect to and is influenced by the macro-scale forces of the political economy emerges (Altman, 2009; Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This model framework shown in Figure 6, which I developed, proposes functionality and navigation within the forces of capitalism, remote settlement, ideals of cultural integration and the sociopolitical context of the NT and broader Australian community. That is, what occurs at the local level within the hearts and minds of children is directly linked to the organisation and the organisation is an expression of the macro system such context is engulfed in.

This framework is a triangulation of strengthened policy concerning Aboriginal cultural inclusion, accessible remote education services and pathways to employment and development on Country. While these are not new concepts, they are raised because they remain unresolved in respect to their design features and how they may be progressively reified. Of importance to the research literature is the geared
and interconnected arrangement of these planks, which offers increased member capacities to succeed through being Indigenous within western capitalism (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005). This framework, analysed across the next six chapters, considers the challenges earlier discussed concerning the discourses of culture and school, including their interactions across the layers of the individual and school organisational contexts, and the macro political and economic system these operate within. This approach considers Ball’s (2013) point about navigating the policy inertia, when advancing education for underprivileged groups:

We should recognize the centrality of education to larger projects of democracy and community building. It is time to get back to basics-to think seriously about what is the purpose of education and what it means to be educated, what schools are for, and concomitantly and crucially who should decide these things (p. 4).

The three policy domains advocated in this Story are advanced on a view that they successfully navigate the structural and fluid tensions identified as being at the core of NT remote Aboriginal student underperformance. These policies align with the main research question, which hinges upon synergies flowing around a clarified policy definition of Indigeneity and its reification within educational social justice. While each policy is shown with its related policy dimensions, these are not commented on here, beyond illustrating the key areas each are bound to. These are clarified in Chapter 8, after their foundational contexts are made more coherent through the journey that unfolds across the Stories in Chapters 1–7.

**Figure 6: Establishing responsive policy approaches**

- A decolonising bi-cultural and bilingual curriculum
- Applying the principles of Peace Education
- Strengthened Aboriginal workforce
- Integrated Aboriginal governance
- Aboriginal cultural inclusion
- Accessible remote education services
- Pathways to employment and development on Country
- Aboriginal regional economic hubs
- NT remote hybrid economies
- Registered training organisations (RTOs)
- Aboriginal regional education hubs
- Engagement through rewards
- Education & health integrated service provision
2.5.2 Establishing a middle ground: Aboriginal cultural inclusion, accessible remote education services and pathways to employment and development on Country

Aboriginal cultural inclusion

Cultural inclusion for Aboriginal peoples is not a romantic ideal. Western education reflects this dimension for Westernised children and it needs to be present in all its key expressions for Aboriginal students because the starting point in engaging an external world is identity (Brayboy 2015; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). The Learning Lessons (1999) review highlighted this claim, having stated the “value in reinforcing and strengthening Indigenous identities in all its forms” (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 120). Identity is not an option, but rather the defining existential window to viewing and engaging with the physical, material and social world. In commenting on this point, Neville, Viard and Turner (2015) stated:

At its core, recognition is a process in which individuals claim or assert humanity for themselves and others based on their beliefs. In this sense, recognition is an existential phenomenon in which one’s very existence is based on being recognised. (p. 249)

For this Story, Aboriginal identities and cultural inclusion in remote education services are non-negotiable. Yet, successive policies, as discussed in Chapters 5–7, have sought to deny this through situating Indigeneity behind an imposed western ‘white’ majoritarian cultural identity, (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). In this way, NT remote Aboriginal communities reflect resistance by taking affirmative action to maintain identity through prioritising it over imposed changes (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015), and in the NT, this has been reflected in the disengagement of a colonising education environment. As I later show, this domain needs to inform education policy in its elements of curriculum and language (biculturalism and bilingualism), to the meaningful participation of Aboriginal educators and senior cultural and ceremony holders, to leadership and governance. This absence and lack of clarity around Aboriginal cultural inclusion needs to be understood within its social frames, and is pursued in this study because it matters profoundly.

Accessible remote education services

In respect to school service design, it is argued that despite a national access and equity policy framework being in place since 1989, the level of responsive planks identified in the strategy has been limited (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012). This is evidenced in my NT-focused case study findings, discussed in Chapter 5. Much of the access design iterations in the NT have failed because the attendance reflects this outcome; centrally due to these shifts being premised on the same model of service delivery that assumes children attend school on an equal footing, are of the same culture and driven by what education policy analysts such as Ball (2013) and McGregor (2009) have maintained is a neoliberal right-leaning economics agenda.
Schools need to move beyond promises of exporting participants to a fragmented capitalist utopian existence and offer functional meaning at the existential level. This means rewarding children and families for attending school, rather than punishing them for not, as the SEAM policy is/was framed. It also means an extensive increase in the number of Aboriginal teachers working with Aboriginal children, achieved through reward structures necessary for difficult-to-fill roles (Ashford, 2000; Lankford, O’Connell & Wyckoff, 2003; Muffs & Smidz, 1999; Papa & Baxter, 2005; Portin & Shen, 1998). And it means increased institutional integration in the way such services are provided. It was in respect to this view that Ball (2013) sought to advance the level of problematising and their embodied, failed solutions:

Confronting the relationship between poverty and opportunity must begin with an acceptance that ‘education cannot compensate for society’ and a recognition of what education can and cannot do, and therefore what needs to be dealt with by other means. (p. 30)

This view recognises that the way services are provided in remote communities is not working and cannot stay the same and must become more accessible through greater alignment with the existential dimensions of remote Aboriginal lives, and it matters profoundly.

**Pathways to employment and development on Country**

Pathways to employment and development on Country is about remote settlement development, and it is the platform by which education has a function and which enables remote schooling services engagement, and within this is recognition of the hybrid economy operating in NT remote communities, as described in detail by Altman (2005, 2009). Development in NT remote communities is difficult to achieve, due to remoteness and an Aboriginal political economy underpinned by an enduring Aboriginal identity, which displaces traditional market economic principles as a driving exchange (Tatz, 2009). NT remote Aboriginal identities, languages, spirituality and kinship systems and law define how western economic threads are treated; always with members in control over such exchanges and with communal ownership and a rejection of materialism over social and cultural obligations as key outcomes (Blair, 2015).

Therefore, this study maintains a position consistent with Altman (2005), that while such dynamics of remote Aboriginality have long been pathologised as deficit obstacles (Macoun, 2011), it is conversely this existential dimension that education must align in order for its institutional purpose to flow toward remote community development and thriving on Country, as Tatz (2009) discussed. In this way, Altman’s (2005) framework of hybrid economy, as shown in Figure 7, is instructive in positioning customary (identity) as the main driver of economic platform. In the original version, which was based on research undertaken in central Arnhem Land in the NT in the late 1970s, most of the remote economy around goods and services tapered around the customary sector (64%), and welfare was far less (26%)
(Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This framework is adapted in this Story (see Chapters 7–8), where greater emphasis is placed on customary, State and market around the sociopolitical dimensions concerning power and governance.

**Figure 7: Altman’s hybrid economy**

![Diagram](image)

(Altman, 2005, p. 4)

In small NT remote communities, economic activity is limited, which is a significant obstacle in families visualising the functionality of western education in securing a job, let alone ideals of community building. Moran (2010, p. 44) for example in discussing families who were forced to work under a “no job no house” policy (under the 2007 Intervention policies), suggested remote communities would likely become ghettos; which later was the reason advocated by the federal government in 2014 to dissolve remote communities (Griffiths, 2015). These policy positions failed to factor in the long existing Aboriginal town camps\(^{15}\) around every major NT town, which included the ‘long-grassers’\(^{16}\) camping on the fringes of society; close to market economies, but a world away (Curchin, 2013).

Against this policy dysfunction, a key option is recognition that remote communities are already hybrid, but, as Curchin (2013) argued, economic ownership, control and management, and their links to education as a mechanism to community development, require definition beyond the limited forms long occurring in such debates, particularly as concerns ‘living on Country’. For example, the NT’s now defunct signature Growth Towns policy left homeland outstations in a policy vacuum, which missed recognition of the broadened ways these centrally situate within the social and economic fabric of remote settlement. This includes an Aboriginal identity as the existential driver behind CTG initiatives, such as ‘Working on Country’. For example, in discussing research conducted around this program in Groote Eylandt, NT, Fogarty and Schwab (2012) confirmed the reason for participation was how it strongly linked to identity:

> From an Indigenous perspective, the junior ranger concept has provided an opportunity for the transmission of language and knowledge on country. All the Anindilyakwa rangers

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\(^{15}\) Aboriginal town camps are designated estates, usually situated on the periphery of the NT’s major townships.  
\(^{16}\) Long grasser is an Aboriginal English term which refers to living within the 3-metre-tall grasses around the NT’s northern townships, in camp-type arrangements. It is associated with Aboriginal fringe-dwellers.
interviewed alluded to this being the key reason for their involvement and their willingness to work with students. (p. 16)

In this proposal, integration is achievable as controls transfer to families empowered in the change and adaptation of identity and culture and its placement within remote economies. It was in this context that the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) had structural relevance (Altman, 2005; Austin-Broos, 2011; Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011). In this way, the issues of inequality based in health and education and priority hubs enable increased rationalisation of resources, but further strengthen capacity for resource renewal. From this an opportunity to reconfigure conceptions of inequality emerges and the capacities for a treaty and reconciliation transpire functionally through its economic validation.

A challenge to the rhetoric behind education as a vehicle for moving remote Aboriginal members into jobs concerns its fragile assumptions of where and how this outcome can be achieved. On the one hand the NT remote economy has been described as dichotomised, “characterised by high unemployment and labour shortages against high wages paid to mining and construction workers” (Moran, 2010, p. 44). Alternatively, economic modelling applied through the defunct NT 20 Growth Towns policy model to enable the investment in human capital required in constructing traditional market-based models was also problematic, due to the undercurrents of land rights legislation (Australian Government, 1976) interrupting the way resources and opportunities are distributed.

That is, communities in the NT have mostly been constructed through ‘white’ colonial settlement agendas that are contrived settings (Moran, 2010; Tatz, 2009) which disrupt Aboriginal settlement through trajectories into feudal-like power imbalances of wealth by inheritance, distributed through kinship systems (Austin-Broos, 2011). In discussing the interactions of Indigenous diaspora and its intersection of heritage and the politics of recognition, Smith (2010) made the following comment:

Heritage - we manage it, look after it, define ourselves and others by it, we inherit it, we go to museums and sites to look at it. However, this materialistic understanding of heritage, this common-sense view, obscures its role in the governance of populations and groups and the way it is used to misrecognise and/or de-politicise the politics of recognition. Indeed, heritage is not a thing, place or monument, but rather a ‘discourse’. (p. 63)

These challenges are engaged in Chapters 6–8, but the central location of Indigeneity remains pivotal, and experiences elsewhere point to this cornerstone (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). In citing The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Phillips, Franklin and Viswanathan (2011), for example, identified three factors to economic growth: self-rule and decision-making power, capable governing institutions empowered at the local level, and congruence between formal governing institutions and Indigenous political culture. This policy trajectory is pursued because it isn’t resolved in the NT and I argue it matters profoundly.
Establishing a middle ground: navigating contestable assumptions

It is important to state that my problematised policy framework is underpinned by contestable assumptions. First is that while advocacy of a bicultural/bilingual curriculum for Aboriginal children should or could be altered from a mainstream education system is debatable, this does not suggest departure from the knowledge that remote Aboriginal children need to achieve in a western, capitalist system. Rather, it is a recognition paradigm (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015; North, 2006), which is reified in this Story as a pivotal foundation to engaging with western education; central which are rights to an altered education including bilingual schooling and a presumption the State is involved in the privileging of such rights (Westwood, 2003). This is significant, given remote Aboriginal members have little choice of participating in a capitalist and globalised world and, like other racial groups, such as described by Ang (2001), experience diaspora. In this way my standpoint concerns a locating and navigation of the social forces that shape NT remote Aboriginal resistance and ambivalence to the marketised western education design on offer (Keddie et al.; 2013; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Prasad & Prasad, 2002).

A second contestable assumption is whether a hybrid economy has a place within the architecture of educational advancement for Aboriginal members living in remote settlements. This view has caveats, including the implications of wealth generation and where wealth is deposited between the individual and community (Altman, 2009; Walter, 2015). This is significant, since Aboriginal collectivism as reinforcement to ideals of ‘Indigenous traditional identities’ is eroded through movements toward individualism and working for reward and social mobility (Lloyd, 2008; Walter, 2015). Here, and as I later show in Chapter 8, this domain is proposed in relation to the positioning of an ‘Aboriginalised economy’, as foundational to education. That is, I argue that by locating NT remote Aboriginal members within a repositioning of power and governance over the links between local hybrid economies and indigeneity, moves toward a strengthening Aboriginal political economy (Altman, 2009; Tatz, 2009), which in turn provides a platform for building educational relevance.

A third contestable assumption within this framework is that remote schools require re-modelling to include increased service design, particularly in respect to access and equity frames. This view holds that schools are not engaging Aboriginal families effectively in remote contexts, because the evidence (see Chapters 4–5) unequivocally shows this. Schools require engagement within their sociocultural context, and this is determined by the lifestyle impacts experienced within community, but it cannot be predicated on punishment and disassociation of families. This includes rewarding attendance, rather than punishing non–attendance, and integrating enabling dimensions into the service frames of schools, including community governance and allied service providers. This view, which is unpacked in Chapter 5, posits school service delivery models are in need of a paradigm change that has relevance to NT remote Aboriginal contexts (Drysdale, 2011).
The fourth contestable dimension to this framework is a form of NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism, as a societal foundation to remote Aboriginal education. In NT remote Aboriginal communities, an anchoring away from individualism, materialism and greed has acted as a ‘stop-gate’ in the marketing of education as a liberating agent toward a world of ‘broken’ capitalism; yet, it is where I argue that an Aboriginal life theme exists. It is here that Savage (2011, p. 34) highlighted that “central to such politics is a fundamental view that social governance is capable of pursuing and achieving the social democratic ideals of equity and social justice, within the architecture of an increasingly globalising and competitive capitalist economy”. In this Story, Aboriginal social capitalism is the foundation that binds my problematised three policy domains within a coherent social and economic tapestry, and achieves a robust meeting point between a western political economy and an Aboriginal political economy (Altman, 2009; Tatz, 2009).

Aboriginality as a problematised axiom in NT remote Aboriginal education

It is recognised that social-capitalism is elusive, given the limitations of Keynesian-style approaches and other forms of State intervention in mitigating the more severe impacts of capitalism and its flow through Australian communities and households (Kenway, 2013; Wagner, 2011). In this Story, my focus is in building progressive policy capacities for education that are aligned with a form of NT remote Aboriginality, of which I have problematised within a communal, Aboriginal nation-building context, based around a form of Aboriginal social capitalism. But I recognise that all things are in motion and that ideas presented in this Story are temporal, since the future is one of adaptation, including what it means to be Aboriginal and how difference is treated inter– and intra–culturally (Gillborn, 2010; Keddie et al., 2013). Indigenous culture is plural and dynamic (Blair, 2015), and my aim here is to avoid an essentialised view on Indigenous identities (Brayboy, 2006; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013).

It is in this regard that Vaught (2006, p.25) highlighted that while marginalised groups “had shifting self–definitions around racial identity, it was how they were raced by those around them, particularly by those with power that mattered to them in a conversation about societal systems and relations”. The social impacts have included a galvanising of resistance cemented within injustice/s or its perception, used to legitimise disengagement (De Vylder, 2008; Dixon et al., 2010; Prasad & Prasad, 2002). In this way, while I attempt to render visible and navigate the forces that interlock within matters concerning NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality, it is clear that, while Aboriginality has featured as a driving ‘impediment’ to western policy actions, it is, and has always been, a foundational key in what Lloyd (2008, p. 52) referred to as a period of “ultramodernity delegitimising the social base”.


2.6 Summary

This chapter has told the Story of NT remote Aboriginal education inequality through the discourses of culture and school, including how they situate within the NT and societal contexts. At the core of this has been the role that Indigeneity has played in both the ‘problem’ and the ‘solution’ (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Yosso, 2005). In challenging the forces that interlock marginalised groups into patterned social performance (North, 2006), my proposed problematised policy domains, as tied to Indigeneity, have merit, providing synergy across the theory, research and practice. In the next chapter, I thus outline the Story of my methodological approach in how Indigeneity and its attached policy domains are navigated, given the complex social mess that NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality is entangled. This inquiry, which employs social constructionist ontology and its politically-suspicious epistemology, is led through the utility of CRT and a nuancing through Brayboy’s (2006) TribalCrit, both of which are deployed through my use of critical race methodology.
Chapter 3. Pursuing methodological clarity through the social mess

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 tells the Story of the methodology used to answer the main research question and its underpinning questions. In doing so I have considered the need to employ research and theoretic clarity to the problem to identify what I argue is a plausible solution to the gap in the literature, and how this will be legitimised within a research framework and its extrapolations into real life opportunities. That is, linking the theory with the research and practice. My proposed solution to the identified gap around the binary dimensions of Indigeneity is considered here to be a plausible option because it seeks a repositioning of well-understood policy arenas across an expanded and deepened investigation of the phenomenological interactions, in ways that offers strengthened functionality of NT remote Aboriginal school services. This chapter identifies the processes and steps involved in achieving this goal.

3.2 Methodological justification

3.2.1 Defining the problem and its embodied research challenge

This study investigates how NT remote Aboriginal student education can be improved through their Indigeneity, by responding to its embodied features within the main study question (see page 31). Despite its continued presence, Indigeneity has received little serious attention within a NT education policy environment (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). One explanation for this is arguably due to the multiple variables impacting performance, making it difficult to establish ‘truth’ in the multiplanar relationships between the application of identity and individual and group choices against a fluid and contextually–varied world (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). The other reason, which in part manifests from this, has been the dominant view that Indigeneity situates external to a schooling design that prepares participants for a life within a western, non–Indigenous world (Hughes, 2008). This study navigates these underlying tensions, but also the dimensions of Aboriginality as a fluid, adaptive and politicised identity (Austin-Broos; 2009, 2011; Blair, 2015; Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013).

For me, this challenge rests within capacities of a middle ground being found between the extreme excesses of capitalism, with its grip on NT Aboriginal education policy formatting, and those of socialism, where capital wealth is tailored toward a common community control, as a pivotal frame in Indigeneity emerging functionally within a remote education architecture. This is acknowledged as an area that has defied structural flexing, as Bone (2012) commented:
It appears clear that the defenders of an orderly, constrained and, at least to some extent, ethically grounded approach to economic activity have been on the back foot for at least three decades, against the onslaught of the relatively unrestrained neoliberal turbo-charged capitalism. (p. 652)

Despite these challenges, I argue that NT remote Aboriginal education inequality can be overcome where the structures defining its institutional design and delivery are advanced in ways consistent with the policy domains investigated in this study. To achieve this, and in telling this Story and counter–Story (Chapter 8), Indigeneity requires an advanced calibration and reification in ways that navigate Australia’s political economy in partitioning member groups into adversarial interactions and resistance (Devylder, 2008; Keddie et al., 2013). This stance is outlined in the next section.

3.2.2 Taking a stance: Locating the gap and its solution
NT remote Aboriginal student performance is racialised in its expression and showing no signs of changing, as Chapter 4 reveals. Bone (2010) made clear that such entrenchment is linked to a mix of potent forces impacting the national population:

I argue that policy imaginations of schools as havens of excellence and equity are difficult to take seriously when infused into the architecture of an education system that is deeply stratified and structured to discriminate between individuals in line with performance hierarchies. (p. 33)

Consequently, the main question is problematised in the literature review as pointing attention toward Indigeneity and its existential and multi-dimensional interactions with the macro environment, where cause and effect in social actions are subject to variable expansions between the individual, community and societal frames—but, as I argue, within the social ‘truth’ of identity (Moodie, 2018; North, 2006). It is not possible to draw links between these layers using positivism and interpretivist in isolation to each other, as Lees (2007) points out, and this is due to the nature of the subject inquiry existing within the sociopolitical forces that such inquiry approaches are rendered within social complexity (Allen, 2004; Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; North, 2006). In this regard, I adopt a lens depicted by Bauman (2005), where individual and societal variability are conceptualised in a liquid state with interactions between local and national contexts in fluctuations of power and politics, wrapped around systemic interdependencies (North, 2006; Ornstein, 2007).

3.3 Choosing a research design

3.3.1 Defining a centrist approach
For this study I have therefore considered a model of inquiry that includes a defined location and boundaries within the structures of Australian capitalism. The social mess this Story investigates is approached with a centrist perspective, which I refer to as a ‘middle ground’ (depicted in Figure 8). The
policy domains that I problematise are informed by Bernard and Ryan (2010), who highlighted three steps in building models. These included: “Identifying the key constructs to be included; show linkages among the constructs—that is, identify how the constructs are related and represent the relationships visually; and test that the relationships hold for at least most of the cases being modelled” (p. 126). Thus, a key pursuit is to develop new knowledge through my proposed policy framework, respecting the social fluidity flowing through individuals and their existential drivers and restrainers, the organisational and service delivery of schools, and the connections between education and remote Aboriginal community development.

In this regard, a key challenge to my proposed policy framework is a sustained balancing between left-leaning social political philosophy and a right-leaning conservative and capitalist political philosophy (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This approach is consistent with Foley et al. (2015, p. 111), who caution concerning the US that an educational left has long found itself “without a revolutionary agenda for challenging in the classrooms of the nation the effects and consequences of the new capitalism”. This standpoint finds consistency with broader globalisation trends in capitalism and the inequality it flows across the institutions of society (Laguardia & Pearl, 2009), as Huw (2011, p. 3-4) stated in respect to a neoliberalism that “is embedded in a relatively fixed multi-scalar institutional framework”. That is, attempts to ‘flex’ capitalism’s flows into the institution of education and its organisational schooling service designs necessarily requires a centrist approach that navigates an Australian political economy (Lloyd, 2008).

While political boundaries are porous, I contend there are few options available in countering NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction, as the uninterrupted racialised marginalisation occurring in countries like the US and UK demonstrate (Foley et al., 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Huw, 2011). Thus, in advancing Indigeneity as the defining platform to NT remote Aboriginal education progression, this study challenges orthodox forms of problematising behind the disastrous pattern of NT remote Aboriginal schooling underachievement, as highlighted by Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017). And at the core of this challenge is economic development and recognition that such outcome has been an ongoing challenge for NT remote Aboriginal communities (Austin-Broos, 2009; Curchin, 2013). Ideas of hybrid economy are cross-sector in nature (Altman, 2005; Baum, Mitchell & Han, 2008) and are therefore treated carefully in this study, given identity and economic development are deeply entangled and, as Curchin (2013) discussed, driven by normative forms of problematising and assumptions.
3.3.2 **Employing social constructionism to answer the study question**

In adopting social constructionism, I attempt to make sense of the complex and messy world in which NT remote Aboriginal education inequality is constructed and materialised across everyday interactions between the individual, their group members and a macro world that interacts with these human dimensions (Pring, 2000). In considering this complexity, borders of discussion are needed to frame this inquiry, of which Njie and Asimiran (2014, p. 35) stated: “ Phenomena are intricately related to many coincidental actions and understanding them requires a wide sweep of contexts: temporal and spatial, historical, political, economic, cultural, social, personal”. This means an attempt to understand NT remote Aboriginal ways of doing and being in a social world are pronounced in power flows, uncertainty, change, success and failure, and the sea of variables that move continuously within and across our collective, human social reality (Pring, 2000). My social constructionist approach is outlined in Figure 9.
Social constructionism: People make their social and cultural worlds at the same time these worlds make them.

I posit a standpoint that social constructionism is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how it is created through binary exchanges between individuals and their social and material worlds. This interpretative, social lens of inquiry is an attempt to identify the key relationships impacting human agency in the context of external influences and their shifts across everyday life. As Njie and Asimiran (2014) stated:

An essential interest in qualitative research is the revelation of meaning buried in the nature of reality as understood and interpreted by people. Therefore, how people add up or make sense of reality combined with their underlying suppositions that determine their behaviour is of paramount significance to researchers following the qualitative research trajectory. (p. 35)

That is, society is viewed through a post-structural lens as existing both as a subjective and an objective reality, shared by the collective and reinforcing a socially-constructed, imagined reality (Jenkins, 2000). This counter–Story thus considers knowledge as beliefs in which people function with relative confidence, notwithstanding that these are often contradictory, such as a love of Indigenous art, while seeking to make Indigenous more ‘whitened’, a contradiction that Palmer (2003, p. 11) explained as being “simultaneously repulsed and attracted to its other”. Ladson-Billings and Donnor, (2005, p. 287) described this as a “a twisted embrace that simultaneously repels the Other. The complexity of this relationship allows white people to love black music and hate black people”. This constructed world of dualist values is self-regulatory and to understand the details of this, the individual needs to be understood within the sociopolitical context.

In telling this Story, I have thus employed social constructionism since this inquiry pertains to socially-constructed systems of high complexity and variability, the proposition is political in establishing cause and effect relationships, the research draws on positivist attempts at identifying generalised social laws and interpretive, context-specific social exchanges commonly reflective at individualised and group scales (Blanche and Durrheim, 1999). That is, I adopt a theory of knowledge that people make their
social and cultural worlds at the same time these worlds make them. In this regard, Blanche and Durrheim’s (1999) profiling of ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies, outlined in Table 13, offers insight to my researcher version of social reality, drawing from positivist and interpretivist inquiry points. This approach enables the data to ‘speak’ as a basis of evidence, to flow this into theory building through a process of existing theory deconstruction to enable a researcher-constructed version of social reality (research ‘truth’) to emerge.

Table 13: Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivist</td>
<td>Stable external reality</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law-like</td>
<td>Detached observer</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hypothesis testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretiv</td>
<td>Internal reality of</td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>Interactional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>subjective experience</td>
<td>Observer inter-subjectivity</td>
<td>Interpretative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructionist</td>
<td>Socially constructed reality</td>
<td>Suspicious</td>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Textual analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Observer constructing versions</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Blanche and Durrheim, 1999, p. 6)

Ontology is a theory concerning how reality is organised and developed (Fuchs, 2015). Here, social constructionist ontology is sourced to investigate what is behind NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality, and to achieve this, discourses of culture and school, as expressed within a frame of Australian capitalism, are identified as key problematised spaces. In this study, I consider their locations between the individual, community and societal levels, to examine the multiplanar relationships between the micro world of the individual and the macro world where consciousness is expressed (Moodie, 2018). Thus, a political and suspicious epistemology is employed in constructing my observer versions of what forces are at play, other than the simplistic reason of ‘being Aboriginal’. This challenge includes a factoring of the fluid nature of change at these levels, and the political and hegemonic forces that exist around wealth and race within a system of social and economic stratification (Foley et al., 2015; Matthews, 2013; Moodie, 2018).

In telling this Story, I draw on CRT to investigate an NT remote Aboriginal identity and its relationship to educational engagement and manufactured inequality within Australian capitalism. Through this the possibilities of a centred position between the political left and right are sought that produce opportunities in strengthening NT remote Aboriginal peoples’ education opportunities through a strengthened social and economic fabric. This study thus investigates the inter-relationships between the private world of individuals and the world of organised work, since the ‘problem’ has been situated at the interface between Aboriginal membership and the organisational school settings where education
exchanges occur. In so doing, this study acknowledges the key concepts that produce a falsifying division between positivism and interpretivism centre upon seven contestable areas that produce difficulties in linking individual behaviour with ideals of social constants (Lees, 2007; Matthews, 2013), as reflected in Table 14.

Table 14: Falsifying concepts in the division between positivism and interpretivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reality and objectivity</th>
<th>Causal explanation</th>
<th>Explanations of human behaviour</th>
<th>Truth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fact</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pring, 2000, p. 58)

In respecting Pring’s advice, the research questions outlined in section 1.3 represent the three problematised discourses and their layering being at the core of driving this inquiry and subsequent opportunity to answer the main research question. In doing so I acknowledge that opportunities for corruption of this type of research are high, and my approach invests in ways that both positivist and interpretivist ontologies speak to each other, based on evaluated evidence collected, and use this as a foundation in document analysis, theory deconstruction and theory building. In this space, Guilfoyle (2008) stated:

Studies of discourse can aim to better understand the exchanges both within communities and those of stakeholders with invested interest at all levels and, more importantly, critically observe the interaction of these discourses to examine how Indigenous communities are best positioned to create change. (p. 203-204)

While each discourse represents significant areas of inquiry, the intention of this study is to seek a contained and coherent treatment of the three domains and construct a valid researcher version of what forces might be at play beyond a simplistic explanation that Aboriginal educational underperformance in the NT is a product of ‘being Indigenous’.

3.3.3 Constructing a policy environment targeting NT remote Aboriginal students

This Story is driven primarily through critical race methodology (as defined on page 29), as part of the utility of CRT. Thus, I have employed inductive reasoning to look for repeated themes to enable coding to group into concepts and categories. This was particularly relevant to the case study where three respondent groups were interviewed. Since the main body of the study was conducted against a three-layer theoretic framework, the categories were established early for the case research (via the three driving questions) based on the case study being used specific to a set of key government reviews, as well on this occasion to scale/link direct into the main study. Bernard and Ryan (2010) offered five guidelines to analysing the data:
• Watch for disagreements among respondents;
• Check respondent accuracy whenever possible;
• Welcome negative evidence as an opportunity to investigate why it doesn’t fit;
• Continue to look for alternate explanations for phenomena; and
• Try to fit negative cases into theory building.

(p. 110)

3.4 Research methods, techniques and tools

3.4.1 An exploratory study of three major NT remote Aboriginal education reviews

A case study is a framework for conducting qualitative research of a phenomenon occurring in a bounded and real-life context, of which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single event or program for learning more about an unknown or poorly understood phenomenon (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Njie & Asimiran, 2014). Here, exploratory investigation was conducted on three major education reviews impacting four NT remote communities, and focused on discovering new knowledge about their policy impacts and why NT remote Aboriginal inequality persists. This inquiry captured the views of those working close to this policy environment, led by questions of why, how and what. Bernard and Ryan (2010) referred to these layers as exploratory questions, understanding processes and generating potential explanatory models. This inquiry also functioned as an instrumental case (Njie & Asimiran, 2014), used as a primary data anchor that linked participant voices with an expanded social inquiry, that is evidenced through secondary data sources.

As discussed, this study includes a case research on the policy impacts of the three major NT reviews that have had a defined focus in addressing NT remote Aboriginal education. Restating, these include Learning Lessons (1999) (Collins & Lea, 1999), SRNTDET (2009) (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009) and ASITF (2013) (Wilson, 2013). This investigation was critical to this inquiry because it enabled the important opportunity of sourcing primary data to strengthen the main study. In achieving this outcome, a key feature of the case research was to undertake analysis of each of the reviews in respect to their relationship to the three sub-questions, and use these to drive inquiry into my problematised policy framework and the underpinned policy spaces of Indigenous cultural inclusion, school service design and post-school pathways to employment and development on Country.

The case study involved one sixty-minute, semi-structured recorded interview with respondents and a follow-up to clarify points, where required. Respondents were provided with a transcript copy of their recorded interview, prior to their data being used. Participants included four NTDoE employees who had role connections with one or more or the reviews, four practising remote school Indigenous principals and ten remote Aboriginal community leaders that were members of school councils where the principal respondents were located. Interviews involving Indigenous principals and community leaders were separately conducted in their respective community to ensure nuanced understanding of
the contextual issues experienced on the ground and how these interacted with the education policy flows into the selected remote schools. As an insider Indigenous researcher (emic) with an extensive school leadership background in NT Aboriginal and mainstream education (outsider/etic), data collection was nuanced through my knowledge of the subject content and contexts.

3.4.2 Participant selection, recruitment and confidentiality
Participant selection was based on a semi-random process, with three distinct groups sought because I needed to interview those who could provide detailed insights on the issues investigated. This included NTDoE workers that have been involved with one or more of the three major reviews and connected policies targeting remote Aboriginal education, remote Aboriginal principals and remote Aboriginal community leaders that had knowledge, and or experience of the impacts of each of the three major reviews under investigation. This was considered an essential part of the bounded framing of inquiry to ensure informed feedback occurred, regarding which Njie and Asimiran (2014) assert:

The focus is rather on the sample that gives the best and the most in-depth information that the researcher seeks and since a careful selection of where information is best gotten often yields more information relevant to unearthing the questions that are asked in qualitative research, purposive sampling and the relevant number(s) involved are much more revered. (p. 38)

Each respondent was invited to participate through an initial phone conversation followed by a formal email. Accompanying this email was a Plain Language Statement (PLS) explaining the study, and consent and withdrawal of consent forms were also included to ensure those whose consent was provided was done so through ethical consideration in achieving freely obtained involvement (Driscoll, 2011). This research employed pseudonyms for all respondents to minimise the risk of participant identification (Driscoll, 2011), and comments were made non–identifiable by reference to geographical details and/or positions and/or any other possible way of identifying the respondent. Participation in the case research was completely voluntary and participants were provided opportunity to withdraw at any stage, up until when the data was coded for analysis. Participants were afforded an opportunity to review their interview transcript via email before the coding of data.

3.4.3 Primary data collection: Semi-structured interviews
In this case research, primary data was ‘discovered’ for the first time by the researcher, with this being achieved through observations, discussion with participants, and recorded semi-structured interviews. While my approach included discussion boundaries as guided by defined categories, I ensured the capacity for respondents to discuss the issues they considered significant; this was achieved through asking similar, rather than identical questions (Barnard & Ryan, 2010). The categories used for the interviews emerged through their alignment with the policy domains that I problematise in this Story. In constructing the questions, care was taken to avoid what Driscoll (2011, p. 163) referred to as leading
questions that produced researcher bias and the “double-barrelled question” of asking more than one question at once, to ensure clarity and containment and to avoid drift in participant responses.

Also, relevant to the semi-structured interviews was a need to ensure open-questions were asked that invoked opportunity for respondents to freely move around each question to provide their standpoint (Driscoll, 2011, p164). Several techniques included a combination of probing (rather than prompting) questions, maintaining silence and waiting for participants to continue with their responses, and echo probes, which involved repeating the last thing a respondent said and encouraging them to continue with that line of discussion (Barnard & Ryan, 2010). This was considered critical to the telling of this Story, since the purpose of face-to-face interviews was to invoke responses that provided flesh to the histories, contextual points, drivers and restrainers in which each of the three reviews under investigation have been encountered at the departmental, school and community levels. A key part of the process was to record each interview to eliminate opportunity for bias in trying to recall by memory and to enable opportunity for direct quotes (Driscoll, 2011).

An important part of my CRT methodology was to transcribe each interview into written format, exactly as was said and verified with the relevant interviewee, to ensure accuracy of captured voices. This process provided opportunity for additional comments and follow-up clarification, particularly since the use of open-questioning required significant inference and judgement calls in producing rich data (Vaught, 2011). Bernard and Ryan (2010, p. 34) identified the relevance of open-ended questions “when the objective is to discover people’s attitudes and beliefs and the basis on which someone has formed an opinion”. To ensure data was organised to speak to the case research question and main study, I employed an inductive process of coding to identify common themes arising from the interviews, including those of an unintended nature. Additionally, I used a form of ‘structural’ coding in describing aspects of the environment in which data was obtained, around each respondent’s community and workplace (Bernard & Ryan, 2010).

3.4.4 Ethnographic-in-nature data generation: Listening to voices: NTDoE policy workers, Aboriginal school principals and Aboriginal community leaders

The semi-structured interviews were conducted across the three groups to identify emergent themes that could offer increased insights to the processes of policy development and their movement into the diverse complexity of NT remote community schools. A central purpose of qualitative inquiry thus is to provide description, interpretation, verification and evaluation, and, in discussing this point, Peshkin (1993) stated:

In the descriptive sense qualitative research reveals the nature of a situation, setting or process; in the interpretative sense it helps in gaining new insights, concepts and discover problems that exists in a given situation; in the verification setting it helps experiment certain assumptions and in the evaluative sense it helps provide the means of judging the

In my attempts to identify such themes my approach was to identify their expressions to aid in their discovery, as Bernard and Ryan (2010, p. 55) commented: “Themes come both from data (an inductive approach) and from our prior theoretical understanding of whatever phenomenon we are studying (a priori, or deductive approach)”. Through this approach primary data was collected to enable comparative analysis across Aboriginal and non–Indigenous standpoints, bureaucratic and centralised agency standpoints, principal standpoints and community-voiced standpoints, against secondary data sources and the identified theories. This approach was considered important because it was key to what Driscoll (2011, p. 164) referred to as selecting the ‘right person to interview’. In this regard, the journey of the reviews from government to community was needed to construct understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions in the construction of the reviews and their subsequent policy actions and outcomes.

3.4.5 Decolonising the research
This study employs CRT, nuanced through TribalCrit to decolonise the research (Brayboy, 2006). This includes use of critical race methodology to disrupt colonising accounts of NT remote Aboriginal education performance, through Story and counter–Story telling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Decolonising approaches to research locate Aboriginal voices at the centre, with Indigenous researchers as agents for change. First Nations peoples have long been subjected to a western, ethnocentric pyramid of inquiry that has distorted understandings of Indigenous social realities (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Moodie, 2018), which Putt (2013, p. 1) described as “inherently biased and disempowering”. Thus, in this study I have followed the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2003) Guideline for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, which have consistency with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) principles of reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity. The research project was granted ethics approval from Deakin University and the NT Department of Education in 2016.

For this study, reciprocity has reflected the return benefits to participants for their involvement in the research, particularly in education; I developed respectful relationships throughout the study, particularly in the honouring of Aboriginal voices; equality reflected my emphasis on a research project that worked towards Aboriginal social equality and equal educational opportunity, based on the inclusion of local cultural knowledge systems; responsibility referred to this research avoiding harm to the participants, and instead working toward the greater good of their community; survival and protection referred to my commitment toward cultural distinctiveness and in avoiding the perpetuation of myths and historic research distortions (see Brayboy’s (2014) discussion on American Indian
context), such as static representation of Aboriginal identities and community contexts; and finally, spirit and integrity here referred to my whole approach in working with respondents and the spiritual values underpinning community members.

A key issue for NT remote Aboriginal communities has been the widespread and pervasive experience of being investigated, researched and probed to such an extent that contributors such as Guilfoyle (2008, p. 202) describe “Indigenous people suffering from research fatigue and historically, research has been viewed with due suspicion because it imposes external agendas onto communities”. One way I demonstrated my commitment was through my NT Aboriginality and extensive background of living in NT remote communities, working with families and children in an educational context. That is, my credibility and integrity had already been established through my demonstrated commitment to working in ways that have dignified community involvement in the delivery of remote schooling services (Blair, 2015; Moodie, 2018). For this investigation, my profile enabled Aboriginal ontological standpoints to be accurately sourced (Brayboy, 2006, 2015), represented through the case collection of data, related findings, analysis and discussion.

The main research question asks what policy approaches aimed at NT remote Aboriginal communities will facilitate NT remote Aboriginal students and their families engaging meaningfully and purposefully with a western education system. Here, the ontological standpoint is plural, rooted in the past and shifting across the future (Austin-Broos, 2009; Moodie, 2018), which meant avoiding an essentialising of Indigeneity (Yosso, 2005). My approach has thus been to invoke Aboriginal participant voices and realities to understand the social, cultural and political issues concerning education policy flows into NT remote Aboriginal communities (Austin-Broos, 2009). As articulated in the NHMRC (2003, p. 9): “The understanding [is] that the present and future are absolutely bound up in the past, and that these cannot be separated from each other when discussing issues where key values are at stake”. This was instructive in recognising the internal and external shaping forces that over time have impacted the constructed discourses and standpoints of respondents.

3.4.6 Observation techniques
An important strategy used in the collection of primary data was to use my past experiences in taking note of the environmental and climatic properties17 in which the semi-structured interviews occurred, noting that my background itself posed risks such as confirmation bias. Thus, I collected anecdotal information on environmental features of each inquiry site, to better understand and avoid overlooking

17 Community dynamics can be misleading to the untrained eye and it is here that I was equipped with extensive experience and insights into the dynamics of community life.
the contextual reality that other data were sourced, particularly through the semi-structured interviews. As Njie and Asimiran (2014) stated, this thick description when deconstructed and analysed yields a valuable understanding and explanation of a process. Inquiries that require the understanding of the meaning of certain phenomenon and events, especially when processes are involved, benefit more from using the qualitative research methods in general and the case study in particular to arrive at results that are exhaustive, rich in depth and information. (p. 36)

My observations were important because these enabled me to look beyond the literal discourses and physical artefacts reflected in each site. This made this study in one sense a critical participatory action research, though my participation was mainly of semi-immersion, rather than active collaborator. In discussing this approach to researcher involvement, Guilfoyle (2008) stated:

This methodology, when applied well and critically, can account for social forces and macro systems of injustice which affect the lives of people within a community and thus achieve using this methodological frame, demonstrate processes for ensuring the community identifies, defines and owns the research concerns and, are an excellent basis to showcase qualitative research, with all its strengths and utility. (p. 202)

My observations, as reflected in Table 15, therefore considered those data I determined relevant to the case study and the broader study. I employed the term ‘observed’ on the basis of accurately representing the ‘reasonable’ truth observed on the ground.

**Table 15: Researcher observation framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous cultural inclusion</th>
<th>Indigenous cultural inclusion in governance, curriculum, teaching &amp; learning</th>
<th>Physical artefacts &amp; symbols reflecting Indigenous cultural inclusion</th>
<th>Aboriginal employment (as a ratio to whole school employment)</th>
<th>Aboriginal leadership &amp; governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service accessibility modelling</td>
<td>School service provision modelling</td>
<td>Service access support programs (i.e. dietary/bus service)</td>
<td>Intervention programs/strategies for students at risk</td>
<td>Intervention program employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathways to employment and development on Country</td>
<td>Secondary education and training services in the community</td>
<td>Observed # secondary students in school</td>
<td>Level of local economic activity</td>
<td>Engagement of secondary students with the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social atmosphere (barometer)</th>
<th>Level of community participation in the school</th>
<th>Level of student attendance</th>
<th>Level of student engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Comment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this investigation is based on a problematising of the three policy domains of Indigenous cultural inclusion, service accessibility modelling and where such experience delivers remote Aboriginal students’ pathways to employment and development on Country, the treatment of a researcher observation framework necessarily required analysis against a document analysis involving the three major reviews under investigation. Table 16 reflects this determination. Through this approach I sought to employ opportunity for quantitative, statistical data analysis to identify associations in the policy flows from these reviews into their targeted remote schooling sites.

**Table 16: Researcher observation comparisons with three NT major reviews into remote Indigenous schooling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Domain</th>
<th>Researcher Observation Rating</th>
<th>NT review analyses (# recommendations)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Aboriginal cultural inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Service modelling: Accessibility to school services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Post-school employment pathways</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last, and to compare the statistical data drawn from a researcher observational framework, specific to each remote school site (as reflected in the above two tables), it was necessary to also construct a framework of capturing participant responses across each of the interviewed groups. This was necessary to identify patterns, commonalities and associations between the various standpoints and policy actions flowing from the three major reviews. Table 17 offered opportunity to identify emergent themes, sourced through the qualitative data collection process.
Table 17: Participant interview responses: emergent themes coded from interview transcripts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Problematised policy domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal cultural inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal school principals</td>
<td>Service accessibility modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal community leaders</td>
<td>Pathways to employment and development on Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education policy workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.7 Researcher immersion
My Aboriginal researcher immersion was a key part of developing a thickened Story in problematising the education system as directly implicated in NT remote education inequality. This positioning enabled close attention to the internal and external shaping influences on respondent responses, particularly as relate to social and political contexts, which can only be extracted well through experience and tact by the researcher (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). This was important in ensuring my Aboriginal voice was included alongside my experienced school leader standpoint, to sharpen insight and inquiry relevant to this research. This was particularly significant around articulating relationships in cause and effect, where tacit details were invoked to strengthen research depth (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1978, 2001).

In doing so, care was taken when linking data to propositions to avoid falsification and/or researcher conceptual bias (Driscoll, 2011). In another sense though and as Pring (2000) pointed out, it is impossible to separate a researcher’s sense of world order from that observed, and language or prior experience with the subject/content matter, as example variables, impacts how data is selected and weighted. Thus, a way of overcoming and maximising generalisability and reliability has been to reference and acknowledge personal input against the levels of triangulation and ethical considerations earlier discussed (Crotty1998). An important part of this approach was to maintain a critical and sceptical lens around what respondents were saying, given the political dimension of their standpoints.

3.4.8 Secondary data collection
Secondary research involved my looking at the research findings of others, and for this study has included multiple sources such as books, journals, multi-media and other online sites, and interrogating official reports and publications. A key aspect of this collection process was to ensure data was sought from credible sources, and, in the most part, recent publication. Since the secondary data has specific connection to the three points of discourse inquiry, these are mentioned in more detailed fashion within the section on discourse analysis.
3.5 Data analysis

The purpose of analysing data is to search for patterns in data and ideas to help explain why such patterns exist (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Analysis included a need to look at what I collected and to create a cohesive, systematic interpretation to help answer the research questions or examine the validity of the study proposition. At the core of this was to ensure the analysis reflected the findings in an honest way, even where these might have challenged the hypothesis or proposition (Driscoll, 2011). The analysis of data therefore involved organising and transcribing the primary data, which was conducted against the guiding questions and their relationship to my proposed policy framework to reveal emergent themes (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Since specific sources may vary wildly in their nature as to what they address, I have also drawn on key themes identified in the literature review. These themes were organised along the discourses of culture, school and society.

Example key data included United Nations Human Development Reports (2016); PISA 2009-; PISA in Brief. Highlights from the Full Australian Report: Challenges for Australian Education. Results from PISA 2009; OECD reports, i.e. Education at a Glance, 2012, NAPLAN reports, 2008–2018; COAG and Productivity Commission reports; ABS reports, i.e. Estimates & Projections, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026; Life Tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey-First Results, Australia, 2012–2013; Prisoners in Australia, 2014; Household Wealth and Wealth Distribution, Australia, 2011–12; National Accounts: State Accounts; Education Statistics (Early Childhood Education & Care; Schools, Australia, 2014).

3.5.1 Theorising the study: The utility of CRT

As outlined in Chapter 1, this Story and counter–Story (in Chapter 8) is told through the lens of CRT (see Figure 10). CRT is used to understand how society and institutions organise along racial lines and hierarchies, and to offer a counter–narrative that problematises the system of education (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). In this study CRT is used in my investigation of Australia’s constitutional law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006) to unpack and navigate the conflicting and antagonistic issues concerning terra nullius18 (Duffy, 2008) and the Mabo decision, which, as Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017) highlighted, was the first time in 200 years of colonisation that Indigenous continuous occupation was recognised in Australia’s legal system. This is considered in this study, given land has long been at the core of NT Aboriginal social justice pursuits and capacities to develop remote communities in the context of a western political economy (Altman, 2009; Bandias, Fuller and Holmes, 2012).

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18 Land belonging to no-one.
As also outlined in Chapter 1, CRT draws on critical theory (CT) to locate the relationships of an Australian society to the issues of cultural hegemony and Indigenous inequality, and its relationships to control, domination and exploitation (Moodie, 2018), pursuing a standpoint that society as a whole should be ‘socially just’, where wealth, self-fulfilment, peace and freedom can be achieved through a reifying of social capital as the main goal of human existence, as defined within the Human Development Report, 2016. This neo-Marxist perspective holds that people can be more than a class participant, and includes a critical analysis of Australia’s political economy and the way power is used in the production of structural inequality (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Fuchs, 2015; Savage, 2011). This is needed to understand NT remote Aboriginal inequality in the context of what Matthews (2013) identified as broader mainstream stratification and class struggles that have grown in the past 30 years.

A third theoretic lens used in the telling of this Story involves critical pedagogy (CP), on the basis that it assists in the identification of the structural flows from CRT and CT into the ways NT remote school services are provided. CP is employed on a basis that it attends to the sociocultural frames in which education occurs, while avoiding a separating of people into local or isolated groups (Foley et al., 2015). Of significance to a social-constructivist position, CP is employed as a tool to unmask the extent in which a capitalist neoliberal agenda, underpinned by positivist approaches to Aboriginal social complexities, has infiltrated the policy discourses of education in the NT remote domain that is complicit in the racialised, systemic and patterned outcomes in the NT context and nationally (Crowther & Ogilvie, 1992; Foley et al., 2015).

**Figure 10: Employing theory to conduct critical policy analysis along three levels**

In constructing new knowledge, secondary data is analysed alongside the primary data. In this way an epistemological approach of political and suspicious observer-constructed version of social reality is enabled through a critical race methodological process of deconstruction, textual analysis, discourse analysis and policy analysis. On the standpoint that power, greed and corruption influence the construction and treatment of NT remote Aboriginal education, and more broadly matters concerning Indigenous social justice, the layers of theory are employed to locate the power flows of a political economy to identify opportunities of a middle ground. For this Story, an attempt in reifying Indigeneity as a foundation in NT remote Aboriginal students’ education outcomes, moving to a point of patterned
equality of opportunity (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012), requires navigation through the corridors of politics and power that schooling policies travel from their capitalist treatment, through the fabrics of ‘race’ and economic inequality and into the core of school and its structural properties.

3.5.2 Discourse analysis of ‘race’, culture and schooling
A key focus in this study has been the need to deconstruct the dominant discourses of culture and school, as discussed in the literature review, and to expand and deepen these within sociopolitical debates concerning NT remote Aboriginal education. This includes the way politicians have constructed public images of Indigeneity as both an essentialised image (Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013), but also as a deficit barrier to assimilationist education policies (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Palmer, 2003). Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005, p. 283) discussed this in respect to the US context that “despite the attempts to eradicate an Indian identity, the mainstream continues to embrace a ‘romantic’ notion of the Indian”. A CRT guided discourse analysis of these types of raciologies is thus a key methodological approach in conducting a critical policy analysis of NT remote Aboriginal education and its treatment across a broader spectrum of Australian Indigenous social justice.

Culture and ‘race’ discourses
Information sourced in discussions of cultural discourses include national and NT Indigenous social policy actions from 1967, national and NT policy design performance and national and NT Indigenous social outcomes. Data/information collected has been disaggregated across national and NT socioeconomic layers and document analysis is used to interrogate data collected within the cultural discourses. The three culture discourse questions have been raised because they are central to Indigenous social inquiry and matters of NT remote Aboriginal social justice, since such investigations are situated on all three and are viewed by this Aboriginal researcher as commonly ‘invisible and assumed constants’.

Schooling discourses
In unpacking Australia’s education policy paradigm, the US inspired ‘Effective Schools’ discourse, and its underlying agenda of neoliberal performativity, is sourced (Hulgin & Drake, 2011; ‘Professional learning in effective schools’, 2005) to understand the philosophic undercurrents of policy and how it strikes across NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality. Data and documents collected focus on policy settings 1990-2016, as this period represents acceleration of a neoliberalist influence on Australia’s education policy environment (Matthews, 2013; Ranson, 2003), and this also includes a brief investigation of the period from 1967, as it offers a foundation to understanding recent policy changes. The data has also been disaggregated across a national socioeconomic indexation to identify patterns to be examined, particularly for Indigenous education performance. This approach to data analysis offers the foundational ‘evidence’ in my research attempts in linking cause and effect
relationships across a stratified and racialised class layering and stratified and racialised education system, as described by Apple (2000) when discussing the UK context.

**Contextualising the data evidence**

The timeline of 1990-2016 highlights a period when Australia’s class layering accelerated and financial sector deregulations tightened around a national Indigenous education policy formatting (Austin-Broos, 2009). The period of collection/investigation has been used to critique changes linked to specific national policy models as they have impacted schooling services, including the political environment that has shaped reform responses (Ranson, 2003). In this study, data and policy actions have been analysed against key structural trends for this period, which include a strengthening influence of economic rationalism within social and education policy settings, decentralisation of the Australian education industry from the early 1990s, corporatisation/managerialism (Matthews, 2013; Robinson, 2015) and the increased application of private industry competitive modelling and education industry standardisation from 1995, and increased schooling social prescription and accountability from 2000 (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Ranson, 2003).

**Societal discourses**

In this study, societal discourses include critical analysis and discussion on capitalism, democracy, political economy and social capitalism and these are underpinned by investigation of key concepts including hegemony, meritocracy, racism and colonisation. As an economic system, capitalism is observed to propel human creativity through competition, and through domination and exploitation, produce inequality (Ball, 2013; Wagner, 2011). As Giesinger (2011) points out, this is the intractable nature of education reforms, that “any educational inequality is likely to disadvantage the worse off in the race for advantage” (p. 42). In telling this Story, ideals of social justice are political constructs (North, 2006) that are caught within temporal spaces, becoming less magnified when competing issues of national interest emerge. Bone (2012), in referencing Friedman (1970), made mention of this dilemma of capitalism:

> There is one and only one social responsibility of business–to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud. (p. 655)

In responding to this challenge, this Story deconstructs the available data and analyses these in respect to the interplay between free-market principles and those of Keynesian-style, interventionist attempts in market regulation (De Vylder, 2008; Wagner, 2011). This pursuit is used to inform analysis of the cultural and schooling discourses. against societal discourses to determine how these operate within a policy architectural sense in the navigation of manufactured inequality (Austin-Broos, 2009), and to advance progressive modelling through the entanglements of complexity economics, which De Vylder (2008, p. 84) described as a “complex, adaptive evolutionary system with no equilibrium in sight”.

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3.5.3 **Presenting the research**

This research is my account of how NT remote Aboriginal education inequality is better understood through placing the focus on the system, rather than those that suffer its condition. The three policy domains problematised in this study (reified as policy pillars in Chapter 8) represent a recapture of existing knowledge that has consistently featured in NT remote Aboriginal education debates, though equally discarded or relegated to the periphery of government policy actions. While this is not new knowledge, what is rare is its contextual placement within the political economy and its associated construction of *Indigeneity as the key foundational plank* in advancing remote Aboriginal student education performance. And while this Story concerns Aboriginal children in NT remote communities in the education system, it broadly represents a linked construction of social capitalism, functioning as a ‘test’ in seeking a real and practical alternative to the unsustainable Australian hyper-driven form of capitalism and the wealth and racialised inequality that derives from this state (Bone, 2012).

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter I have outlined my methodology to answer the main research question, through addressing its underlying and embodied sub-questions. In attempting to reify NT remote Indigeneity as the key platform to countering the structural educational inequality experienced by NT remote Aboriginal children is that it requires its problematised ‘treatment’ across such structural layers. For this Story, inequality is a social construction, that has been led by, and led to, significant layering of student performance along lines of class and ‘race’ (Webster & Ryan, 2014), and with such regard I employ CRT, alongside adhering to Aboriginal ethical practices, to describe the nature of this performance, in order to locate the nature of its solution/s. To achieve this, I employ my problematised three policy domains and advocate a centrist pathway to countering the multiple and multifarious forces of capitalism and its design outcome in producing structural inequality (McCarthy, 2009).

The next chapter turns attention to the Story of the secondary data, since the nature and scope of the problem is the basis for this inquiry and needs to be unpacked. Chapter 4 details national and NT Indigenous and non–Indigenous education policy trajectories over the past 10 years, extending in some areas to 26 years since 1990, along with the data outcomes produced. This timeline is identified on the basis that this earlier period reflects significant structural developments in the Australian education system, at a time of major societal change. As will be shown, this included a rapid expansion in economic inequality and stratification as an Australian economy gravitated towards free-market principles to overcome economic recession in the late 1980s. Chapter 4 serves as the evidence and basis for the research problem and the profound questions this study raises about the nature of Indigenous education problematising and its research foundations.
Chapter 4. Australia’s layered education performance

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the Story of Australia’s educational performance is told over the period 2008–2014, with earlier timeline trends included to enable historic contextualisation to recent performance expressions. The timelines selected are instructive of the first 6 years of national, standardised testing. The patterns of performance reported here remain the same for each year after 2014 and offer no statistical departure from that discussed. While aggregated data are analysed, attention is drawn around the disaggregated reports, particularly NT remote Aboriginal student performance. In presenting this data, student achievement is discussed against Australia’s education policy trajectories and their associated funding. This performance is tempered by the fact that a consistent measuring instrument of a national curriculum, assessment and reporting framework only came into existence from 2008. Prior to this period, it is difficult to profile educational performance levels across Australia’s varied jurisdictions, partly due to the different points in which curriculum, assessment and reporting occurred, but also due to unreliability in the data.

This chapter discusses schooling performance through a series of layering disaggregated across Years 3-9 (8 years of age – 14 years of age). The data reported are disaggregated across three layers: (1) national mainstream, State and Territory jurisdictions, wealth (through parental qualifications and employment status) and by geolocation (metro, provincial, remote and very remote); (2) National Indigenous and (3) the NT, with specific focus on remote Aboriginal achievement. Analysis of the NT includes disaggregation of language background other than English (LBOTE) and key demographic elements relevant to the NT context. The chapter reveals that Australia’s national education performance has long been layered, consistent with the layering of capitalist economies elsewhere (Gibbons & Telhaj, 2007), and while this layering is pronounced across Indigenous groups nationally, it is particularly deepened and compounded across NT remote Aboriginal community contexts (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

4.2 National education policy trajectory

In locating a national education policy trajectory, it is important to consider its movements within the context of a developing capitalist, democratic, Australian society (Austin-Broos, 2009). Education discourses have been influenced by key events such as population growth, recession and war, and, more acutely in recent decades, by growing wealth inequality (Davidson, Saunders & Phillips, 2018). Within this national arena key movements have included emerging markets that have placed pressure on the education system and its marketised trajectory in providing quality vocational training and higher education, the emergence of integrated technology industries, development of the knowledge society
and ideals of a rounded life-skills education (Matthews, 2013). Since Australian Federation in 1901, there has also been an Australian democratic system that has fuelled a parallel trajectory in overlaying ideals of fairness and equality of education opportunity, situated within capitalism’s flows toward individualism and its extrapolations into ‘falsified’ choice and meritocracy (Matthews, 2013; Reid, 2002; Yates, 2004).

4.2.1 Foundational movements

Key events that have influenced Australia’s education system are reflected acutely after 1948. As ‘schooling for the masses’ took shape, NSW government schools’ retention of Year 7–10 students increased from 13% in 1948 to 48% in 1958, and 72% by 1968, albeit with wealth an early variable (ABS, 2001). Despite high–performing secondary students from 1964 receiving Commonwealth scholarship support to stay at school, this had little impact on students from low socio economic or remote locality backgrounds (ABS, 2001). Later, the Whitlam Labor government in 1974 abolished tuition fees at universities, advancing colleges and the TAFE sector; increasing a trajectory toward free public education (ABS, 2001). Underpinning this action was the Karmel Report (1973), which identified the rights of the individual child, and that Indigenous children required significant government support. As described by Werner (2015), the Karmel Report highlighted a struggling education system, reflected in under-resourcing, low-quality teachers, school curriculum and organisational service modelling (ABS, 2001).

Intersecting across these actions the Fraser Liberal government in 1975 pursued an agenda of choice and merit through increased funding to the private education sector (ABS, 2001). This resulted in a swing to the right and increased student flows into the private sector from the public system, as parents sought to improve student pathways into employment (ABS, 2001). By 1989 the architecture of Australia’s education system entered further into the contesting forces of capitalism, where the ideals pursued with the Karmel Report began to prise open the multiple-layered challenges these generated (Matthews, 2013). In 1989, economic pressures radiating across a national policy environment coalesced around the segments of the schooling system from preschool to senior secondary, Indigeneity, racial integration and a need to factor special education as a major growing need into the matrices of education policy and service modelling (Australian Education Council, 1989).

While 1973 onwards signalled a trend toward national education policies reflected in egalitarian ideals (Education Council, 2015), Australia’s economic recession in the late 1980s to early 1990s relocated these ideals between economic-rationalist doctrine and the social dimensions of schools and student learning (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Matthews, 2013). Across these contests, national actions gravitated toward schools as sites of specialisation, based on a view they could deliver on the promise of education through specialised service provision (Hattie, 2003, 2009). It was here the 1970s Karmel and Boomer reports were instrumental in advancing the course of reforms for 30 years, transporting
schools from the 1990s across the levers of decentralisation, corporatisation/managerialism and standardisation (Matthews, 2013). Table 18 offers highlights this movement, which pursued a goal of overcoming the social undercurrents flowing through the internal properties of education, due to growing inequality. Behind these policy shifts, economic rationalism emerged as a dominant influence in national policy development (Dimmock & Walker, 2000).

Table 18: Key national bodies, reports & milestone reforms 1973-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karmel report</td>
<td>The Whitlam government established a committee for the Australian Schools Commission, chaired by Peter Karmel. The Committee was tasked with recommending ways to improve the schooling system.</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling in Rural Australia report</td>
<td>Report by Garth Boomer recommended ways of improving the quantity and quality of rural schooling.</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten goals of Australian schooling</td>
<td>Precursor to the Adelaide and Melbourne Declarations for Australian Schooling.</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation</td>
<td>Decentralisation of Australian schools emerges from 1990 (Karmel Report)</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG established</td>
<td>COAG oversees national education and schooling improvement.</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent public schools</td>
<td>Independent Public Schools and global budgeting emerge, extending the 1990 decentralisation movement</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Education Council, 2019)

**Council of Australian Governments (COAG)**

A determinant of the recent policy setting has been COAG’s role in shaping the architecture of national education reforms, through its Education Council. This council consists of the State/Territory education ministers, and oversees the National School Reform Agreement, which sets out a five-year strategic
direction (COAG Education Council, 2019, n.p). The Agreement outlines eight national policy initiatives, organised under three policy ‘pillars’, shown in Table 19. Noticeably absent from this design is an articulation of Indigenous education and/or how a national change agenda would be achieved within the social frames of school organisational spaces, including a national culture-building policy approach.

A critique of these policy levers reveals an absence in articulating the broader, human social attributes that national schooling goals identify and which are structurally embodied elements in its pursuit of reaching across social disadvantage. While these policy levers are applied in the context of differential funding streams, as a response to meeting funding requirements to schools in disadvantaged contexts, the problematising and economic-rationalist discourses that these policy levers derive from remain in place. The report from which these policy levers are based, *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools 2018* (Department of Education & Training, 2018), discusses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the same context of social and economic disadvantage and within the policy paradigm described:

> The review panel heard from a range of stakeholders that the fundamentals for supporting all students do not change. This holds regardless of a student’s circumstances, whether they are students with disability, students in rural or remote locations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those from non–English speaking backgrounds, low socioeconomic backgrounds, gifted and talented students, or any combination of these. (p. 11)

This most recent national education policy problematising, being an effort to mainstream, has revealed a narrowed and anchored ‘white’ standpoint to responding to Indigenous student disengagement and its associations with a broader societal overlay of continuing and embedded racism (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Moodie, 2018), which I detail further in Chapters 6–7.

**Table 19: Key national education policy initiatives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supporting students, student learning and student achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Enhancing the Australian curriculum to teacher assessment of student attainment and growth against clear descriptors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Assisting teachers to monitor individual student progress and identify student learning needs through opt-in online and on-demand student learning assessment tools with links to student learning resources, prioritising early years foundation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III. Reviewing senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I. Reviewing teacher workforce needs of the future to attract and retain the best and brightest to the teaching profession and attract teachers to areas of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II. Strengthening the initial teacher education accreditation system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enhancing the national evidence base</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Implementing a national unique student identifier (USI) that meets national privacy requirements in order to support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base

II. Establishing an independent national evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development

III. Improving national data quality, consistency and collection to improve the national evidence base and inform policy development

(Education Council, 2019)

4.2.2 National education policy architecture
Where a national education policy trajectory is problematised against structural inequality, it is important to consider what this looks like in an Australian context, which Eaton and Stilwell (1992) discussed as deepening from the late 1980s. The ABS (2012) reported that across 2011-12: “Households in the highest net worth quintile held more than 60% of the total net worth of all households, while a further 21% was held by households in the 4th quintile. By comparison, the lowest three quintiles held, in total, 18% of total net worth”. This inequality arguably raised questions about whether education’s function was to reproduce inequality, or to break it (Apple, 2000; Matthews, 2013). The first option is unsustainable, given the costs associated with inequality, and the second locates oppositional to the structural forces that give rise to inequality. Within these limited options, Australia’s social-liberalist agenda remains within a social-capitalist paradox (Savage, 2011).

Against this and offering a cloak to Australia’s economic inequality, the United Nations Human Development Report (Malik, 2013, p. 27) identified Australia as one of the top five countries ranking ‘better’ on its Human Development Index (HDI), then on gross national income per capita in 2012. While this highlighted the moral dimensions of Australia as a caring society, in canvassing the structural dimensions of poverty, raised key points concerning hegemony:

This inequitable and unjust social and economic universe can be compounded by unjust governance. Often the excluded remain voiceless in the institutions of governance and thus observed by public institutions. The institutions of democracy remain unresponsive to the needs of the excluded, both in the design and policy agendas and in the selection of electoral candidates. Representative institutions thus tend to be monopolised by the affluent and socially powerful, who then use office to enhance their wealth and then perpetuate their hold over power. (p. 37)

As discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 40) Australia’s wealth inequality has deepened (Davidson, Saunders & Phillips, 2018), and when this is situated against the international context, the country’s neoliberal trajectory is clear. A Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2018 (Shorrocks, Davies & Lluberas, 2018) for example stated of the Australia context: “With 1,596,000 people in the top 1% of global wealth holders, Australia accounts for 3.2% of this top slice, despite being home to just 0.4% of the world’s adult population” (p. 55). This elevated pursuit of wealth happens on the backs of those marginalised
and exploited, and has a deepening polarising effect to ‘white’ cultural hegemony in education policy mapping (discussed in Chapter 6). This extends materially and internally, and where group members are based spatially within this stratified power relationship is linked to the value given to their identity (Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

In light of these national and international links to wealth and opportunity, connections are established from data on education and wealth distribution, and that postcode matters, along with relationships between the education levels of parents and a child’s ability to gain from the education system. In a study of NAPLAN’s (2008–2009) earliest iterations, Hughes and Hughes (2009) revealed that results were directly linked to parent education levels, suggesting strongly interlocked class-based and cultural patterns; a view backed by the SCRGSP (2011), and as confirmed since in every NAPLAN report between 2008 and 2018 (ACARA, 2019).

4.2.3 The politics of Australia’s shifting education policy reforms
An Australian political landscape that has sought a third-way position between the political left and right and gravitated around unsteady ideals of social-liberalism (Savage, 2011) has thus been an attempt to reduce the more harmful effects of capitalism, rather than to create social equality. In telling this Story, such a path is considered unsustainable, since inequality is a by-product of capitalist competition and its reliance on human exploitation (North, 2006; Wagner, 2011). This condition was described by Nieto (2007, p. 302) as an “ideological problem embedded in a system with all manner of negative attitudes and perceptions of people from different social standings”. In Australia rights and equal opportunity are pursued national values, producing ideological contests across the education system, that have fuelled an environment of heightened public accountabilities toward what O’Dowd (2009, p. 813) described as an “ideological abyss”.

These contests are witnessed in funding ‘agreements’ and the centralised agendas in schooling reform (Fenwick, 2000; Matthews, 2013), but also covertly in ideological contests where ideals of Indigenous social justice centre on what Stewart-Harrawira (2005, p. 129) referred to as Indigenous peoples’ ‘right to be different’ as much as a pursued right to be treated equally. This tension has occurred within an increasing level of Australian hyper-capitalism and its corollary in neoliberalism (Bone, 2012), leading to policy actions moving fractiously across the high levels of variation and social complexity that schools exist in nationally (Poell et al., 2000, p. 28). With respect to this image of inequality (see Figure 12), the education profession has become more defined, yet less defined where political and philosophic divisions denote partitioning to accommodate an increasingly complex industry under heightened public attention. As discussed by Klenowski (2011), this has produced a widening distrust and disempowerment of a teaching profession caught within social ambiguity.
Reforms seek to prepare children for a constantly changing and challenging world. This means moving children, mostly from struggling families, to do better than their demographic experiences.

From the early 1980s the introduction of school councils signalled a recognition that the open, porous and organic organisational properties of schools required prising open of what had been a closed system (Hough, Paine & Austin, 1997). This was also relevant within an overlaying democracy, where pursued rights of individualism emerged in sync with strengthening policy approaches that emphasised issues concerning the costs to deliver education. Thus, through decentralisation, schools became self-managing entities functioning as ‘learning organisations’ capable of renewing and adapting to uncertainty and change through transformational leadership, based on dialectic team-work (Copland, 2003; Long, 1990; Stoll & Fink, 2001). In this regard, decentralisation of the Australian schooling system in the early 1990s reflected shifts consistent with the US context toward site-specific local controls and accountability, whilst simultaneously increased policy controls to centralised education department officials and their senior bureaucrats (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000; Klenowski, 2011).

Following this trend, the decade from 2000 reflected moves toward standardisation of the organisational structures of schools and their workforces, predicated on a contestable belief that heightened specialisation within schools could counter social inequality arising from an increasingly hyper-capitalist Australian society (Bone, 2012). As a school principal throughout this period of rapid change, I experienced this corporatised design across education, which philosophically sought to deconstruct students into fragmented components, serviced through segmented organisational structures featuring curriculum, teacher standards, HR, student services, corporate services and finance (Ranson, 2003). It was in this dynamic that COAG’s economic rationalist perspective on education policy formatting flowed into the front-end policy toolkits that schools were required to adopt.
4.2.4 National reform toolkit
While this chapter has focused on describing the limited ways that education reforms have addressed societal tensions, they nonetheless are templates towards excellence. Improvements do not occur without investments, and the teaching profession has in the past existed as an ambiguous and pseudo profession, due to its lack of definition within the social frames. The strength of the education landscape demonstrates Australia has performed well, but struggles in its translation across disadvantaged contexts. It is this challenge where the policy suppositions are exposed for their rigidity, as evidenced in their philosophic and political dislodgement (Matthews, 2013). COAG’s pursuit of aligning an Australian education system to the national economy makes sense, but designing an education system through the economy has been problematic. This is particularly because it has sidelined social policy in advancing through the complex and problematic social dimensions of schools, and with it, new paradigms in addressing the patterned condition of schools in NT remote Aboriginal communities (Tatz, 2009).

My experiences in senior school leadership revealed that this approach led to a reductionist climate of educational problematising, where attempts at deconstructing social problems into bits of the whole had increased demands of worker specialisation, resource demands and impacts on time allocation (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). This was found to be acute in efforts to resolve issues that have relied heavily on quantitative inputs to address the naturally complex, unpredictable and self-organising and organic properties of schools (Matthews, 2013). Dimmock and Walker (2000, p. 147) described this as “structural-functionalist approaches maintaining single-level frameworks that ignore the relationships and interactions between differing levels of culture”. For example, in this formula teachers are treated as parts of a whole to manipulate the raw product, children, through manufacturing tools of curriculum, pedagogy, programs and resources (Rahman, 2013; Ranson, 2003).

Thus, what has emerged has been a blinding to the social epiphenomena emanating from either the relationships that exist between such sub-components or from the output of relationships they share with the external, global environment. While the ‘quality’ teacher for example is important, it is tempered by variables that extend well beyond the scope of the classroom. In view of this, Christie (2005, p. 242), citing Said (2004), suggested that a new type of ethic was needed; “one which offers resistance to the great reductive and vulgarising us-verses they thought patterns of our time”. But despite this advice, Australia’s trend has remained fixated upon national standardisation and increased centralised controls and accountabilities to build the internal specialisation of schools (Matthews, 2013). Against rising inequality (see Chapter 1), the incapacity of this approach to counter the forces reshaping the service integrity of schools is evident, including the spiralling costs associated with such trajectory (Crowther & Ogilvie, 1992). These costs are now explored.
4.3 National trends in education funding

During the 1960s, Australia’s education system intensified across the layers of early childhood, primary/elementary and secondary, which required increased clarity driven by social demands for extended education, industrialisation, immigration, full employment policies and increased urbanisation (ABS, 2001). Accompanying this, the States Grants Act 1964 was passed (amended in 1973 to include non–government schools), signalling the involvement of the Commonwealth’s entry into education funding. In 1973 the Karmel Report proposed a model of funding (adopted in 1974) and included programs for special education, disadvantaged schools, teacher professional development and innovation (Harrington, 2011). Between 1973 and 1988 the Australian Schools Commission funded States and Territories on a triennial basis in the areas of general recurrent grants based on levels of disadvantage, capital grants and targeted programs. As discussed by Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017), this changed in 2009 when COAG endorsed a new arrangement under a National Schools Specific Purpose Payment, with additional grants provided through national partnerships (Harrington, 2011).

4.3.1 Funding trajectory

The period from 1989 is significant to this Story since it signified a sharpened curvature in the economic, free-market overlay of the nation, an acceleration in economic and social stratification and the heightened changes to a national education reform agenda that sought increased institutional responses within a trajectory of rapid, societal change (Lloyd, 2008). In 1989, Commonwealth direct funding nationally for schools was $11.5 billion, of which 58% was allocated to teacher salaries (government sector), with an additional 11% spent on non–teaching salaries (Australian Education Council, 1989). The remaining 30% was spent on goods and services as well as buildings and school grounds. Tables 20-21 reveal the rise of government expenditure over the past 60 years. While the Australian Constitution determines responsibility for funding education services remained with State governments (Matthews, 2013), more recently the Commonwealth has utilised section 96 to legitimise Commonwealth intervention through tying policy requirements to grants (Harrington, 2011).

Over this period, expenditure on non–government schools were $3.2 billion, including $1.9 billion spent on Catholic schools. The Commonwealth provided funding through grants to approximately 50% of funding for non–government schools, and State grants represented an additional 23% (13% for other non–government schools). From the private sector, non–government funds raised represented 27% for Catholic schools and 67% for other non–government schools (Australian Education Council, 1989). Successive ABS reports analysed by the author reveal the period from 1989 as a time of rapid increased expenditure levels by all governments. While it is difficult to identify whether this expenditure has represented an increase against GDP (ABS reports after 2002 do not include this information), it raises several relevant themes. These are discussed within this study, and may broadly be characterised as:
1. A deepening of economic-rationalist doctrine within the matrices of a national education policy paradigm and delivery;
2. A deepening of education’s placement within societal advancement, fuelling increased politicisation of education; and
3. A capturing of both discourses within a rapidly changing capitalist, democratic system and their locations within economic advancement and ideals of social justice.

Table 20: Public and private expenditure on education, Australia, 1948–49 to 1997–98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public expenditure $m</th>
<th>Net private expenditure $m</th>
<th>Public and private outlays $m</th>
<th>Outlays percent of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948–49</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953–54</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958–59</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963–64</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972–73</td>
<td>1,774</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>2,241</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975–76</td>
<td>4,120</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>4,777</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977–78</td>
<td>5,370</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>6,106</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978–79</td>
<td>5,794</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>6,658</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983–84</td>
<td>10,048</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>11,364</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–89</td>
<td>14,242</td>
<td>1,623</td>
<td>17,205</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–95</td>
<td>20,174</td>
<td>3,327</td>
<td>25,339</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>23,109</td>
<td>4,577</td>
<td>29,578</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2001, p. 8)

Table 21: Public and private expenditure on education, Australia, 1999–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public expenditure $m</th>
<th>Net private expenditure $m</th>
<th>Public and private outlays $m</th>
<th>Outlays percentage of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>22,994</td>
<td>9,006</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>n.p.%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>24,460</td>
<td>9,865</td>
<td>32,323</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–01</td>
<td>24,339</td>
<td>10,349</td>
<td>34,688</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–02</td>
<td>26,202</td>
<td>11,086</td>
<td>37,288</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graph 2 outlines the cost of education increasing significantly from 1.7% of GDP in 1948 to 5.0% over the last 20 years, and it also reveals the discourse of public verses private, where significant upward expenditure trends emerged from the mid to late 1980s, as the economy slowed and financial deregulation principles accelerated (Austin-Broos, 2009). On one level, this reflected an Australian population moving between the two sectors in pursuit of the quality education and employment opportunity, a point captured in an OECD19 report *Education at Glance 2014: OECD Indicators* (2014, p. 238), which stated that “many of the OECD countries with the greatest growth in private spending have also had the largest increases in public funding”. In discussing the spiralling costs in delivering education services this report (OECD, 2014, p. 238), made several important points:

- Across OECD countries governments accounted for 84% of education funding;
- Approximately 92% of funding for primary, secondary and post-secondary non–tertiary educational institutions across OECD countries came from government;
- Tertiary institutions and pre-primary institutions received the largest amount of funds from private sources (31% and 19% respectively);
- Government funding for educational institutions (all levels combined) increased between 2000 and 2011 in all countries (except Italy) for which comparable data exists;
- While more households shared the cost of education, private funding increased at greater rates in more than 75% of OECD countries.

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4.3.2 Funding models
In a Department of Parliamentary Services report, Harrington (2011) highlighted this trend of Commonwealth funds flowing to non-government schools (see Table 22). This report highlighted that Commonwealth funding from 2000–2012 had not increased substantially as a percentage of national GDP, moving from 0.72 in 2000 to 0.84 in 2012; a far lower percentage than the previous decade. ABS figures for GDP percentages in education funding (Table 21) show 5.1% in 1999–2000 and 5.3% for 2002, however this is likely due to the ABS including State and Territory funding streams, which account for 91.4% of overall government contributions (Harrington, 2011). Thus, complexities in the way funding is now sourced and reported on made it difficult to establish how much currently gets to schools most in need, against a trend that favours families with money. The next section details the impact of this trajectory on the schooling performance of Australian children.

Table 22: Australian government funding of schools 1999–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual expenditure</th>
<th></th>
<th>Real expenditure</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government schools</td>
<td>Non–government schools</td>
<td>All schools</td>
<td>Government schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$m</td>
<td>% of total funding</td>
<td>$m</td>
<td>% of total funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–00</td>
<td>1 909</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>2 883</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–01</td>
<td>1 893</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>3 405</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001–02</td>
<td>2 058</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>3 737</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002–03</td>
<td>2 143</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>3 869</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal of an Australian education system to liberate the underprivileged and build the economic and cultural wellbeing of the nation are advanced through moral imperatives and a pursuit of ‘third-way’ social-liberalism (Savage, 2011). However, despite these ideals, there has remained an entrenched patterning in Australia that suggests schools are anchored to their district environments (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Savage, 2011), such as experienced in the US (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). A keystone investigation into the first 5 years of a national agenda of standardisation titled Report to the Council of Australian Governments (21 October 2012), Education in Australia 2012: Five Years of Performance (Australian Government, 2012) underlined this view. As highlighted in Table 23, this report revealed patterned under-achievement remained entrenched for poor non–Indigenous students over the first 5 years, despite intensified educational reforms, accountability and performance improvement frameworks and increased funding (Matthews, 2013).

**Table 23: National outcome trends for low SES 2008–2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Outcome 2008–2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Large gaps in achievement between low and high socioeconomic groups remain in all year levels of testing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Between 2008 and 2012, the reading achievement of students in the lowest socioeconomic group increased in Years 3 and 5, but declined in Years 7 and 9.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Between 2008 and 2011, Year 12 attainment increased for the lowest socioeconomic group to 73.7% compared to 93.3% for the highest socioeconomic group. The gap between the two groups remained as per 2008 levels. There were greater improvements for the lower and middle socioeconomic groups (quintiles 2 and 3). Year 12 attainment for both groups increased around 5%, to 81.9% and 85.8% respectively, reducing the gap with the highest group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2011, after leaving school, 41.7% of young people from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds were not fully engaged in work or study, compared to 17.4% for young people from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds. This gap widened between 2008 and 2011.

A global statement in this report included mixed messages:

Participation in preschool is high and school outcomes in the early years are improving. Nationally, average scores improved in Years 3 and 5 in reading and in Year 5 in numeracy, but there were no improvements in Years 7 and 9. Australia is also performing behind top countries in these key areas. Year 12 attainment has increased, particularly for Indigenous students. More than a quarter of young people are not fully engaged in work or study after leaving school and this has worsened over 5 years. (COAG Reform Council, 2013, p. 8)

The patterned trends of educational inequality are evident in the above quote, as too the question it raises about where education transports those school leavers unable or unwilling to engage in further study or employment. The following provides the nuanced journey of performance, commencing with the international context.

4.4.2 Australia’s international performance trends
Against this national profile, international testing has revealed Australia’s trends in schooling performance have slipped. The Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) emerged out of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organisation of industrialised nations in 2000 and is coordinated through the OECD. A key function of this test, which is administered every 3 years, is to rank the educational performance of countries grouped within and external to the OECD. PISA captures the performance of students aged 15 years in mathematics, science and reading, and measures general competencies such as collaborative problem solving (ACER, 2019).

The OECD report Education at a Glance, 2012 did not provide comparable data in its findings across countries, which suggests the data is some distance from being of use beyond that of a subjective barometer. In Australia for example, the national rate of enrolled 4-year-old children was 51%, behind countries such as France, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Japan, Norway, Italy Germany and NZ (all close to 95%), with Canada, Switzerland, Ireland, Indonesia and Turkey behind Australia. However, the data highlighted Australia was also well above these countries in its ranking, revealing the limitations of comparing international performance (OECD, 2012). In an earlier Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report, Thomson et al. (2009) found that Australia’s international performance was strong, but over 2009 to 2012 the nation’s international average performance dropped substantially from 11th to 16th as revealed in Tables 24–25. This profile also revealed the NT and Tasmania performing below the OECD average.
Table 24: PISA in brief highlights from the full Australian report: Challenges for Australian education: Results from PISA 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia 2009 rankings</th>
<th>Reading Literacy</th>
<th>Mathematical literacy</th>
<th>Scientific literacy</th>
<th>Average performance</th>
<th>Relation to OECD Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thompson et al., 2009)

Table 25: PISA in brief highlights from the full Australian report: PISA 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia 2012</th>
<th>Reading Literacy</th>
<th>Mathematical literacy</th>
<th>Scientific literacy</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Relation to OECD Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14th</td>
<td>19th</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction rankings</th>
<th>Reading literacy</th>
<th>Mathematical literacy</th>
<th>Scientific literacy</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Relation to OECD Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia average</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD average</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Thompson et al., 2009)

4.4.3 National trends in schooling performance
In 2003, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) outlined the need for improving the national comparability of Australia’s education performance through common national tests. Over the next 5 years each of the States and Territories worked collaboratively in the design and diagnostic layers of the tests, at the time led through the national coordinator and project manager, Curriculum Corporation. The first tests were conducted in May 2008 for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in government and non–government schools. Students were tested in the domains of Reading, Writing, Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy (ACARA, 2008). The following provides 6 years of national schooling performance, profiled through a consistent test and assessment tool.

In Appendix A, a data profile is provided on the national performance in reading and numeracy, across all tested cohorts of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These tables, which reveal slight waves in the data trends for all cohorts over time and the NT, significantly and consistently performed well below the other
jurisdictions. As with the earlier discussion of the PISA assessment, this profile does not offer contextualised information to unpacking results and the environments that such mapping is overlayed. Graphs 3 and 4 reveal Australia’s performance across all cohorts and all testing areas. While discussed in later sections of this chapter, these averaged results for non–Indigenous and Indigenous students highlight the NT’s education policy environment as one of structural inequality, given the scope and depth of variation in the results points to the systemic elements of policy design.

**Graph 3: Mean aggregated average at or above minimum national standards: Years 3 – 9 reading 2008 – 2014**

![Graph 3](image)

**Graph 4: Mean average at or above minimum national standards, years 3 – 9 numeracy, 2008 – 2014**

![Graph 4](image)

In the next section data is provided on student performance by wealth, which is not a categorisation used in the NAPLAN. To achieve this profile parental qualification and occupation were separately sourced as variables of student performance, and these were analysed across the highest points of achievement in Year 3 (band 6) and Year 9 (band 10). This is important to highlight since achievement flows into Years 11 and 12 and post-secondary pathways (university, technical and further education)
and ideals of a strengthening economy. One anomaly that requires attention in this research is why the data between 2008-2014 for Year 3 and Year 9 reading and numeracy consistently show on average a 50% reduction at the high achievement level against both variables. This is significant given such trends are not evident in the national minimum benchmark achievements reflected in the data sets provided in Appendix B.

4.4.4 National performance by parental qualification
Appendix C provides data sets that reveal consistently higher performance outcomes for students from family backgrounds where the parents or primary caregiver has a tertiary qualification, at minimum a bachelor’s degree. This trend in a deterioration at the higher scores by Year 9 is significant, and for this study points toward serious undercurrents impacting an Australian middle class and growing social inequality. Table 30 reveals the average trends, which are reflected in Graph 5. These reveal this trend as a major signal that postcodes matter, albeit across what the data suggests is a constriction of the middle class. Arguable, for a future Australia seeking economic prosperity and ability to attend to its internal and international challenges, the education system will need to perform at a much higher level than indicated here, particularly given it conversely reveals that 75% of children from relatively well-educated family backgrounds are not achieving at the highest banding achievement levels.

Table 26: Student performance average combined upper level year 3 (band 6) & year 9 (band 10) reading and numeracy, by parental qualification, Australia, 2008 – 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental qualifications</th>
<th>Percent of students achieving at band 6 (year 3) &amp; band 10 (year 9) 2008–2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>23.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>12.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>7.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>10.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Averages sourced from Tables 3.7 – 3.8 combined for reading and numeracy

(ACARA, 2008–2014)
4.4.5 National performance by parental occupation

In presenting student performance trends against parental occupation, Appendix D outlines the data performance, which indicates that qualification and occupation are closely linked. Figure 12 provides NAPLAN report definitions, and Table 26 highlights this association. The anomaly identified earlier in the data detailing parental qualifications concerning the 50% reduction between Year 3 and Year 9 is mirrored in the data sets for parental occupation. These data sets are significant since they suggest schools are flowing students increasingly into the blue-collar vocational sector, placing downward pressures on a deregulated higher education sector, and on the construction of a knowledge economy. For this Story, these trends challenge Keynesian-style intervention by governments (Curchin, 2016; Kenway, 2013), given the revenue to fund economic budget repairs associated with costly social programs, alongside the costly social fragmentation that exponentially expands from such condition.

Figure 12: Key: Parental occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Senior management and qualified professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Other business managers and associate professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Tradespeople, clerks, skilled office, sales and service staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Machine operators, hospitality staff, assistants, labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid work</td>
<td>Not in paid work in the previous 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>No data provided for parental occupation at the time of student enrolment. The higher the percentage of missing data, the less informative is the results of the other categories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27: Student performance combined average upper level year 3 (band 6) & year 9 (band 10) reading and numeracy, by parental occupation, Australia, 2008–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental qualifications</th>
<th>Percentage of students achieving at band 6 (year 3) &amp; band 10 (year 9) 2008–2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>22.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>9.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid work</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ACARA, 2008–2014)

Graph 6: Student performance combined average upper level year 3 (band 6) & year 9 (band 10) reading and numeracy by parental occupation, Australia, 2008–2014

This outline of national data in schooling achievement in literacy and numeracy confirms a tiered schooling system, reflected at every cohort and every year since 2008. In telling this data Story, these trends in national performance reveal the points raised earlier concerning the interaction of systemic education inequality and the cost-burdens to the community and economy. For this study, these trends point to a highly incomplete national architecture of education, as verified in a policy trajectory bound extensively within economic doctrine, a national funding model that has not shifted the lowered patterning in national education outcomes, and a policy architecture anchored to this paradigm performance. The ripples of this are magnified within the Indigenous domain (Austin-Broos, 2009), as discussed in the following section.
4.5 National Indigenous education policy trajectory

4.5.1 Foundational movements
Australia’s Indigenous Peoples gained the right to vote in federal elections in 1962, and an education policy trajectory emerged from the 1967 referendum on a platform of Australian ‘citizenship rights’ and associated flows into a national education architecture (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), and alongside this journey the intersections of wealth inequality and ‘race’ converged with the ambiguous and organic social properties of schools. The journey of a national Indigenous education policy environment has been one characterised by fiscal fluctuations, jousts between economic and social policy approaches and a politicisation over this journey, given its placement within a developing Australian political economy (Matthews, 2013). Appendix E outlines the key policy actions undertaken since 1967.

This journey of a national Indigenous education policy environment has been one of seeking to assimilate Indigenous members into a world of stratified capitalism, that has Indigenous members located at the bottom of a racialised social hierarchy (refer to NT Aboriginal social outcomes in Chapters 6–7). According to Brayboy, Castagno and Maughan (2007, p. 167) assimilation is: “an act or series of policies that force those who are not like those in power to become more like them or to model themselves after the ‘norm’”. They go on to state that: “Programs or policies of assimilation rarely (if ever) take into account what marginalised groups desire or want and, therefore, deny their right to self-determination” (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughan 2007, p. 167).

Along this trajectory, NT remote Aboriginal families have been forced to ‘visualise education as a liberating gift’ against ongoing raciologies that have rejected their identities as homogenous and inferior (Austin-Broos, 2009). This western imperialism is consistent with the experiences of First Nations Indigenous education policies in the US, as discussed by Brayboy (2014) and similarly African American students, as discussed by Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005), who stated: “what each of these groups (i.e., African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans) has in common is the experience of a racialized identity” (p. 284). The ideological distortions this has produced across a democratic Australian society have been profound, for example, from a policy perspective it has been expressed in political struggles between a socialist left, a capitalist right and precarious and short-lived centrist attempts (McCarthy, 2009). The most recent driving instrument of this long journey, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (NATSIES) 2015 (Education Council, 2015), has symbolised such tensions.

4.5.2 Recent policy trajectory
The NATSIES is guided by 8 principles: achieve potential, equity, accountability, cultural recognition, relationships, partnerships, local approaches and quality (Education Council, 2015). At the ideological
core of this strategy is a positioning of Indigeneity as an added layer, rather than defining plank (p. 4). While this is unpacked in Chapter 7, it is important to highlight that this seemingly small difference dislocates human and social capital from the core of a social institution. This is significant since Indigeneity is the pivotal point from which learning and achievement emerges as by-product, tempered by a multitude of external forces impacting education and its participants (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Westwood, 2003). This standpoint is consistent with a recent United Nations Human Development Report 2016, which positions the economy as a by-product of social cohesion. The funding models discussed in the next section reveal the unsustainability of this policy trajectory, as reified against the types of technical-rational problematising that Figure 13 reveals.

**Figure 13: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education strategy (2015)**

![Diagram](image)

(education Council, 2015, p. 4)

### 4.6 National trends in Indigenous education funding

Sourcing historic trends around Indigenous education funding is problematic since these were not separately reported on until recently, as highlighted in section 4.3 National Trends in Education Funding. Furthermore, it was difficult to obtain reliable details since funds emanate from a combination of Commonwealth and State/Territory government sources in either supplementary form, such as directly identified Indigenous expenditure or as a share of the total mainstream budget (SCRGSP, 2014).

It is worthwhile then to highlight the trajectory of exponential growth in national education from 1989 which has included Indigenous-related program and policy levers, acknowledging the role of education in meeting Australia’s future needs, particularly in tempering growing structural inequality. However, this problematising has facilitated a budget trajectory reflective of its policy trajectory, bound within
spiralling policy complication as to how this variation of humanity can be treated within the western cultural pyramid that NT remote schools are bound by (Austin-Broos, 2009).

The 2014 Indigenous Expenditure Report (SCRGP, 2014, p. 1) revealed Indigenous education outcomes reflective of national policy trajectories, and the siloed ways these have been enacted, as in countries such as the US (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). This report, for example, revealed unsustainable trends across 2008-09, 2010-11 and 2012-13: “Estimated expenditure per person in 2012-13 was $43 449 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, compared with $20 900 for other Australians (a ratio of 2.08 to 1 – an increase from a ratio of 1.93 to 1 in 2008-09)”. Reasons cited for this doubling included a greater intensity of service use and the higher costs of providing service, for example due to location and as targeted services were provided in addition to mainstream services (i.e. Indigenous family liaison staff). A recent Australian Education Review: The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous Voice in Education (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), confirmed this, drawing on 2014 data (see Table 28).

Table 28: Australian government plus State and Territory government direct expenditure, Australia, 2012–13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total expenditure</th>
<th>Expenditure per head of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indigenous share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education and training</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School education</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluated against the government report, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014 (SCRGSP, 2014b), growth is minimal, and, in some cases, gone backwards. This suggests the source of the problem is either about not enough funding, or more likely, given mainstream patterns of national schooling achievement, the policy models are incomplete in the ways they engage and meet Indigenous families across the multiplanar points of wealth and racialised inequality (Austin-Broos, 2009; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).
This point is made in the former report, which stated:

The reasons for these persistent gaps in outcomes are complex, arising from a mix of historical, social and economic causes. Yet there has been limited information with which to assess the adequacy, effectiveness and efficiency of expenditure on programs aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. (SCRGSP, 2014, p. 5)

For this study, a comparable doubling of inputs against significantly lowered outcomes points to an unsustainable policy trajectory, as reflected in national Indigenous education outcomes, now discussed.

4.7 National Indigenous education outcomes

4.7.1 Performance overview

The data relating to national Indigenous schooling outcomes revealed in this section indicate Indigenous children in every Australian jurisdiction are performing at levels well below non–Indigenous cohorts. This performance has been evaluated against the national minimum levels for Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 over a seven-year period, 2008–2014. Consistent with the data presented in this chapter, the report Education in Australia 2012: Five Years of Performance (Australian Government, 2013) represented this view. This report highlighted educational outcomes for Indigenous students reflected systemic patterning since national testing commenced in 2008. The data expressions since this report for the period 2013-14, and as outlined to 2018, have revealed no shift from this profile. A summary of this is provided in Table 29.

Table 29: Little progress for Indigenous students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor outcomes, 5 years, 2008 – 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7.2 National trends in Indigenous schooling performance

This section discusses the national performance of Australia’s Indigenous students, and geolocation is included since it is an important variable behind student performance, particularly in the NT which does not have a metro classification (as expressed elsewhere) and where ‘living on Country’ in remote and
very remote locations has aligned closely with a traditionally-oriented Aboriginal identity. As revealed in the national mainstream data sets, the NT Indigenous performance profile has been significantly and consistently well below Indigenous students from other jurisdictions. Tables 30–31, reveal that Indigenous performance outcomes 2008–2014 for Year 3 and 9 reading and Year 3 and 9 numeracy across all States and Territories have been consistently and significantly below that of non–Indigenous students. These tables also reveal a sliding of student achievement across geolocation has been more evident for Indigenous children, underpinned by lowered participation rates.

Table 30: Percentage of Indigenous students achieving at or above national minimum benchmark in reading, years 3, 5, 7 & 9, 2008-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yr 3 Indigenous</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 3 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 5 Indigenous</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 5 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 7 Indigenous</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 7 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 9 Indigenous</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>67.0</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 9 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ACARA, 2014)

Graph 7: Percentage of Indigenous students achieving at or above national minimum benchmark in reading, 2008-2014

As revealed in Table 31, a consistently lowered national Indigenous outcome in numeracy is also evident. This consistency is across all tested cohorts across 2008–2014; a pattern that highlights the problem resides within the systemic design of education. As discussed in the previous section, government policy and decision-makers in one sense acknowledge this, given the reported doubling of funding to Indigenous education. However, it is difficult to conclude that these funds have been used in ways reported by governments. This point, discussed in Chapter 7, is critical since education is
expensive and, in a finite fiscal environment, resource-deprived schools tend to gravitate actions towards the middle ground; a point raised earlier in this chapter. In this way, policy actions that demand schools do more with less create distortions to rational-linear reform attempts, particularly between policy intent and how these are enacted across targeted sites, producing subterranean sociopolitical flows that mask reality (Moodie, 2018).

Table 31: Percentage of Indigenous students achieving at or above national minimum benchmark in numeracy, years 3, 5, 7 & 9, 2008–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yr 3 Indigenous</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 3 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>96.6</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 5 Indigenous</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 5 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 7 Indigenous</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 7 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>96.4</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>96.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 9 Indigenous</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yr 9 Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>94.8</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Graph 8: Percentage of Indigenous students achieving at or above national minimum numeracy benchmark, 2008–2014)

4.7.3 National Indigenous participation rates
For this study, the participation rates, reflected below in Tables 32–33, presents mixed messages. The first is that the gap remains between Indigenous and non–Indigenous students and the second is that Indigenous student participation has dramatically decreased by Year 9. At the core of participation is engagement with the purpose and ideals of education and where it seeks to transport participants (Matthews, 2013). Also intersecting is population spread, and the degree in which reported national funding designed to intervene in these patterns reaches intended sites and is used as intended. This
reasoning is based on distrust in such propositions by governments, given, as Savage (2011) describes, policy approaches that seek to address matters of social justice are fraught with stubborn anchors within communities, as much as within the institutions that serve to liberate marginalised groups from inequality. In the following section, the NT context is presented as a key illustration of this standpoint.

**Table 32: National Indigenous participation rates year 3 reading and numeracy, 2008–2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reading participation rate</th>
<th>Numeracy participation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>89.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>97.2</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>95.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>89.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>95.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>95.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ACARA, 2014, p. 308)

**Graph 9: National Indigenous participation rates year 3 reading and numeracy, 2008–2014**
Table 33: National Indigenous participation rates year 9 reading and numeracy, 2008–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Indigenous status</th>
<th>Reading participation rate</th>
<th>Numeracy participation rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>94.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>75.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>92.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>93.0</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ACARA, 2014, p. 323)


4.8 NT remote Aboriginal education policy trajectory

4.8.1 Foundational policy movements
The NT Indigenous policy environment has remained closely aligned with a national Indigenous education policy trajectory, though its application in the NT has been skewed by the fact that most schools are in remote and very remote locations (NTDoE, 2016). These schools are also overlayed by
an Aboriginal population practising traditionally-oriented lifestyles and speaking English as a second language. A key feature of this has also been the absence of alignment of schooling policies and community contexts, which serve as a basis for rationalising the purpose and function of western education. The NT thus is a unique jurisdiction because it magnifies the social, economic and cultural undercurrents that corrupt and dislodge education reform attempts, and at the core of this journey has been a standpoint by governments that a western formatted education can serve as the key institutional instrument in assimilating Indigenous members into a western world, displacing a traditionally-oriented Indigenous identity (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

As prefaced earlier in this study, a government education policy agenda targeting Indigenous children in the NT commenced alongside mainstream policy actions in the 1970s, and during the 1990s became increasingly caught up within the discourses of egalitarianism and social justice, and their tensions within a tide of capitalism, as globally elsewhere (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). The significant and persistent underperformance of Indigenous students at the national and NT levels, highlights that the past remains the present, with a key difference being that the last time a major paradigm shift occurred in the NT was in 1973, with the introduction of bilingual schools (Devlin, 2011). Since the demise of this model as an official education policy action, NT remote Aboriginal students have been subjected to a ‘white’ mainstream policy environment (Tatz, 2009). Thus, the reform toolkits in the NT have remained consistent with those discussed regarding the national environment, and a nuanced discussion of these are outlined across Chapters 4–7.

A brief overview of the NT context starts with the introduction of bilingual schools from 1972 in Yuendumu and, though later expanded across seventeen communities, it was discontinued 20 years later when the ‘promised’ improvements were observed by ‘white’ policy makers as failing to materialise (Collins & Lea, 1999). In considering the context of these national Indigenous education reforms, the Australian Education Council (1989) outlined nine key findings that impacted the direction of NT remote Aboriginal education between 1967 and the late 1980s. These are highlighted in Table 34. As with the national scene, policy modelling specific to Aboriginal community contexts has bounced between the political left and right, as expensive social policies have failed in shifting Aboriginal education inequality, giving way to neoliberalist policy attempts underwritten by increased free-market economic principles (Matthews, 2013).

**Table 34: NT Aboriginal policy origins 1989**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students of Aboriginal descent reflected 32% of NT student population, of which 74% were ‘tribally oriented’. There were 17 bilingual schools, Community Education and Vocational Centres and the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) and Mentor Programs sought to build the level of Aboriginal teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overcoming isolation was a major issue and correspondence education and outstation forms of schooling were considered costly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influencing the role of parents and community resulted in the formation of school councils and action plans for school improvement, introduced to ensure schools were working towards agreed objectives in consultation with community.

Teacher development. A Master Teacher scheme provided an attractive career path that remains within the classroom.

Language and communication. For Aboriginal children, the maintenance and development of Aboriginal and other languages was observed as an ongoing process.

Retention rates were identified as poor for Indigenous children.

Computer education needed to develop as a tool of learning.

Providing for special needs students was a key emerging issue for the NT context.

Curriculum uniformity and national compatibility were major issues. Due to high mobility rates in the NT, uniform curriculum, which is compatible with other Australian school systems was required.

After 1990, bilingual education in the NT became politically ambiguous as a driving policy approach for remote communities, and over the following two decades remote school services in the NT operated within a policy vacuum, since there was no ideological replacement offered (Collins & Lea, 1999). By 1997 it was clear that NT remote Aboriginal students were not achieving well in school, and the Learning Lessons (1999) review was commissioned by the NTDoE to find out why. This review offered 151 recommendations to fix the problem, which ultimately failed to alter outcomes. In 2013 a second major review into remote Indigenous education was commissioned by the NTDoE titled ‘A Share in the Future’, and since this report no significant movement has occurred to the ongoing educational underperformance of remote children. These are discussed in greater depth in later chapters, though suffice here to contend, as Matthews (2013) has argued, that this lack of architecture has led remote schools to drift extensively in their organisational purpose and associated delivery processes.

4.8.2 NT remote Aboriginal education: The recent policy trajectory

Alongside national education reforms, the NT implemented a number of additional policy actions, which I discuss in Chapter 5-7. But one that ideologically stands out was the federal government’s controversial school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM). Introduced to the NT in 2009, SEAM incorporated a ‘big stick’ to force families into sending their children to school on a regular basis, based on a view this increased learning performance (DEEWR, 2014). The other controversial policy has been the US-developed, highly routinised direct instruction (DI) program, which was implemented on the basis that policy drifts across NT remote Aboriginal schools over the previous 20 years had produced multiple approaches in the teaching of English, and that consistency was required in remote community schools (Murray, 2015). However, and beyond these and other policy instruments that I later discuss, education policies aimed at NT remote communities have remained opaque (Matthews, 2013), along with their associated funding models.
4.9 **NT trends in remote Indigenous education funding**

As discussed earlier in the sections concerning trends in national mainstream and Indigenous funding, the NT’s funding commitments to Aboriginal student inequality has been difficult to determine, mainly because there seems to have not been any attention to revealing such trends. For example, in a 2014 Indigenous Expenditure Report (SCRGSP, 2014), the NT’s position on this was visible:

> Across virtually all services areas, the Territory’s Indigenous people are the main users of government services. Due to the relative size of the Indigenous population these services are generally delivered through mainstream programs, with the cost of delivering these services being relatively higher than delivering services to our non-Indigenous population. Not only is the Indigenous population highly dispersed, it is also younger and very mobile which makes delivering mainstream services more complex. (p. 54)

Analysis of annual reports 2000–2016 published by the NTDoE confirms that Indigenous education funds have not been separately reported on, at any stage. This makes it impossible to draw specific associations in cause and effect between financial inputs and NT remote Aboriginal student learning outcomes. While this is discussed in Chapters 6–7, it is reasonable to suggest that such ambiguity ultimately serves to employ Aboriginal families as leverage in making greater claims on the Commonwealth, on a basis of Indigenous disadvantage, with subsequent funding streams employed across centralised, mainstream resource distribution. The corporate history of the NTDoE, particularly in recent years, testifies to this view through the systematic dismantling of Indigenous representation (see Chapter 1) and the reifying and dominance of ‘white’ privilege (Moodie, 2018; Werner, 2015).

4.10 **NT remote Aboriginal education outcomes**

The education performance outcomes discussed in this chapter demonstrate the NT, and particularly remote Aboriginal students, have consistently lagged every other jurisdiction. While geolocation has not been a major variable in the education outcomes of non–Indigenous children, it is significant for Indigenous students. The challenge this presents are in the questions this raises and what types of problematising occurs in response. As commented earlier, for the NT this has resulted in policy approaches consistent with the US experience which Hulgin and Drake (2011, p. 391) described as the “stronger dosage formula to teaching and learning”, constructed across confounding external forces emanating from the NT’s demographic environment (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). Across the NT’s social, economic and cultural environment, these policy responses experience fracturing in the journey through racialised economic, social and cultural inequality.

4.10.1 **NT demographic environment and NAPLAN performance**

In discussing the disengagement of Aboriginal children from the schooling system, the following offers insight into the NT’s education performance. It is a profile that is unlike other jurisdictions in Australia
and is one which continues to challenge the core of national and NT education reform attempts. While in Chapter 6 attention is drawn to the social outcomes produced from this political environment, the Story in this section concerns some of the key variables that have been both a process as much as a product of institutional disconnect (Westwood, 2003). Table 35, for example, presents a portrait of school as being incongruent with the lived realities of those targeted, but further the broader implications these patterns present for national and NT public policy and the positioning of NT remote Aboriginal members/communities within a contemporary Australian society.

**Table 35: Summary of NT government schools’ demographic data (2014)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of students enrolled in school</th>
<th>33,229</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools in remote and very remote areas</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of students living in remote and very remote areas</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Indigenous students</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average student attendance</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Indigenous student attendance</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of students with a language background other than English</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Report 2013–2014)

MCCETYA’s geographical categories applied across the NT context reveal that most schools are situated in remote and very remote contexts, as detailed in Tables 36–37. As a small jurisdiction, the NT government has sought to deliver education across remote regions, spread across vast geographic distances. Intersecting with location, Graph 11 illustrates the NT also to be a nation within a nation, with its flows of power and resistance, particularly in respect to remote Aboriginal existential interactions with capitalism and its educational institutions (Keddie et al., 2013).

**Table 36: MCCETYA classifications: The NT context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan:</th>
<th>No region in the NT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provincial:</td>
<td>Darwin, Pulmerston, Darwin Rural up to and including Bees Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote:</td>
<td>Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin Rural further than Bees Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very remote:</td>
<td>All other areas of the NT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Report, 2013–14)

**Table 37: National percentage of population spread**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>Major cities of Australia</th>
<th>Inner regional Australia</th>
<th>Outer regional Australia</th>
<th>Remote Australia</th>
<th>Very remote Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

132
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qld</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>Tas</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NTDoE Annual Report, 2013–14)

**Graph 11: Percentage of Indigenous students (of total student cohort) by State and Territory, 2009**

**Socioeconomic status: NT context**

Socioeconomic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is made up of four measures, provided by ABS census data. These scales capture the different socioeconomic conditions around Australia and assist in defining locations that are relatively disadvantaged. This index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage (IRSD) measures the level of low-income households, level of English proficiency (LBOTE), households that pay low rent, and the level of members with no post-school qualifications. In Graph 12 the NT’s IRSD profile is captured. Where Level 1 indicates the lowest 10%, the NT has most of its schools situated in the lowest percentile of community disadvantage.

(NTDET Annual Report, 2009–10)
In describing the performance of Indigenous students in the Australian education system, a key variable in the NT is that most Aboriginal peoples in the NT live in remote communities, as revealed in Table 38. Accompanying this profile is the fact that most of the Aboriginal children being tested for schooling performance through measures such as NAPLAN speak English as a second or third language. Table 39, for example, profiles the national level of LOTE student performance in NAPLAN, which highlights the poor performance outcomes for the NT implicated by LBOTE as a key variable impacting students, particularly Indigenous students living in remote and very remote locations.

Table 38: NT Aboriginal population trend 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NT Total Indigenous Population</th>
<th>56,776</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average occupants/dwelling</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total urban</td>
<td>11,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total remote</td>
<td>45,540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ABS, 2011)

4.10.2 NT Aboriginal schooling outcomes
The NAPLAN report for 2014 (ACARA, 2014), highlighted in Table 39, indicates the performance of students with a language background other than English has been a more significant and consistent key variable in the NT than elsewhere (see also Graph 13). Of importance here are the extreme levels of underperformance in meeting the minimum national benchmark levels in Year 3 through to Year 9 in reading and numeracy. These outcomes suggest that LBOTE in the NT has not situated external to the sociocultural foundations that give legitimacy to the cultural orientation and placement of Aboriginal languages and associated vernaculars. That is, LBOTE has reflected a broader context of NT remote Aboriginal student disengagement with a national education design, of which attendance and its detailed
nuances around engagement have become increasingly recognised as a major influence of pupil learning outcomes (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

Table 39: NT student performance, years 3 and 9 by reading and numeracy, by LBOTE, Australia, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State / Territory</th>
<th>Year 3 Reading</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
<th>Year 9 Reading</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
<th>Reading &amp; numeracy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Year 9 Reading</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
<th>Reading &amp; numeracy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LBOTE students at or above national minimum standard (%)</td>
<td>LBOTE students at or above national minimum standard (%)</td>
<td>LBOTE students at or above national minimum standard (%)</td>
<td>LBOTE students at or above national minimum standard (%)</td>
<td>LBOTE students at or above national minimum standard (%)</td>
<td>Reading &amp; numeracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>92.3</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vic</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>90.85</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>88.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>92.1</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>92.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>86.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>92.8</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>92.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>44.15</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aus.</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>92.2</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>93.2</td>
<td>91.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ACARA, 2014)

Graph 13: Achievement of year 3 and 9 students in reading & numeracy, by LBOTE status, by State and Territory, 2014

Indigenous student attendance

NAPLAN does not capture data on student attendance, and to access this information on the NT required data sourced from various NT DoE reports. Attendance figures are vital in understanding how often Indigenous students engage the education system, and at what levels. A reliable capturing of student attendance in the NT emerged from 2006, when the NT moved to electronic attendance records. Prior
to 2006, teacher roll books were used to record attendance, however, these often ended up in school storage rooms after completion, resulting in difficulties in obtaining an accurate capture of the NT’s attendance statistics. Following the shift to electronic records, disaggregation across the layers of preschool, primary school, middle school and senior secondary school were profiled from 2011. The data captured in the following tables and graphs reveal a combination of Aboriginal attendance patterns deteriorating from 2006.

Table 40: Average student attendance by Indigenous status (government schools), 2007–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NT DoE Annual reports, 2007–2014)

Graph 14: Average student attendances by Indigenous status (government schools) 2006–2014

The data on NT Aboriginal attendance has long shown disengagement, and Table 41 highlights this in relation to those above and below an 80% average benchmark. Explanations for this are multilayered (Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer, 2017), and one study by the NTDoE is insightful. In this investigation titled Student Whereabouts Term 3 2014, inquiry was conducted across seven NT communities. Findings included that on any day 22% of students on the active roll were out of community; 20% of students on the active roll were not at school, but were in their community; and students in middle and senior years were less likely to attend school than those in younger cohorts (Picton, 2014): “The likelihood of a student from any cohort taking 5 consecutive days off during any week was over 50%, giving weight to the theory that students are more likely to be away from school for extended periods of time rather than shorter stints” (Picton, 2014, p. 1).
Table 41: Indigenous government school attendance rates preschool–year 9 middle school, 2011–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Preschool average attendance rates</th>
<th>2011–12</th>
<th>2012–13</th>
<th>2013–14</th>
<th>Mean average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000–2011: Attendance not disaggregated beyond totals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students attending &gt; 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school average attendance rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students attending &gt; 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Years average attendance rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students attending &gt; 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Years average attendance rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students attending &gt; 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non–Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>n.p</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes—NTDoE Annual Reports did not include disaggregated attendance figures until 2010. Prior to this, attendance figures are shown as total averages across all year levels.

(NT DoE Annual reports, 2011–2014)
Aboriginal senior secondary completion rates
NAPLAN reports on Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (and at the time of this study, the senior secondary levels), followed a nationally non–uniform curriculum, assessment and reporting framework, thus evaluating this level was restricted to the local context. In this regard, outcomes in the NT for the period 2001-2009 were sampled. The NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) is awarded by the NT Board of Studies to students successfully completing Year 12. The NTCET is a flexible model that offers pathways to Higher Education or Vocational Education and Training (VET), and levels of achievement determine which courses students may pursue. As shown in Table 42, Aboriginal students in the government sector have achieved an average 11% of their non–Indigenous peers (rising to 16% in the non–government sector), such choice are constricted. Table 42 and Graph 16 reveal the accrued learning deficits of previous years are compounded for Indigenous students, of which remote performances were not reported.

**Table 42: NT certificate of education (NTCE) Year 12 completions in government schools by Indigenous status, 2001–2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Non–government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Graph 16: NT certificate of education (NTCE) year 12 completions in government and non-government schools by Indigenous status, 2001–2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>612</td>
<td>5562</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>1762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(NT DoE Annual report, 2009)

#### 4.11 Summary

In this chapter I have told the Story of Australia’s education performance, based predominately on published reports for the period 2008–2014, which I have disaggregated to identify the various patterns in student performance (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). These categories included Indigenous and non-Indigenous, age/year cohorts, urban, provincial, remote and very remote contexts. The period selection for this chapter has included policy and funding trajectories from 1990–2014, on the basis that outputs in student performance have occurred at a time of rapid change and shift in education policy mapping, and will be evaluated against key structural trends for this period in later chapters. These include a gravitation toward free-market principles (Lloyd, 2008) and a strengthening influence of economic rationalism within social and education policy settings; decentralisation of the Australian education industry; corporatisation/managerialism and private industry competitive approaches in school modelling; and national standardisation, technical prescription, accountability and its flows across the schooling industry (Ranson, 2003).

The data Story in this chapter raises important questions about the paradigm behind education policy setting for mainstream and Indigenous Australia. This is because performance across mainstream cohorts is linked to postcode, and Indigenous educational inequality remains defined by the key variable of identity (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). Questions directed at the paradigm of a national education system are instructive in directing inquiry into problematised spaces that are often overlooked in official policy decisions, and are needed in moving inquiry to an improved understanding of
Indigenous identities (Indigeneity) within a contemporary national Australian identity, the design function of school, the nature of learning within its societal complexities and relationships that might exist within the structures of capitalism (Austin-Broos, 2009). In the next chapter attention is drawn to this study’s primary data, to gain insights into NT remote Aboriginal experiences with the NT’s education policy environment.
Chapter 5. The mismatch between education policy and NT remote communities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter tells the story of my field research that investigated the impacts of the NT government’s three major reviews into NT remote Aboriginal education. This chapter reports on the captured voices of those close to the policy flows connected to these reviews. The field research formed an important part of the main thesis investigation into the NT remote Aboriginal education policy agenda, its impacts in remote community school settings, and what Aboriginal peoples had to say about their education (Tatz, 2009). To revisit, the main question behind this study investigates education policy approaches aimed at NT remote Aboriginal communities, identifying those likely to facilitate students (and their families) engaging meaningfully and purposefully with a western education system. This chapter synthesises respondents’ understandings, as part of the ‘evidence’ toward answering the main study question.

As reflected in the title of this thesis, Indigeneity is problematised as a key element flowing through the main study questions. This is important to highlight because Indigeneity is underwritten by the contestable assertion that it matters within a changing and much broader world of western capitalism (Moodie, 2018). The findings in this chapter therefore address this social construction and its premise through providing insight into how schooling policy is understood and experienced against the social undercurrents that flow through identity and the existential domains of Indigeneity. This chapter reveals a major mismatch between the NT education policy environment, NT remote Aboriginal education contexts and their anchoring around Indigeneity.

5.2 Locating the problematised policy domains across the NT’s three reviews

Chapter 3 outlined the methodological approach employed to the field research, which is based on a search for patterns in the data, with the patterns being assembled around the case study questions. Specifically, this case research follows Clark and Braun’s (2013) six phases: familiarisation with the data, which requires the researcher to immerse themselves within the data; coding, which enables capturing a semantic and conceptual interpretation of the data; searching for themes, which includes collating themes relevant to the research question; reviewing themes, being a process of defining and synthesising the nature of each theme and their inter-relationships; defining and naming themes, such as constructing a concise name for each theme; and writing up, which includes weaving together a coherent narrative about what the data is saying and how it is speaking to the main study question.
Prior to conducting field visits, analysis was conducted on the three reviews to ascertain how their policy recommendations aligned or related with the three problematised policy areas explored in the research questions. This was a significant step in identifying the dominant policy trajectories over the course of 20 years, which in turn would assist in understanding their expressions when flowing across the identified four remote community sites. Significantly, the three reviews contained recommendations outside the scope of reference outlined in this study, with for example others falling into areas of remote infrastructure and internal departmental systems processes. While important, these outlying recommendations are not tabled here since the focus is the investigation of policy trajectories directly relevant to the problematised policy arenas and their relationship to the sociopolitical dimensions of education provision. Each of these three reviews are discussed in the following section.


Learning Lessons (1999) (Collins & Lea, 1999) emerged after results from the Multi-Assessment Program (MAP) showed remote Aboriginal student learning outcomes in the NT were well behind non-Indigenous students. This first, major review had three key objectives, being to ascertain the views and aspirations of Indigenous parents and community members in relation to their children’s education, with reference to literacy and numeracy; the key issues impacting educational outcomes for Aboriginal children; and to identify supportable actions for improving educational outcomes (Collins & Lea, 1999).

The main goal of this review stated:

The underlying philosophy for Indigenous education in the Northern Territory is to restore at a community level the involvement and ownership by Indigenous people of the education for life of their children, and in partnership with the providers, to progressively improve attendance, teaching, and outcomes across all Northern Territory schools. (p. 19)

Learning Lessons (1999) established ten findings, including:

- A widespread desire amongst Indigenous people for improvements in the education of their children;
- unequivocal evidence of deteriorating outcomes from an already unacceptably low base, led primarily by poor attendance which has become an educational crisis;
- substantial evidence of long-term systemic failure to address this situation;
- a number of complex long-standing issues that must be addressed which have significant resource implications for the Department of Education and the Northern Territory government;
- evidence of failure to access significant available Commonwealth funds to address poor outcomes with intensive projects;
- a need for the Indigenous Education Council Northern Territory to be completely restructured;
- a need for management systems in the Department of Education to be organised to ensure that Indigenous education is a critical core business of the department;
- a strong imperative for an outcomes-based approach to Indigenous education at all levels;
• Northern Territory government responsibility for turning around the poor educational outcomes jointly shared by many Departments as part a whole of government response, in particular Territory Health Services, Territory Housing, Local government, and the Office of Aboriginal Development, making a whole of government response all the more essential;
• A need to establish partnerships between Indigenous parents, communities, and peak bodies, the service providers and both the NT and Commonwealth governments to honestly acknowledge the gravity and causes of declining outcomes, its destructiveness to future Indigenous aspirations, and to assume the joint responsibility of immediately reversing the downward trend. (p. 1)

In Table 43, my analysis of this review is provided. Recommendations relating to Aboriginal cultural inclusion amounted to 26% (of the total defined areas under investigation), with most focused around improving service access. There were no recommendations focused on aligning the remote schooling system to the local economic environment, other than as assumed in the knowledge and skills development of a mainstream-oriented curriculum that (if/when achieved well) would enable student participation in the wider industries and workforce sectors. The review did not clarify a link between what was skill development (i.e. NTCE, VET) and where it would transport students. The pathways link to jobs was not specific and there was little clarity between what this meant in relation to remote Aboriginal contexts. That is, a concept of ‘job’ was presented as an indivisible, incontestable and generalised truth, through the absence of its articulation to remote schooling or contexts.

Table 43: Learning Lessons (1999): Alignment of recommendations to areas of inquiry

|   | Recommendations reflective of Indigenous cultural inclusiveness | Two–way learning (Recs 98–102); Second language learning (Recs 103–105); Language teaching (Recs 106–108); Literature production centres (Recs 115–116). All recommendations identified were specific to Indigenous culture and languages. Total # recommendations: 13
|---|---|
| 2 | Recommendations aimed at improved access of education for students in remote communities | Indigenous recruits (Recs 70–79); Early childhood (Recs 80–86); Secondary schooling (Recs 87–89); Post-compulsory schooling (Recs 90–94); Special education (Recs 95–97); Mobility (Recs 119–123); Health issues and wider social context (Recs 124–130); Community partnerships (Recs 142–151). All recommendations identified were specific to improving access. This included 10 recommendations focused on Indigenous employment in the delivery of schooling services. Total # recommendations: 50
| 3 | Recommendations aimed at pathways to employment on Country | No recommendations focused on an educational curriculum tailored to ‘employment on Country’ defined. Total # recommendations: 0

(Collins & Lea, 1999)
5.2.2 Review 2: Structural Review of the NT Department of Education and Training (SRNTDET): Delivering the Goods (2009)

While I discuss further details around this review in Chapter 6.4, due to its direct relevance to the discussion on the NT’s sociopolitical context, it is relevant to introduce in this section. Almost a decade later in late 2008, the first NAPLAN results were published for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, which revealed the NT was well behind the rest of the country in all areas of literacy and numeracy testing, particularly in remote Aboriginal student achievement (see Chapter 4). Consequently, the NT government commissioned the Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (SRNTDET, 2009) (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009), which was aimed at establishing ways of improving the system of education services, rather than the design. The terms of reference identifying its overall objective were to refocus the NT education department to more effectively improve Aboriginal student school attendance and levels of literacy and numeracy, as well as to meet future challenges in education (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 7).

The SRNTDET (2009) was structured around five themes: “building a more coherent system; building a performance-based system; strengthening organisational capacity through improved recruitment and retention of staff; increased participation of Indigenous personnel; and strengthening school governance with improved community participation” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 8). In respect to Aboriginal education, the reviewers cited The Little Children are Sacred Report (Wild & Anderson, 2007), particularly its identifying education as a key driver in improving wellbeing for remote Indigenous children and in closing the gap of remote Indigenous disadvantage (Wild & Anderson, 2007). Unlike Learning Lessons (1999), which focused on education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) (see discussion in Chapter 7), the SRNTDET (2009) was predicated on ‘closing the gap’ through western-formatted ideologies that assumed improvement would be achieved with Aboriginal families located as bystanders, given the absence of an Aboriginal identity across policy recommendations.

My analysis of this review is outlined in Table 44. Apart from Indigenous workforce development and access and equity policy areas, which constituted the bulk of recommendations, many of the recommendations offered a vague connect to each of the three policy areas under investigation. There were no recommendations identified that focused on aligning remote education service provision to the local economic environment, other than as assumed in the knowledge and skills development of a mainstream-oriented curriculum that, when achieved, would enable student participation in the wider industries and workforce sectors. Further, the link to ‘jobs’ was not explicit and there was no clarity between what this meant in relation to remote Aboriginal community contexts.
Table 44: SRNTDET (2009): Alignment of recommendations to areas of inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Recommendations reflective of Indigenous cultural inclusiveness</th>
<th>No recommendations specific to Indigenous cultural inclusivity in curriculum and service formatting.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2 | Recommendations aimed at improved access of education for students in remote communities | Theme 4: Increasing participation of Indigenous personnel at all levels of the system, Recs 4.1–4.5  
Theme 5: Strengthening the regionalisation of DET, Rec 3 (ITC)  
Most recommendations identified were specific to improving increased participation in the delivery of education services, including ITC opportunities. Others focused and non–Indigenous performance development to accommodate Indigenous perspectives. |
| 3 | Recommendations aimed at improved student pathways to employment and development on Country | Theme Five: Strengthening the regionalisation of DET, Recs 1, 4,  
Recommendations focused on strengthening VET in schools, increased Indigenous consultation and governance, capacity building (issues of community), increased regional economic, industry and business development. |

Total # recommendations:

- 0
- 6
- 2


The third major review, *A Share in the Future* (ASITF, 2013) (Wilson, 2013), was commissioned on the basis that a generation of children since *Learning Lessons* (1999) had failed to gain the benefits that it the earlier review sought. The key issues behind the review were that by Year 3 (using NAPLAN measures) Aboriginal students in remote communities were already 2 years behind their counterparts in similar contexts elsewhere in Australia, particularly in their writing results; that, by Year 9, the gap was about 5 years of schooling; that substantial improvement would not be achieved by marginal improvements; and that unless ways could be found to give Aboriginal children in the first 8 years of their lives a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy, those children would add to the “lost generations of Indigenous Australians” (Wilson, 2013, p. 11).

While *ASITF* (2013) was the second major review directly focused on remote Aboriginal education, it reflected a move away from Aboriginal-led education, which had been a key element of *Learning Lessons* (1999). As revealed in my analysis of this review in Table 45, this review included (against those defined within the scope of this researcher’s investigation) seven (19%) recommendations focused on Aboriginal cultural inclusion, thirty-six (81%) on improving education access, and zero recommendations focused on education pathways to employment and development on Country (Wilson, 2013). As in previous reviews this document also failed to clarify a link between skill development and where it would lead students, post-school. As in the case for the earlier reviews, the link to jobs was also not specific and there was no detailed attempt in identifying what this meant in relation to remote Aboriginal contexts.
Table 45: ASITF (2013): Alignment of recommendations to areas of inquiry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Recs 20–26</th>
<th>Total # recommendations: 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Recommendations reflective of Indigenous cultural inclusiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recommendations aimed at improved access of education for students in remote communities</td>
<td>Rec 1 (integrated services); Recs 3–8 (homelands schooling); Recs 9–15 (community engagement); Recs 16–19 (early childhood services); Recs 27–33 (secondary schooling); Recs 34–37 (attendance); Rec 38–40 (wellbeing and behaviour); Recs 41–48 (Workforce development)</td>
<td>Total # recommendations: 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recommendations aimed at improved student pathways to employment and development on Country</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Total # recommendations: 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.4 Bringing the analysis together

When analysis of each of these three reviews is brought together, several themes appear common to all three reviews:

1) Each were initiated on an ‘education performance crisis’ in remote Aboriginal schooling performance;
2) Each prioritised improving the accessibility of remote education;
3) All criticised the NT and federal governments’ under-investments in NT remote education;
4) All reflected lowered attention (approximately 20%) toward Aboriginal cultural inclusion in the delivery of remote schooling services, with focus mainly on knowledge and skills development through western teaching/learning model approaches;
5) Each problematised the role of education as preparing students for a ‘nebulous’ western world of capitalism;
6) Context, as concerned the socially-complex undercurrents, was largely ignored.

This analysis locates the problematising behind the 1999, 2009 and 2013 major reviews. Taken together with the concerns put forward in Chapter 2, evidence from this analysis reveals the bulk of policy recommendations focused around racialised deficit school discourses (Jorgensen et al., 2010), and their extensions within the technical features of education reforms that ignored the central role of community cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Analysis also shows that the cultural discourses were not a priority, given the location of Indigeneity as relating to school improvement was largely invisible. This is evidenced in the absence of detailed examination of why, how and where education would lead Aboriginal families within their socially-complex lives (Keddie et al., 2013). In the next section, this is presented through the voices of those closest to these review recommendations and their policy flows. While policies also emanate from outside the reviews, their designs are located and discussed within the ideological and schooling service tensions, outlined in this chapter.
5.3 Case study participant interviews

5.3.1 Participant standpoints around Indigenous cultural inclusion, accessibility of remote school services and pathways to employment and development on Country

For this study three groups were selected for interviews and are referred to in abbreviated form (i.e. Respondent 1 (R1), DoE employee). These are set out in Table 46.

Table 46: Study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Department of Education employees connected to the implementation of policies flowing from each of the three major reviews. This group provided a rich source in sharing insights around how policy construction and implementation occur from the lens of the NT DoE.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>DoE Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Aboriginal school principals of NT remote government schools. This group provided Indigenous school leaders’ insights into key education policy actions within their respective schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Comprised three Aboriginal school councils connected with three of the schools where the principal respondents were located. Group 3 had nine participants. This group provided a critical voice and lens into community life and its relationship to the ideals of western education and its service models.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aboriginal principals are at the interface of western education and the plural identities of Aboriginal students, and vital in understanding how these often-dichotomised reality points are navigated within the organisational spaces of school. The third group comprising senior Aboriginal community leaders connected to each of the school sites, were an essential voice to hear and respect concerning the impacts of key policy actions flowing across their communities (Tatz, 2009). This group was crucial to telling this Story, since aspirations of NT remote community development are hinged upon ‘remaining Aboriginal’ to succeed within a broader, western world of capitalism. Put another way, this third group acted as an ontological and Aboriginal existential platform toward interrupting ‘white’ normative assumptions driving policy flows into their respective communities (Brayboy, 2006, 2015; Moodie, 2018).

Groups were asked semi-structured questions aligned with the three problematised policy spaces of Indigenous inclusivity in education policy setting and delivery of schooling services; accessibility of schooling services, as related to the major policy investments of the school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM), direct instruction (DI) and boarding schools; and student pathways to employment and development on Country. Against these lines of inquiry, flexibility was factored in to enable the different standpoints to emerge.
In sorting through the captured responses, dominant themes were identified across all groups. While these themes are well known in the research literature (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), the voices captured in this study reveal the more nuanced and various ways policy flowed into the complex spaces of NT remote Aboriginal education. That is, the respondent groups were insightful in offering a ‘three-dimensional’, and deepened foray into the policy journey from intent, to construction, implementation and outcomes, and offered insights into the social complexity that official education policies and actions flow from (Tatz, 2009). The three categories of convergent themes, divergent themes, and additional and outlying themes, are now discussed.

5.4 Convergent themes

5.4.1 Indigenous cultural inclusion is at the core of NT remote school services

Across respondent groups, feedback around whether Aboriginal cultural inclusion was important in the delivery of remote education services, was a unanimous ‘yes’. R1 (DoE employee) stated that it was important, based on their long-term experiences in working in NT remote Aboriginal communities: “Well, inclusion is about presence and it’s about having a voice and having Indigenous leaders, more Indigenous teachers”. R1 spoke of one remote school where the community hadn’t been engaged, but once an Aboriginal principal had been appointed, inclusion started happening and the attendance of students and engagement of community increased: “When I got there, we were running at 50%, and over 3 years kept it at 76%” (R1). When asked whether community inclusion had meant that students enjoyed school more, R1 stated: “Yeah, you didn’t have to drag them. When I first got there, they expected me to chase kids and I refused; I’m not going to chase someone, as they were just going to run away” (R1).

R2 (DoE employee) also viewed Indigenous inclusion as a key plank: “I’m convinced that Aboriginal identity, it’s the most important thing to people. It’s their identity and it manifests in land; it manifests in language”. R5 (Aboriginal school principal) also identified that inclusion should be central in the delivery of education for two worlds:

> It’s very important because one of the key elements of our whole transformation was bringing the western idea of being; we are trying to balance that in this school. We have our cultural ways to be taught, as well as delivering the western ideology at this school. (R5)

Similarly, R6 (Aboriginal school principal) also stated: “It’s paramount; it’s just such an integral part of everyday working in this context and having inclusion of Aboriginal culture” (R6).

Other respondents shared this view:
I don’t think we need reviews to know that this is a significant part of the local context and the importance of including it in the curriculum. It shows local people that they have ownership. Indigenous employment is important because you won’t have the culture and the language in your school. (R8, Aboriginal school principal)

R10 (Aboriginal school principal) echoed this view of locating education across community development:

It’s about growing the people in the community. I’m a big advocate for training local recruits. They are the ones that own the knowledge and will be here into the future, as well as their children, growing up and becoming leaders of the future. (R10)

5.4.2 Indigenous cultural inclusion is not prioritised within the NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment

There was a perception that Aboriginal cultural inclusion was not an area of government priority, given its lack of policy clarity and despite official overtures to the contrary. Several respondents for example believed that as a policy goal it had been more of a priority in the 1999 review (Collins & Lea, 1999), but since then had been scaled back. In discussing these views, several reasons were offered. In commenting about the shelving of Learning Lessons’ (1999) focus on inclusion, R1 (DoE employee) identified departmental senior staff changes:

It wasn’t seen to be important, although some initiatives were kept and that was more around good luck rather than good management because we actually had a high turn-over of senior staff and with new staff come new ideas and ways of doing business. (R1)

Similarly, R2 (DoE employee) commented on the political domain:

Marion Scrymgour, as Minister for Education, took bilingual education out by insisting on four hours of English a day; but there was a lot of support for two-way language, two-way learning programs in the Territory. (R2)

R4 (DoE employee) viewed a shift away from cultural inclusivity, giving several reasons:

I think there’s a political lens, a funding lens, a policy lens. To standardise and get economies of scale and program delivery, the other side of the coin was a shifting away from Indigenous involvement in what happens and what works and what education is delivered in their schools. (R4)

R3 (DoE employee) added to this view of policy slide, stating:

I’ve been around long enough to have witnessed the vibrancy of that mentoring program around the remote area teacher education program; it was vibrant and people were successful. Then, watching the whittling away of those programs you only have to look at the [low Indigenous] staffing numbers across schools and in corporate from 2013 to 2016 to know why we have an elephant in the room around cultural inclusivity. (R3)
R5 (Aboriginal school principal) observed a key issue was the location of power and control of education policy modelling and local decision-making on the ground. R5 argued that Aboriginal inclusion was best achieved through governments giving more autonomy and control to remote communities:

That department [of education]; let go. Let the community run it and slowly you walk, but look where they’re walking, even if it takes 10 years to get there. It’s better to get there making slow changes before they can get there. (R5)

5.4.3 **Education policies aimed at improving the accessibility of NT remote school services have been mostly ineffective**

Improving the access of remote school services has been a significant focus of the NTDoE, as reflected in its prioritisation across the recommendations from three reviews. Despite this, analysis found a common respondent view that these policy efforts had not produced a more accessible schooling service. For example, R1 (DoE employee) highlighted policy actions had failed to factor in the various key points of service delivery:

The flip side is they have better access to boarding colleges. Middle school, I’m not sure what’s happening, but you’ve got kids who may be viewed by their parents as too young to send away. So, you’ve got kids from as young as eleven to fourteen who are still being taught by teachers. (R1)

R2 (DoE employee) was particularly critical:

No, definitely not. Minister Anderson became aware there were four hundred and seventy odd homelands that had no service provision. If each of those only had one child, that’s five hundred kids that weren’t receiving any services at all. We have been putting our heads in the sand over this; we don’t want to know about those kids. (R2)

These respondents crystallised the complex challenges around improving schooling accessibility. Therefore, it was important to examine the more recent and prominent policy initiatives, designed to address this issue. These include the school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM), direct instruction (DI) and boarding schools.

5.4.4 **The failure of the school enrolment and attendance measure policy**

Each respondent group were asked whether they thought the SEAM policy had been successful in getting children to school. Responses varied, but most viewed SEAM as a failed policy and, in some instances, a reason for family and student disengagement. R1 (DoE employee) stated: “The SEAM policy has had limited success, when you’re hitting [parents] over the head with a stick”. Instead, this respondent focused more on families where children had established good attendance:

It’s more about how you have a positive conversation with people, changing tack and not talking about little Johnny didn’t come to school today. I’d keep away from those parents
and talk to those whose child is attending between 80–100%; it’s about a positive view of education, as opposed to the negative. (R1)

When I asked whether SEAM was seen by parents as a negative policy, R1 stated: “Absolutely. I don’t think I’d like someone parking out the front of my house, beeping the horn at six o’clock in the morning”. Similarly, R2 (DoE employee) also believed SEAM hadn’t worked and was particularly scathing around the depth of the problem:

No, it hasn’t. When you’ve got attendance at some places at 20%, some places at 40%, bumping it up to 22% and 42% isn’t going to address the enormity of the problem. We did a study to work out what percentage of kids were out of community on any particular day. What we came up with in these ten schools was about 23%. So, on any given day 23% weren’t in the community. (R2)

In discussing this ‘big stick’ approach being applied to families, many of whom were in financial hardship, R3 (DoE employee) believed the policy lacked clarity:

I don’t think there is agreement around the SEAM. When you talk to people that work in that area, there’s very different views. I don’t think there’s policy agreement, and the impact of it? Sounds like a highly resourced response for not the outcome everyone’s looking for. (R3)

To unpack this further, I asked whether engagement was or had been a part of building attendance, as opposed to punishment of non-attendance. R4 (DoE employee) indicated that this wasn’t a consideration:

It was all about getting the kid to school. But then the student’s ability to then engage with learning and what other things needed to happen to allow for that have evolved [sic] as SEAM evolved [sic]. I think the engagement of students and what it takes to get them at school and engaged in learning has come later. (R4)

In respect to SEAM, Group 2 offered insights concerning its relationship to learning and engagement. For example, R5 (Aboriginal school principal) stated: “It does exist here, but we’re always going to have that retention problem with kids. You can try and punish, but the parents won’t understand it. You can serve the papers; parents will just say: ‘Yeah, alright’. They’ll send their child for four weeks; they’ll get their family payment back, and then it starts again” (R5). Similarly, R6 (Aboriginal school principal) stated:

I don’t think it has. I do not think that taking peoples’ payments away from them is working at all because the kids aren’t coming. That then puts pressure back in the community and we start seeing the increase in break and enters because families don’t have food or more fighting happening because families are becoming reliant on other families. It just created more problems. (R6)
On the day of interview, R6 stated that their school’s attendance was around 30%. When asked how many of the students not attending were out of community, they replied: “I think almost all the passive20 are not in community. That would be probably forty not in community; just in and out, but not coming to school” (R6). In inquiring further, I asked whether being an Aboriginal principal mattered. In responding R6 pointed to wider issues they considered as more significant: “To some degree, but they need to value education. We’ve got a number of families that value education, but there’s families that need to be educated about education” (R6). While also sharing this view, R8 (Aboriginal school principal) offered additional insights around attendance, and its relationship to student movement:

They’re truant at one school and they’ll be in another community but won’t feel comfortable going to that school. Things like that I don’t think have been factored into attendance and truancy. School attendance does need to work, but with good attendance you’ve got to have good programs and good teachers. (R8)

Similarly, R10 (Aboriginal school principal) added that engagement was as important as attendance:

I think there needs to be a differentiation between attendance and engagement. Our attendance officer does an excellent job of getting every kid who’s in community at school, but it’s about how we keep them at school and engage them in meaningful education. (R10)

I inquired further around the impacts of the SEAM policy on families’ ability to engage in education. In commenting, R10 stated that it had produced the opposite outcome to that intended:

It puts extra stress on families; the trauma that kids experience at home leads to them becoming disengaged. There are more important things in their life to be thinking about rather than school, like where they’re getting their next meal from or where they are going to be sleeping tonight, and is that place going to be safe? (R10)

In trying to understand how broadly SEAM was viewed more generally within community as an effective policy, Group 3 was instructive. R7 (Aboriginal school council) for example indicated that it wasn’t received well and had caused further difficulties in trying to get families more connected with school services:

Not a good idea. Sometimes if their payment is cut off, they get angry with the school. We have a yarn21 and tell them: “If your kid starts coming back to school, we’ll restore your payment”. Some get wild. We need to wake up our kids to go to school every day to learn both ways. (R7)

For R9 (Aboriginal school council) the SEAM policy presented the same challenges: “Yeah, they go around warning first and just see whether if the kid’s sick, or something wrong” (R9). When I asked if

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20 The term ‘passive’ is used to describe students that are enrolled, but reflect very low attendance rates. Passive attendance figures are used in the formula for calculating school funding levels.

21 Yarn is an Australian colloquial term for a personal conversation, sometimes expressed in narrative form.
cultural issues impacted how families were consulted, R9 shared: “We have cultural barriers where I can’t go into certain people’s houses; we get somebody else to go in there” (R9). Others offered insights where some families had limited influence in working with their child: “Some parents don’t really care. Some families just think, “not today”. Some families just give up on that child” (R11, Aboriginal school council). Other reasons for why children didn’t attend school included: “Parents drinking, playing cards and not enough time with that kid. I see it a lot. They say: “No, not today”; they don’t give two rats”. (R11).

R11 identified home environments as a key reason for truancy:

Parents play a role. They’re unemployed and some argue, like an addiction. They don’t have much food and clothing. They sick of home and bring it here at school, teasing, fighting amongst each other. Some parents aren’t strict enough; some kids do whatever they want. Some parents [are] separated, and not having a father figure in their life; it’s big here. (R11)

5.4.5 Failure of the direct instruction (DI) program policy
With some exceptions, discussed in the section detailing divergent themes (p. 162), DI (see discussion, p. 129) was understood by most respondents as ineffectual in improving student engagement and learning, and in some instances claimed to have caused the opposite outcome. R1 (DoE employee) for example viewed DI as boring and as causing truancy:

Some communities are finding that it does work for them. [Community Y] hate it. I observed three children doing it. The boy in the middle refused to keep going, so the second boy started to chastise him and a fight broke out. When they were removed for a while, then brought back in, the young fella that was in the middle did it without blinking. I think it was him saying: “I’ve had enough”. And teachers get bored with it. If you have a DI school, it’s difficult to recruit quality staff. (R1)

R2 (DoE employee) shared a similar view of DI, which offered insights into the future, particularly in the tensions between the role of teachers and systemised, scripted learning programs:

I don’t know much about direct instruction, but I know that it’s a crazy model. It’s designed in America; the materials are designed in America; the subject matter is American. I don’t think they take into consideration the individual needs of students and the social/emotional needs of kids. It debases the value of having a teacher in the classroom. (R2)

Asked whether DI had improved the accessibility of education, R2 stated:

I don’t know how it impacts on access, but I know it’s been done in other ways before. We had Accelerated Literacy, based on the same principle: trying to get a single, homogenous model across the system that was prescribed. Part of it might have been a hope that kids would engage more because they knew the business, and the teachers that were rotating through the school would pick those skills up. (R2)
In furthering this inquiry, R4 (DoE employee) commented: “Given how expensive the program we purchased through Good to Great Schools Australia, I would say that it’s a very expensive package and the cost was unsustainable” (R4). Similarly, R3 (DoE employee) agreed with this view:

Yes, but there was a political desire. The Minister [of Education] had witnessed DI in action, and went: “It’s remarkable”! We rolled it out and the more we rolled it out, the clearer it became it was not going to be the answer. (R3)

When asked about the impacts of DI, R9 (Aboriginal school council) indicated the problem of using repetitious programs in the teaching of English as a second language:

It’s in [nearby community]. When it is time to do that DI, they run away from school; they don’t want to do it. Kids don’t like sitting in one place for a long time [when] you have to mainly repeat. (R9)

When asked whether DI was producing the opposite outcome to its policy intent by pushing kids away from school, this respondent believed it had: “Yeah, it’s from America. So, getting that and coming here and try and teach our Indigenous students, it’s not really good” (R9).

5.4.6 The limited option of external boarding schools

As an Aboriginal person who lived part of their life in an Aboriginal boarding school in the early 1970s, I was aware that the practice of communities sending students away to boarding schools has long existed in the NT, well before it was discussed in the ASITF (2013). Against this backdrop, I wanted to know how broadly and targeted this policy was implemented. R1 (DoE employee) replied:

We have better support for children who wish to further their education out of community, although it left a void for children who weren’t academically gifted and wanted to stay in community. There was no option for them. What I’ve watched is a spike in kids trashing teacher houses, which makes it difficult for the school to function. (R1)

Against these policy design issues, I was interested in how these decisions were made. As a government employee, R2 (DoE employee) offered insights into the political considerations around the boarding schools policy:

It was to shut down [secondary provision] because it wasn’t producing results, according to Wilson. His intention was to put a ceiling on the numbers of students required to have a program, which was forty secondary students. There were four places only where secondary provision would be delivered, and they are the big places. Minister Chandler at the time [was] not very far away from an election where they won government on the basis of bush seats. Taking secondary programs out of schools, taking teachers [and] forcing the kids to leave communities wasn’t going to be palatable, so he didn’t make it mandatory. Kids who are left behind, what are we doing for them? (R2)
Against this backdrop, it is useful to consider the views of one Indigenous education leader around their experiences with boarding schools, which offers an outcome of strong parenting. As the parent of two boys, R9 (Aboriginal school council) commented:

My boys, we sent them to [college] and my other son did well in footy [drafted to the AFL]. When we went there, we didn’t find they were putting education first for him, so we sent them to a school in Melbourne. We sent both because my youngest son couldn’t survive, but with his brother they made it through together. It’s hard for them going away, but it was a good move. (R9)

When asked whether other parents were having similar experiences, R9 stated: “In a small community like here I think my boys were the first that went [away]. There are a few parents that sent them to Darwin or to Alice [Springs]. It’s just keeping them there; it’s hard” (R9).

5.4.7 Under-utilised local senior secondary education options

As discussed in this chapter, the ASITF (2013) review recommended the boarding school policy was due to difficulties in delivering secondary services across small, remote communities. However, while for the larger communities, secondary education can be delivered on Country, it is difficult to establish how successfully it engages secondary students, since individual data on attendance and other performance indicators were difficult to obtain. However, the data outlined in Chapter 4 suggest these sites have not performed well and my observations during site visits confirmed this, having witnessed large numbers of secondary-aged children not attending school on the day of my visits. Against this observation, I posed questions to R5 (Aboriginal school principal), who managed a school that delivered a secondary program:

It’s good for getting kids to move away, but at the same time those kids going away, they get into trouble; they show erratic behaviours at the [boarding] school. We had a couple of kids and they came back, stayed here, became our students and graduated through our program. (R5)

In considering this comment, I wanted to establish how much local NT boarding options were taken into consideration, given interstate boarding institutions situated so far from the realm of remote student lives. A boarding school was recently built on land adjacent to the Nhulunbuy high school, at a reported cost of $20m (Thomson, 2016). The purpose was to build boarding hubs within community regions, though for one principal respondent this initiative failed to consider how it might best serve the interests of those targeted. R6 (Aboriginal school principal) for example suggested this new building suffered from a lack of community consultation in the appropriateness of the design and the communication around its availability: “At the moment that boarding school is at capacity; there’s forty beds there.

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22 I had consulted with each site to ensure visits occurred on days where no significant cultural events were happening, to show respect and avoid intrusion.
We’ve probably got two to four there. When it was opened, it filled up quickly and I didn’t have much information around it. Before you knew it, it was full” (R6).

The community where R6 worked is comparatively large and has a developed employment pathways program that links with regional industries. However, according to R6 the community has struggled in attracting senior secondary students into the secondary programs offered at the local school. With limited information made available around the boarding school option, R6 further stated:

When they opened, very little information was fed through. Families have realised its open, but it’s at capacity. It’s full and I know there are parents that want to send their children away. We’ve had a lot go to Cairns and a lot have come back. They just don’t last. I can’t think of one of our students that’s gone away and been really successful down there. (R6)

Considering the relative proximity of the new boarding school, I asked the question if this would make a difference, given the suggested low success rates achieved with interstate boarding schools. R6 replied:

I think so. I also think that with the amount of money here that one should be put here because most go away and they all come back. When they come back, they’re too shame to come to school, stay at home and they fall off the grid. I don’t know they’re back, unless I see them down the street. They’re not going to say: “I’m back and want to enrol”. (R6)

When I asked about this issue of students going away to boarding school and returning shortly after, R8 (Aboriginal school principal) also stated it came with problems:

It has happened; students go to a boarding school and can’t cope, get homesick or want to come home. Another boarding school just sends students home for all sorts of reasons. The reason most parents want their children to go to boarding school is they have access to a range of things they can’t access in the community. Whether its sport or the arts, they’ve got to have experiences outside of the community. (R8)

When asked the question around the examples of successful boarding school experiences and what might underpin these outcomes, R8 further stated:

It does depend on the boarding school. But there’s one in Darwin that we’ve got about a dozen students at the moment, and there’s constant communication with the families here. That’s a number one important factor; communication has to be good. We’ve had a couple of students get to Year 12 in that college. (R8)

In the next section, discussion turns to some of the key connected issues raised by respondents in respect to localised boarding schools, given many remote schools do not have secondary programs available.

5.4.8 Local NT boarding schools struggle

In investigating interstate verses local boarding schools, respondents revealed both had been problematic, including sites where secondary programs were in place. Against this feedback, I sought
more nuanced understanding of the issues, beyond those already identified. For this discussion, College X is a boarding school owned and operated by a group of remote Aboriginal communities to service the educational needs of secondary-aged students. From my experiences in earlier years when I visited this college, it appeared to be well resourced and is relatively isolated from its communities to create distance from home-related issues. This site is unique in its expressions of Aboriginal self-determinism, control and governance. Against this investment, feedback revealed ongoing issues around engagement. R11 (Aboriginal school council) who worked in a remote community school, stated: “We have twelve Year 6s this year and half of them want to go to the college. That’s what we were trying to do about kids knowing their path, so they can prepare for it” (R11). In exploring the success rate of students flowing from regional schools to the college, and what opportunities emerged for those students concerning employment, R11 stated:

Most of the kids that go there, they go better and some of them got a job because of work here or somewhere else. Them young fellas, every Monday they come and do work experience. That’s good because you start early. (R11)

In discussing boarding school retention, R11 further commented: “At the college some of them kids try to run away, but too far out bush. The majority of the kids attending there, they got addictions already; cigarettes and smoking gunja [cannabis] and stuff” (R11). When I asked to clarify this generalisation of ‘most’, R11 stated:

Yeah, heaps getting into relationship23 early. It’s a big thing, jealousy and whatever. Last term, some of them was fighting amongst each other. If a kid starts to play up or punch or they got conduct [misbehaviour], they be sent home with a letter saying “mischief”. (R11)

It is within this context of secondary service provision that discussion moves, in the following section, to the pivotal dimension of where education transports students. Here, the focus is employment on Country, which, as this analysis has identified, is a critical level of nuancing that none of the three major reviews problematised, despite its obvious connection to educational purpose.

5.4.9 Pathways to employment and development on Country
Pathways to employment and development on Country serves to validate the functionality and purpose of the schooling experience (Matthews, 2013). Aboriginality in this context is reinforced by attachments to Country and by a broader community of Aboriginality, where the controls over the shifts in identity are imposed from within, rather than externally, as is the case with forced assimilation (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Reynolds, 2009; Tatz, 2009). This domain represents a pivotal issue because Aboriginal life opportunities are underpinned by sustainable local and regional economies that must be

23 In Aboriginal English this commonly means a sexual relationship.
hybrid in their design. The questions thus sought to understand how these undercurrents played out in the way the post-schooling and training domains were problematised and expressed in policy and program actions.

In turning focus in this direction, R1 (DoE employee) was asked about their insights into the NTDoE’s policy environment around pathways to employment:

There’s a project called Community Lead. The schools that aren’t big enough to become Independent Public Schools (IPS)24 give them opportunity to do something else, but [it] translates to people having a stronger voice around how their kids are taught and what they are taught, and there’s a huge push towards learning on Country. (R1)

When I asked about where R1 thought education transports children in the remotes, the response was blunt:

Basically, to death or to jump. If they don’t get a quality education, that’s their life choices. We love our kids, so we wanted the best for our kids. We had to wrestle back control of education. Communities like [this community] have taken the next step, which is about taking back control. That will put education in a better space to have very productive conversations. (R1)

When I asked how this broader Aboriginal control reflected on the placement of education, R1 commented: “Community feels not just empowered, they aren’t frightened to come into the school anymore and they walk in like they own the place now” (R1). When I asked this question of others, one suggested this was a key area within policies that was never addressed. R2 (DoE employee) stated:

It’s at the heart of purpose. Collins [Learning Lessons, 1999] even talked about that when they did interviews with people. They said: “Well, education for what”? What’s the point in going through a non–Indigenous education system, coming out with qualifications to get a job, because there’s no jobs there or there are other people who are filling the job. (R2)

In respect to those students not opting for boarding school and requiring an alternate route to employment-type skills, R2 further stated:

We’ve been raising this with exec board (NTDoE), all the time. We’ve been saying: “We’ve been chased by principals to do something about these kids who are rocking the rooves. Do something about these kids who are coming through the classrooms and upsetting their little brothers and sisters, and they’re not even engaged in schools”. They’re starting to respond and there is a program now called Employment Pathways; of which boarding schools is one option. (R2)

24 Government schools that are large and satisfy government policy requirements can apply to become fully independent. Only one IPS exists in the NT remote community context.
When I probed whether the Employment Pathways program was like the earlier and now defunct policy of VET in Schools (VETiS), R2 stated:

In lots of ways yes, but it doesn’t have the requirements of VET, which needs to be delivered by a qualified person. It’s got to be an accredited course, (and) it’s gotta be done in a certain number of hours or else it doesn’t meet the requirements. Employment Pathways doesn’t have scriptures of VET in Schools, and so it’s more flexible; may turn out to be a better model. (R2)

When asked what might be the major issues for NT DoE in formatting remote Indigenous education against pathways to employment and development on Country, R2 indicated it wasn’t considered:

Pathways to Employment on Country? I don’t think they recognised it as important; they have never addressed that fundamental question. You can get a job and leave community, but if there’s no jobs out there or there’s no thinking about how people can be gainfully employed in remote communities, then parents always question: “What’s the point”? (R2)

R3 (DoE employee) observed this as an expression of the multifaceted and complex challenges of remote community contexts:

Unintended policy consequences of the move away from secondary provision in remote [communities] produced a rapid focus on trying to fill that gap with an employment pathway, including learning and working on Country. Once you take secondary out, what do you give kids that stay behind? (R3)

R3 further observed these issues as policy on the run:

That generated a policy reaction around writing up a whole curriculum package for Employment Pathways. So, VET in Schools? It’s almost a replacement of that. Attempt has been to co-design what the program looks like, dependent on the community and the access to jobs, the type of employment, the type of industry and then what you teach as part of the curriculum. (R3)

For the Aboriginal principals the post-schooling employment pathway was significant in community development, and for R5 (Aboriginal school principal) progressive steps had been taken through Aboriginal controls:

It is very important. We have our pathways to jobs here. We have a coordinator [who] deals with some organisations that we’ve established a partnership [with]. We have a VET program; a trainer that comes around and helps on various units of work. We had a lot of kids interested, coming through the secondary program. It helps if you have a trainer who’s onside looking after pathways; that’s what the Department [DoE] don’t have; this person on the ground to work with the school and organisations when they graduate. Not a lot of organisations will take on school leavers. (R5)

R6 (Aboriginal school principal) led a school like that of R5, within proximity to an expanded, economic hub. R6 highlighted a concern about attendance, as connected to gender:
The one I can think of is the Employment Pathways Program and VET in Schools. We’ve just taken on the VET Foundation Skills, Certificate 1. However, they need to come and do the work, and the teacher, he’s fantastic in the trade training centre, [though] it comes back to attendance. For those that attend, they’re working through at a nice pace. However, that class, it’s been the majority of males and the girls have not engaged. (R6)

A further line of questioning was around the impact that cultural taboos played in offering employment pathways to the older students, of which R6 stated:

It does. A lot of the girls had gone to boarding school, so the majority of that class was male-dominated. It was right on NAPLAN25 and we had a population explosion down there. When I got there all the boys were hanging outside. All these girls had come back to school because they’d been away and all decided to come back. I said: “come on boys, learning time now”. They said: “No, we can’t go in there”. There were three different poison cousin26 relationships, so they couldn’t come in. (R6)

A follow-up question was asked around how responsive the broader economic community had been in supporting the school’s pathways to employment program:

They’ve been supportive. They come a couple of times a week and work in the trade training centre, while the students are there. They also come in and do talks to the senior boys’ and girls’ classes. A lot of our seniors are doing their Certificate 2 in Conservation and Land Management. When we’re doing our work experience, we’ve got more places asking for our students than the [number of] students, because the numbers [attending] were very low. (R6)

In continuing this investigation around pathways to employment and development on Country, R8 (Aboriginal school principal) stated:

Employment Pathways is a program written by teachers, which waters down the curriculum. They will get a certificate at the end of it, but it’s assuming that all kids want to go down that path and that parents want their children to go down that path. We found parents want their children to access what other Australian students can access. They may drop below the level, but they’re still having a go at it. (R8)

This school was in an area with limited economic activity, which I probed R8 about: “Unfortunately, that’s the black hole. At the moment it’s just the shire council and there’s only so many positions there and most are labour-type positions” (R8). In contrast, the local and regional economic environment overlaying the school where R10 (Aboriginal school principal) worked is comparatively large, of which R10 commented:

25 The NAPLAN test is administered in mid-May.
26 The term ‘poison cousin’ describes Aboriginal kinship relationships that need to be avoided. These people must not be named or spoken to, and not to be in close proximity, including in the same room.
[This community’s] got a lot of infrastructure here which opens for employment and a lot of positions are earmarked for local employment. There’s still the challenge of what people will want to do and what they’ll be capable of doing. So, that’s where the employment pathways program has the bonus. (R10)

In the latter parts of this chapter, these convergent themes around Aboriginal cultural inclusion, the accessibility of education services and pathways to employment and development on Country are synthesised in respect of what they are suggesting about the nature of functional policy responses. Before this, the next section is important to discuss, given divergent and outlying themes need to be factored into the findings of this chapter.

5.5 Divergent themes

Interviews revealed divergent responses in respect to how respondents experienced the various policy actions highlighted, but also in the way they were perceived in relation to the broad Story of schooling engagement and disengagement. Each of these themes are detailed in this section.

5.5.1 Diversity concerning cultural inclusion in service provision

One finding related to Indigenous cultural inclusiveness was the different ways this was responded to, which in a sense also reflected how the policy domain was problematised. R6 (Aboriginal school principal) for example identified some progressive actions happening in recent years in Aboriginal inclusion in remote service provision, particularly as connected to the SRNTDET (2009) (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009) and ASITF (2013) (Wilson, 2013). One example was the appointment of a regional, cultural officer:

Definitely promoting the culture, but also capacity-building around Indigenous staff. I think it has [improved], only in the sense that I know. So, there’s somebody who comes out every three weeks, three times a term and she works with our Indigenous staff; so, really capacity-building and empowering them. (R6)

While this had connection to the government’s policy agenda, particularly regarding community partnerships, R6 pointed out this position was identified well before the NT DoE: “No; that came from a report that the [Indigenous regional council] had done in 2009/10”. When I then asked about the NT education policy environment and how well it enabled Indigenous inclusion, R8 (Aboriginal school principal) replied:

I think it’s happening in certain areas, but it’s not a generalised policy throughout the Northern Territory. So, we’re getting to it; recently been involved in putting together a family and community engagement charter, which shows some good strategies in getting those things to happen within your school. (R8)
R10 (Aboriginal school principal) identified that recent policies were more supportive of Indigenous inclusion:

The *Share in the Future* is the one that I’m most familiar. In terms of inclusivity, I think that the strategy that has been created for the next 10 years out of the *A Share in the Future* review, one of the initiatives is the *Community Engagement Charter*. The charter is an excellent tool for working out everybody’s points of view and feeling like everyone is contributing to that process. (R10)

On this discussion of cultural inclusion, R7 (Aboriginal school council) stated: “Yeah, we know it’s very important for our kids. We want our kids to continue our culture. Education is very important for our kids to learn both ways in English and [Aboriginal language]” (R7). This view was shared by R9 (Aboriginal school council): “The culture, it’s very important. I think it should be taught at the school; it’s just important for kids because they know where they come from” (R9). And similarly, R11 (Aboriginal school council) stated:

Well, I think that it’s vital and for us to have our culture strong. Identity is sort of fading away and it hasn’t been taught much, like back in the old days. I got relatives in Arnhem Land; some of them they don’t have knowledge for Aboriginal ways and they find it difficult. (R11)

However, for some, cultural inclusion should not be viewed within a policy vacuum. R7 (Aboriginal school council) for example identified that they had their language, and instead cited poor student attendance had been behind children being unable to make the leap into English and learning about a western world: “When the new kid comes in this school, they find it hard” (R7). Others including R9 (Aboriginal school council) believed the policies were there, but the main issue was getting the right locals to work in the school: “We don’t have Indigenous people; we don’t have any and I think it’s finding money too, for them to come in” (R9). Similarly, R11 (Aboriginal school council) thought the policies supported Aboriginal inclusion: “Pretty good. They gotta understand both [worlds] and remember where you come from; always come back to it” (R11).

**5.5.2 Direct instruction works for students attending school regularly**

While several respondents viewed DI as an ineffectual program of learning intervention, others presented a mixed response. For example, R11 stated: “Some of our kids here saying it’s boring. Its OK, but one thing, it’s not from here; a lot of them words from America, and our kids here they are turning out to being American”. However, when I asked R11 if they thought DI had improved students’ engagement and/or learning in school, this community leader stated:

Yeah, it really has because I started to get kids to school every day and on time. The kids here, their English is very well spoken, because of this DI. Like, my two kids and the way they talk and they talk back to me, I think “oh, yeah, that’s good”. (R11)
R6 (Aboriginal school principal) also offered a supportive view of DI, particularly for those that attended school regularly:

Schools that implemented DI were given a coaching position. Students are placement tested, right from the start. If students roll up here from [another community] my DI coach can get on the phone and say: “So and so has presented, what program or what level are they at?” We can then slot them in the right placement, so there is nothing new for them. They go in; it’s the same structure, the same routine. (R6)

However, when pressed about program issues, this respondent stated:

The problem with direct instruction, and we came up against this last year, we hit a brick wall after going fantastically. DI is based around the lesson progression, so at every lesson they’re only given 10% new information. But if the student hadn’t attended in three weeks and turn up, they don’t know what’s going on. So, DI’s working for students that attend regularly. (R6)

R10 (Aboriginal school principal) identified their school delivered DI:

Our school is a direct instruction school for literacy; our kids don’t move between our school and other DI schools that often. I think the program is very successful in our school, even though some people have not liked teaching it. We do have some very good results and recently did all our PM Benchmarking across the school and kids had moved five and six reading levels, just in one semester. So, to see that growth is definitely a celebration that this program does have an impact. (R10)

When asked if the program was engaging students, R10 stated: “We don’t tend to have as many behaviour problems during that time of the day because the kids know the routine; there’s consistency and opportunities for success”. When I asked about how well teachers worked with the program, R10 stated: “There was a survey last year, they surveyed all the DI schools and I think the data showed that it was the younger, early career teachers that had the biggest difficulty engaging in the program” (R10).

5.6 Additional and outlying themes

5.6.1 Factoring additional and outlying themes
Several additional and outlying themes emerged in the field research. These are important to address because they strengthened a nuanced detailing of the multi-layered policy context. These themes concerned teacher quality, the limited capacity of principals in attending to the multifarious nature of their roles, the limited focus on employment pathways for young remote post-secondary students and

27 The PM reading program is a commercial layer 3 curriculum resource with defined stages of progression. PM is used in school-based teaching, assessment and reporting.
the lack of clarity of local employment opportunities in the delivery of schooling services. These themes emerged from interviews and are analysed here and in later discussion.

During interviews with the Aboriginal school principals and community leaders, all of whom were members of their respective school councils, questions were posed about the three problematised policy domains. While this was central to the inquiry, it was also an opportunity to ask the groups what they saw as the single, main issue impacting remote Aboriginal schooling achievement. The purpose of seeking this sharpened response was to provide insight into how these two Aboriginal respondent groups problematised in relation to their standpoints of school and community. That is, whether it was about an external education policy environment or it was about the individual; given these two domains intersect at a point where policy and government accountability end and individual accountability and responsibility commences.

5.6.2 Quality teachers are equally important alongside quality programs
R8 (Aboriginal school principal) pointed out the close relationship between quality teachers and quality programs. This principal raised this comment in two areas of questioning, being about DI and attendance, with their relationship to schooling engagement. R8 stated:

DI, it’s an American program; it’s old and out-dated. Whether it is appropriate for the Indigenous context within the Northern Territory, I’m not convinced. You’ve [also] got to have quality teachers. You might have a good one teaching the DI program and making progress, then you have someone who’s not a good teacher, and this does happen. But, with good attendance you’ve got to have good programs and good teachers, and I say both in one sentence because both have to be as good as each other. In the school it comes down to quality teachers. They use that program; they teach well, children will learn. (R8)

In terms of the problem at the heart of this Story, this point by R8 is important to consider because it alerts us to the fluid nature of social complexity and, at the same time, the vertical, silo policy responses too often favoured by governments.

5.6.3 The remote school principal role is unsustainable
R6 (Aboriginal school principal) argued that a core issue impacting the delivery of remote schooling services concerned the role of principal as being unsustainable. While this comment implicates the respondent’s ability to balance the competing demands of the position, it also points to the matter of resource allocation and is significant to consider in the context of the remote Aboriginal funding levels, discussed in Chapters 5–7. R6 stated:

The amount of compliance that a principal needs to do? If I had somebody that could do all this compliance stuff, someone like a PA.28 I spend weekends doing that stuff because I

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28 Personal assistant role funded to support the principal in remote contexts, are often without this resource.
can’t during the day because I’m running an organisation about people. I need to be out there talking with families. It’s become more and more; the compliance that we need to do as principals and things we need to do by the end of every week. You’re learning on the job, but there was no real training. So, more support. (R6)

Similarly, R10 (Aboriginal school principal) also identified the key issue was around the changing role of the principal:

Well, the role of the principal’s becoming more and more complex. As a teaching principal, I have a teaching load. I think the role of the teaching principal is less sustainable than it has ever been, especially with increasing complex student needs and the trauma in communities that we’re experiencing. (R10)

R10 stated that the disadvantage in remote communities had a compounding impact on the principal role:

I think that education doesn’t just have to be limited to the curriculum, that in communities we need to have other systems that support families to have healthy lives. What I’ve observed is a very adhoc approach to programs in communities. (R10)

When I asked about what impact community trauma, adhoc policy and programs had presented across a changing principal role, R10 further stated:

Well, I’m a TP2.29 Sometimes you have to mow the lawn and clean the toilets. I heard a few years back that the teaching principal JD30 was being reviewed and then nothing had been released. We’ve had a change in government, change in [DoE] leadership as well, so I think that’s all part of the challenge. (R10)

R10 then added:

I’ve noticed that teaching principals have come and gone a lot, some only for two weeks and went [stated]: “No, this is a joke, I’m not doing this!” I’m an Indigenous person who can influence in a positive direction. So, I think that’s what drives me, and at times I’m exhausted and I can’t think straight, so I go home and shut off. I think they are challenges for my wellbeing, when some days you’re exhausted. (R10)

These experiences from Aboriginal school principals highlight that remote area workforce development is a policy arena that is, through its inability to respond to these significant and ongoing issues, adding to the problems of remote schooling development.

29 The NT principal role has many levels. Teaching Principal 2 (TP2) is the second lowest level and generally attached to remote, small schools.

30 Job description.
5.6.4 Remote education pathways need to be improved
While discussion of findings in this chapter has been around the various segments of remote schooling, R8 (Aboriginal school principal) suggested the entire service modelling hadn’t been thought through:

I think one of the things would be linking our education at the school to future employment, right through. So, even before they start school you have a great Families as First Teacher’s program; then they come into school. We’ve got a strong pathway in the early years, and going up to the middle years. But we need to link not just within education, but other areas too. It sounds like we’re giving people more choice, but there aren’t a lot of choices. Until those links are made, it’s all very disjointed. (R8)

As this statement suggests, R8 believed the main issue behind the poor performance of remote schools in the NT was the service architecture. This is significant, given this view affirms the focus of my thesis, including the need for increased Aboriginal participation in education delivery.

5.6.5 Aboriginal employment needs dramatic improvement
An additional policy domain identified by R8 related to the level of Aboriginal involvement in the delivery of remote schooling services:

I think we need to increase Indigenous employment at all levels, and I’m talking about Regional Directors and all of those, because those positions, until that happens, you won’t get a real voice. Of course, people have to have the skills and the ability, but try and get people to that level. (R8)

When asked about how or why an Aboriginal person, particularly at the level of regional director of schools would be different or better than non-Indigenous people, R8 stated:

Well, they’d have the Indigenous perspective; they’re looking through those eyes and seeing the real picture. When you get a non-Indigenous person in that role, often the starting point is getting to know what’s important in the Indigenous community. You won’t always get an Indigenous person who understands all that as well. It still comes down to the right person, but I think you’ll have someone in there that understands the real issues. The other thing is being able to work with the people in the community; being able to talk, listen and bring back to the table what’s important to the community. (R8)

These statements draw upon the critically important threads that remote Aboriginal community development needs to occur through Indigenous people, at all levels of the education system, not just in school organisational spaces.

5.6.6 Parents and families are most responsible for their children’s education
When asked what they thought was the single, main issue behind the lowered schooling performance, R7 (Aboriginal school council) viewed parent responsibility as the key issue. R7 stated:
The main thing is the parents, they need to be strong. In 1991, we had a lot of kids coming to school and we were strong ATs. We used to go out in the community; we used to take the attendance rolls and sit with the parents and ask them questions: “What’s the reason why the kid’s not coming to school?” And we had the feedback: “Teasing is going on; they were hungry; some got dirty clothes”. That was in the past, and now when our team go around, it’s still the same answer: teasing, dirty clothes, bullying, sick. I don’t know what’s bothering them. (R7)

This point is significant since it problematises the boundaries around individual responsibility to change and community development.

5.6.7 Aboriginal voices in remote education need to be substantially increased

The last main policy arena problematised had to do with power, empowerment and representation of Aboriginal social realities. R9 (Aboriginal school council) stated that it was the absence of an Aboriginal voice in NT remote schooling policy modelling:

That voice, getting somebody. There wasn’t a voice. We should have one; what we want for our school. Remote communities should have more Indigenous staff, and then enrol to do the teaching and then get a voice from there. It makes us stronger, to be heard. It’s our schools and our kids. (R9)

This statement highlighted the ‘silenced Aboriginal voice’ in the education system that targets NT remote children (Tatz, 2009). The themes canvassed in this section of outlying themes reflect this since each of the key domains problematised as significant issues are silenced, evidenced by the fact that all are either absent or opaque in policy. In the next section, attention is turned to synthesising these themes, as expressed across each of the three respondent groups, and as relates to this investigation into the three problematised policy domains.

5.7 Key findings

5.7.1 Participant emergent themes

The main study problematises policy actions related to Aboriginal cultural inclusion, remote schools’ service accessibility and pathways to employment and development on Country. The focus of this chapter has been to accurately capture the voices of those close to these domains through semi-structured interviews. In presenting this primary data Story, the following dominant themes have emerged. These have been synthesised and are broadly described in Table 47. At the bottom of this table are three key findings. Each are discussed in Chapter 6, followed in Chapter 7 by what they suggest

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31 Assistant Teachers (AT). An employment classification that enables parents to work in remote schools in supporting roles.
for this study and the key propositions they invoke around progressing through the social, economic and political entanglement driving the policy problems discussed.

Table 47: Participant emergent themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problematised policy domain</th>
<th>Aboriginal cultural inclusion</th>
<th>Accessibility of remote school services</th>
<th>Pathways to employment and development on Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1: DoE policy workers</strong></td>
<td>Since <em>Learning Lessons</em> (1999), there has been a policy shift away from Aboriginal cultural inclusion in the delivery of remote schooling services.</td>
<td>SEAM, DI and boarding schools are high cost and unsustainable policies and have been ineffective.</td>
<td>Pathways to employment is not articulated into remote community development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2: Aboriginal principals</strong></td>
<td>Aboriginal cultural inclusion is at the core of building improved student learning and schooling development.</td>
<td>SEAM, DI and boarding schools have not improved the engagement of remote Aboriginal students.</td>
<td>The employment pathways program has encouraged schools to become more integrated with their communities and the alignment of education to local economic development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3: Aboriginal community leaders</strong></td>
<td>Aboriginal children need to learn both-ways well to be able to successfully live and walk in both worlds.</td>
<td>Parents and families are the most responsible in getting their children to school. Community schools are owned by the community and they must support them.</td>
<td>Post-school employment pathways are providing opportunities for those that want it, where it is available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dominant themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All groups</th>
<th>Theme one</th>
<th>Theme two</th>
<th>Theme three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal cultural inclusion is at the core of improving remote Aboriginal school services. This is not a prioritised domain within NT remote education policy.</td>
<td>The accessibility of remote school services has not improved. At the core of disengagement is a lack of ability to engage and lack of purpose.</td>
<td>Pathways to employment and development on Country is not factored in the architecture of schooling services, and more likely to succeed in expanded local and regional economic hubs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7.2 Aboriginal cultural inclusion

The key finding that all groups in this field research viewed Aboriginal cultural inclusion as a pivotal element in the formatting of remote Aboriginal school service was significant. This finding interrupts the racialised narratives that ‘Aboriginal cultures don’t matter’, that is reflected by its silence in the problematising behind the *SRNTDET* (2009) and *ASITF* (2013) reviews. Against this form of social exclusion, as discussed by those such as Walter (2016), it was evident in the remote schools visited that Aboriginal cultural inclusion was nonetheless pursued across employment, curriculum, teaching and
learning and governance, in responding to the complex phenomena concerning change, uncertainty, crisis, planning and adaption to the local cultural, economic and political world (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). However, as evidenced in Table 48, these Aboriginal pursuits were also limited by the lack of an overarching policy environment that legitimised and resourced and rewarded such actions.

5.7.3 Accessibility of remote school services
While improving the accessibility of remote Aboriginal schools has dominated the NT DoE’s policy agenda, this hasn’t led to improvements in attendance, engagement and learning (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). The finding that the SEAM, DI and boarding schools have not increased engagement reveal policy detachment with remote community life. For example, SEAM has been predicated on punishing the punished; DI on a rote modelling that includes a narrowed and standardised approach which required children to suspend their multiple intelligences (Keddie et al., 2013); and boarding schools have been problematic, particularly for those with mainstream cohorts, to cater for traditionally-oriented Aboriginal students with accrued learning gaps. The finding that some respondents viewed these policies as causing students to disengage revealed the policy design faults, but there was also a lack of systemic uptake around school-based actions that were observably working. These included school dietary programs, which appear to have no problematised clarity within any of the reviews, despite their profound impacts.

5.7.4 Pathways to employment and development on Country
The third theme around the rationalisation of education and its functional relationship to where it transitions students is difficult to achieve, particularly where a child (and their teachers and families) cannot see such pathways. In locations where trade training centres exist, they are in the larger local and regional economic hubs, but responses reveal even these have struggled against a history of welfare dependency and ambivalence to education that has manifested from a dislodgment in the purpose of remote education services that commenced in early childhood (Martin, 2002; Matthews, 2013). This finding points to the complicity of an education policy environment that has not resolved the deep social undercurrents the study respondents highlighted across themes 1 and theme 2.

5.7.5 Problematising the borders between the State, community and individual
A fourth theme is treated separately because it represents the core of the issues between the State and the individual. The statement by R7 (Aboriginal school council) about the lack of community engagement with their local school – “I don’t know what’s bothering them” – goes to the core of the problem. It is the point within social stratification that porous borders exist between what is offered to assist people and the choices they make around that opportunity. As R6 (Aboriginal school principal) also commented: “When I go to any community meeting, they say the same thing: Education is the key! They say that all the time; I hear families say that. Do they really know that it is?” For the main study, the implication of this question is profound because it is located along the border of two worlds; one
that catapults battles between the non–Aboriginal world of political left and right and their policy waves in support or punishment, and one where Aboriginal resistance is driven by a state of being and remaining Indigenous (Brayboy, 2006).

5.7.6 **Researcher observation comparisons**

Observations during site visits focused on how each reflected my problematised policy domains of Aboriginal cultural inclusion, accessibility of school services and pathways to employment and development on Country. These artefacts offered insights to the NT’s policy flows into communities and their impacts with staff, children and families. To mitigate the ‘gaps’, I drew upon my extensive background in remote teaching and school leadership to guide how I sought ‘evidence’ of a school’s journey (Blair, 2015). This included the state of the infrastructure, the quality of relationships, the level of integration between school and community and the level of student attendance and engagement. A generalised directional trend was used, and as shown, while each site reflected a commitment across each of the policy domains, these reflected varying levels of strength, and this was arguably implicated with the policy issues outlined. This observational framework, outlined in Table 48, reveals consistency with the primary data discussed in this chapter.

**Table 48: Researcher observation comparisons with three NT major reviews into remote Aboriginal schooling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Domain</th>
<th>Researcher Observation Rating</th>
<th>Site 1</th>
<th>Site 2</th>
<th>Site 3</th>
<th>Site 4</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal cultural inclusion</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>All schools had prioritised Aboriginal cultural inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service modelling: Accessibility to school services</td>
<td>Weakened</td>
<td>Weakened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Weakened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Three of the four schools had low student attendances, except Site 3, which had high attendance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-school employment pathways</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Weakened</td>
<td>Strengthened</td>
<td>Communities visited were moving toward strengthened status in larger local and regional economic hubs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is significant that a move away from a defined policy mapping of cultural inclusion has occurred since *Learning Lessons* (1999) (Collins & Lea, 1999); that policies designed to improve the accessibility of school services, namely the school enrolment and attendance measure(SEAM), direct instruction
and boarding schools, have not halted the dislocating of families from education, and that the pathways to employment and development on Country remains unresolved in its links to education service architecture in NT remote communities. At the core of these findings is this failure of the education policy environment and its political trajectory in constricting the choices available to Aboriginal people, who are faced with the untenable position of giving up their identity to become ‘poor, failed pseudo-whites’ on Country.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has told the Story of my field investigation into the impacts of the three major NT Indigenous education policy reviews: Learning Lessons (1999), SRNTDET (2009) and ASITF (2013). This inquiry offered currency and nuanced insights that unequivocally revealed a deepened mismatch between education policies and NT remote community contexts. The next chapter thus provides a foundation to understanding this policy dysfunction, through discussing the NT’s sociopolitical context. In pursuing this goal, I also explore a fourth theme in individual responsibility, which I signalled for consideration. This is the point at which government policies and individual responsibility have clashed abrasively within a fluid and rapidly changing world of post-capitalism and left–right politics (Bauman, 2005). In the next chapter a context to these findings is therefore conducted through unpacking the nature of the NT’s political economy.
Chapter 6. The NT remote Aboriginal education policy context

6.1 Introduction

Education is happening from the time the kid’s born, but it’s happening in a parallel universe, and what we’re talking about is education delivered by governments in schools by qualified teachers, delivering a standardised curriculum across Australia, and that’s a parallel universe in my reckoning, from Aboriginal people’s point of view, and the cross-over there doesn’t exist very much. (R2, DoE policy worker)

This chapter tells the Story of the sociopolitical context behind the disastrous education policy environment aimed at NT remote Aboriginal children and their families. In this Story, the NT functions as a ‘test site’ in constructing centrist policy corridors (McCarthy, 2009) that enable remote community Aboriginal development beyond deleterious assimilationist policies that remain favoured by governments, despite their obvious failings (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). The NT is a site of special interest because it is where Aboriginal social inequality is most relevant to this Aboriginal researcher, and because this inequality is the deepest of all Australian jurisdictions, as I will show in section 6.5. The NT’s demography, discussed in Chapter 1, has served to interrupt and dislocate western education policy approaches, creating spiralling epiphenomena and anchoring around the intersections of wealth inequality and racism, as discussed by those including Gillborn (2015) and Cowlishaw and Morris (1997).

In Chapter 5, this policy performance was discussed, and a key finding was that a major mismatch has long existed between education policies and NT remote contexts. As I outlined, investigation into Aboriginal cultural inclusion, the accessibility of schooling services and where these experience transport students in respect to pathways to employment and development on Country, revealed that these key domains linked to remote Aboriginal existentialism were either incoherent, non–aligned or absent within the remote education policy architecture. Also included within the previous chapter was the finding that an Aboriginal voice in education policies, impacting their lives, was largely silenced and had been deteriorating since at least the Learning Lessons (1999) review (Tatz, 2009).

To understand why this has been the case and why the policy mismatch has been so severe, in this chapter attention is drawn to the NT’s sociopolitical condition, arguing that this is where power and control over education debates and actions occur. This chapter offers insight into why remote Aboriginal students and families have struggled to find value in western education, and why the education policy environment has lacked the most basic architecture and relevance to remote community contexts.
6.2 The NT’s sociopolitical context

6.2.1 Colonisation as an ongoing racialised narrative

“Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control” (Howard, 1997, p. 1). This quote by former Australian Liberal Prime Minister John Howard was given at the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne, Australia. This speech caused considerable uproar and continued critical commentary, and underlined that Australia’s brutal history of colonisation remains omnipresent within its morally-conflicted fabric and political debates concerning Aboriginal social justice (Short, 2003). These conflicts continue because colonisation continues, and the raciologies from privileged ‘white’ politicians find favour because they speak to ‘white’ cultural hegemony (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). Thus, in order to understand why the NT treats its Aboriginal population to a ‘weaponised’ education experience, its brutal history must be canvassed, because it is at the core of the present moral and sociopolitical conflicts that Howard represents for this study (Haebich, 2011; Short, 2003).

The NT’s colonial backdrop

It is estimated that when the British arrived in Australia in 1788, Australia was home to some 500 Aboriginal language groups numbering between 250,000 and 750,000 people, and within the first 153 years had reduced to approximately 31,000 (Tatz, 1999, p. 319). At this time there was an estimated 250 languages, which by 2005 were reduced to 20 considered ‘strong’ (SCRGSP, 2011). In outlining reasons behind this catastrophic reduction, Tatz (1999) highlighted the impact of smallpox epidemics (April 1789; 1829–1831; 1865–1869). However, even with this catastrophic impact, Tatz concluded that killings by the colonisers were the main reason behind population decrease (p. 322). According to this historian, between 1824 and 1908 settlers killed some 10,000 Indigenous peoples in Queensland alone; prompting in 1883 British High Commissioner Gordon to write to William Gladstone, Prime Minister of England:

The habit of regarding the natives as vermin, to be cleared off the face of the earth, has given the average Queenslander a tone of brutality and cruelty in dealing with ‘blacks’ which it is very difficult to anyone who does not know it, as I do, to realise. I have heard men of culture and refinement … talk, not only of the wholesale butchery … but of the individual murder of natives, exactly as they would talk of a day’s sport, or having to kill some troublesome animal. (Tatz, 1999, p. 324)

In 1828 the Governor of NSW declared martial law, which resulted in 4000 Aboriginal deaths by 1835, and the brutality continued for a further 100 years (Tatz, 1999, p. 324). One of the most recent areas of mass killings was the NT, where Aboriginal families suffered extensively at the hands of government-endorsed killings. Over a 35-year period (1860–1895), approximately 1,750 Aboriginal family members were slaughtered; enabled by social Darwinian-style thinking that categorised Aboriginal peoples as
non–human (Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Tatz, 1999). These killings occurred as recently as the 1928 Coniston Massacre near Yuendumu in Central Australia (NT), when 31 people died in response to the killing of a white pastoralist (Gray, 2011). During this researcher’s time as principal of Yuendumu school, this figure was conveyed as far higher by descendants of the victims (Beadman, 2004). Of significance here was that this last massacre occurred during a period of so-called protectionism (Gray, 2011).

The shift toward protectionism emerged from 1840, after it was believed the Indigenous ‘race’ was dying out (Ardill, 2002; Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997; Tatz, 1999). As Gray (2011) discussed, Aboriginal protectors had no statutory powers and sought to modify police brutality through appealing to personality, rather than legal argument. Protectors commenced operating in the NT in 1910, though police had full control over what Aboriginal families would do, where they would live, what they would wear and whom they would marry. Gray (2011) argued that protectors like Baldwin Spencer in the NT used numerous explanations for denying Aboriginal rights, including “the need for cheap labour; Aboriginals [sic] didn’t work as well as whites and didn’t understand the value of money” (p. 42). Gray (2011, p. 55) argued that “arsenic poisoning, shooting and burning of workers”, such as occurred on Victoria River Downs Station (in the NT’s north-west region), were a common control method.

While protectionism projected the illusion of humanitarianism, in the NT it was an outcome of ‘white’ economic interests, which would be severely limited without Aboriginal labour (Ardill, 2002; Short, 2003). Tatz (1999) highlighted two instruments employed in protectionism. First, the legal frame, which was largely ineffectual, and second, extreme isolation and segregation. A key issue was that economic development required Aboriginal slave labour and indentured cheap Asian workers to develop the NT’s emerging economy (Martinez, 2006). In 1911 Spencer had so-called ‘half-caste children’[sic] in the NT separated from their ‘full-blood’ [sic] families, and the “chief Protector was made the legal guardianship of all Aboriginal children, displacing the rights of parents” (Ardill, 2009, p. 105). In declaring ‘half-castes’ [sic] to be separated from ‘full-bloods’[sic], Spencer stated of Aboriginal families:

Their customs are revolting to us, and they were ‘far lower than the Papuan, the New Zealander or the usual African native’ and directed the Kahlin compound (in Darwin, Australia’s most Northern capital city) be erected to separate the half breeds from the savage. (Tatz, 1999, p. 327)

Spencer had earlier been director of the National Museum of Victoria where he had the skeletal remains of murdered Aboriginal members placed in the natural history display to ‘showcase primitive humans’
The Kahlin \textsuperscript{32} compound in Darwin and the Bungalow \textsuperscript{33} in Alice Springs were advocated by Spencer based on ‘reservation for preservation’. At this time, the government attempted to introduce a system of fingerprinting Aboriginal people, having them medically reviewed and provided a bronze numbered disc and a “dog tag for half castes” [sic] to be worn around their necks (Gray, 2011, p. 3).

The Commonwealth assumed responsibility for the NT in 1910 and, through the \textit{Aboriginal Act 1910} (SA) and \textit{Aboriginals Ordinance 1911} (NT), sought to improve protections to Aboriginal peoples (Ardill, 2002; Martinez, 2006). The exploitation of Aboriginal women was outlawed (Gray, 2011), while other policies sought to dilute Aboriginal families by ‘shades of whiteness’ and placed those considered part-black with “white families to learn to be ‘white’” (Austin-Broos, 2011, p. 61). Rowse and Smith (2010, p. 96) found that up to 1961, the Australian Bureau of Census attempted to apply “genetic classification”, based on a three-level division of ‘white blood lines; ‘full-blood’ Aboriginals (more than 50% Aboriginal); ‘half-castes’ (50% Aboriginal blood) and those of less than 50% Aboriginal blood (quadroons, deemed not Aboriginal). Throughout the 20th century there existed a policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal peoples, which Genovese (2011) described as a State–endorsed genocide policy involving the removal of an estimated 100,000 children, including several of my older siblings, during the 1960s.

Ardill (2009, p. 87) discussed how imperialist beliefs emerged through ideals of “monogenesis, polygenesis and phrenology”, functioning to legitimise atrocities against Aboriginal families in ways that Stewart-Harawira (2005, p. 61) described of the NZ Maori context as “the English in covenant with God to bring true christianity to heathen natives”. Developed in the 1860s by Francis Galton, hijacking Darwin’s theory of natural selection (rebranded as social-Darwinianism), this racism fuelled eugenics (Ardill, 2009), to redefine land in the NT as non–Aboriginal (Duffy, 2008; Moodie, 2018), and to justify acts of racism against Aboriginal families (Cowlischaw & Morris, 1997; Lake, 2001; Palmer, 2003). The church sought to christianise and civilise Aboriginal peoples (Lester, 2006, p. 239), while struggling to self-embody such principles. Of this decay, Thomas Buxton, Director of the London Missionary Society (1848), stated:

\begin{quote}
What have we christians done for them [Indigenous peoples]? We have usurped their lands, kidnapped, enslaved and murdered themselves. The greatest of their crimes is that they sometimes trespass into the lands of their forefathers; and the very greatest of their
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} The Kahlin and Bungalow compounds were prison-like reserves, built to segregate Aboriginal children with white/light skin away from their parents and family, to receive whiteness training.

\textsuperscript{33} The Bungalow is now referred in tourist promotions as the Old Telegraph Station, to promote early colonisers’ as progressive contributors, white-washing its links to Aboriginal brutality.
misfortunes is that they have ever become acquainted with christians. Shame on such christianity! (Lester, 2006, p. 233)

These early challenges signalled christianity’s entanglement within an emerging capitalist democracy, particularly within the conflicted, moralising compass at the heart of Australia’s political establishment (Duffy, 2008). While the years after the 1967 referendum\footnote{The 1967 referendum changed the Australian Constitution, after 90% of Australians voted to have Australia’s First Nations peoples included in the Census, allowing government to make laws on their/our behalf.}, for example, have reflected attempts in reconciling an Indigenous presence within a ‘white’ Australian identity, this has also been about diluting a savage and ongoing colonial narrative (Duffy, 2008; Halloran, 2006). Thus, throughout this ‘maturing’ of an Australian nation–State, colonisation continued against a strengthening form of Australian capitalism, ensuring that Aboriginal peoples in the NT would be subjected to the contortions of the political left and right, as underpinned by the anchoring discourses of neocolonialism and neoliberalism (Moodie, 2018). At the core of these exchanges has been a socially constructed norm, based on western ‘whiteness’ as a defining human standard, as discussed in the US context by Lissovoy and McLaren (2003).

The manipulation and control asserted through constructed norms and notions of standardisation are one form of perpetuating otherness and producing inequality amongst Indigenous peoples (Matthews, 2013; Vaught, 2011). As previously discussed, ‘norms’ are culturally–determined and powerful indoctrinating agents of the dominant cultural group, as Solomon et al. (2005) revealed when discussing ‘white’ privilege in American culture, for example, as associated with a history of domination and control over other racial groups (Brayboy, 2014). The standardised notions of what constitutes fairness and equal opportunity are bound within power differentials that are neither benign nor impartial, and as Eisenberg (2006) and Matthews (2013) highlighted, justified non–democratic and hierarchical decision making. It is in this cloaking that NT Aboriginal inequality is discursively racialised (Moodie, 2018).

Of this dynamic, North (2006) described how the entrenched marginalisation perceptually becomes for those in power a ‘natural’ state of stratification, where democracy functions to legitimise the impacts of hegemony through false ideals of meritocracy and to rationalise Indigenous social inequality as a normalised state (Austin-Broos, 2011; Matthews, 2013). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) made the point about the US education approach in using euphemisms to cloak the reality of racism:

Through euphemisms, issues of concern are presented in ways that do not make the majority or dominant social group uncomfortable. These sorts of euphemisms are part of a larger culture of whiteness that predominates in most U.S. schools; this whiteness is manifest in the predominantly white educational faculty, the social relations, the norms and expectations, and the inequitable access to resources and quality education within our school system. (p. 950)
It is within this cloaked ‘white’ consciousness that discussion turns to the transportation of this twisted social entanglement.

6.2.2 Aboriginal inequality as a rationalised im/moral state
As Australia moved through the 1970s, a national identity forged upon a western, ‘white’ Anglo image did not include the country’s long, Indigenous history, continuing an unstable foundation within political debates concerning NT remote Aboriginal social justice and their extensions into education (Austin-Broos, 2009, 2011; Tatz, 2009). A propensity for example in pursuing a national identity based on homogenised myths has failed to heed the centrality of identity reconciliation at the national level and its flow through the social matrix of education. The Australian curriculum reflects this, having diluted the integrity of Indigenous cultural identities and histories and the contributions First Nations peoples have made to Australia’s national development. For example, the inclusion of two standards in the Australian professional standards for teachers, being 1.4 and 2.4 (AITSL, 2018), which draw attention to Indigenous cultural content and learning needs, is for this Aboriginal researcher, wrapped more within a conflicted sense of ‘white’ moral crisis, than a sense of liberating social justice for Aboriginal families.

In telling this Story, it has, for example, remained a major conflict to employ a nationalised curriculum that ignores social variance, with the world’s oldest continuous living culture beating within the country’s core (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). In this way it has remained a trend within Australian nationalist and moralising pursuits to celebrate Indigeneity as a link to humanity’s historic past, whilst simultaneously working to ‘mainstream’ through constructions of ‘white’ normalisation, framed around an Anglo-oriented western cultural pyramid (Andrade, 2009; Collard, 2007;Vaught, 2011). These superficial promises and falsified ideals of capitalism have facilitated a trajectory of a fragmented national identity through the continuing denial of its history, and what this means for Aboriginal ideals of social justice and reconciliation in education.

For me, one of the perversions of a stratified capitalist economy and its extensions into the national and NT education paradigm is that partitioning members fractures nationalism for Aboriginal families, as much as for other marginalised groups (Dixon et al., 2010; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). It is difficult to remain connected with utopian ideals of education as a change agent if the national political discourse is racialised deficit pathologising and policy responses are siloed upon schools as sites of systemic response to problems situated within the system (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In this regard, Stevenson’s (2010) discussion that a social democratising of the State to improve ways of living stems from the ground up is problematic in suggesting schools can be engineered to construct democratic, public and plural spaces to counter social inequality, as discussed by Giesinger (2011). This is the case in Australia, where a top-down reform environment has been accompanied with the disempowerment of schools (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007).
As discussed by contributors such as Lissovoy and McLaren (2003) and North (2006), the discourses that shape social justice debates relating to First Nations peoples are framed upon a neoliberal misconception that all citizens are free and equal participants. Thus, where conversation occurs around difference and otherness, ideals of ‘effort’ and outcome are bound together, along with indifference, insecurity and fear centring upon stereotypical descriptions involving skin colour, cultural grouping, sex, gender and those deemed special or ‘handicapped’ (Jenkins, 2008). This stereotypical classification system, while used by individuals, communities and societies in seeking to understand through generalisations the broader social landscape to achieve a sense of rationality and ‘control’ in navigating human social complexity, simultaneously acts to create costly divisions amongst the population.

While human variation and social configuration build identity boundaries and communal maintenance of social reality (Jenkins, 2008), through these exchanges run additional socialisation processes. These are where, at the individual level, differences act as barriers, reinforced through cultural and socioeconomic conditioners, and, at the institutional level, power flows produce organisational self-determinism that is cemented through governments’ increasingly centralised policy control (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Fenwick, 2000; Klenowski, 2011). For nations such as Australia where multiculturalism was adopted in Commonwealth policy from the 1970s (Matthews, 2013), significant tensions at all levels challenge its capitalist-welfare entanglement through a complex interaction of rewards for similarity, penalties for difference and privatising of individualism at the centre of human action (Lloyd, 2008). This dynamic, described by Eisenberg (2006) as reconciling diversity and democratic participation, becomes visible when examining this interaction within the NT’s centralised department of education.

6.3 The NT’s remote Aboriginal education policy environment

In this section the NTDoE’s performance is discussed in respect to its design features. This is needed since Indigenous education policy actions reflect power and control drawn from the structural dimensions of centralised government agencies (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Fenwick, 2000; Klenowski, 2011). The previous section provided a backdrop to the NT’s sociopolitical context, particularly in how ‘race’, privilege and power have influenced an agenda of social justice for NT remote Aboriginal families. In this section attention turns to the threads of imperialism as it manifests within oblique, utopian ideals of falsified liberation aimed at Aboriginal families (Austin-Broos, 2009, 2011). This is because education is based on these ideals as unchallenged ‘constants’, which applies also to the growing non–Indigenous population of students from economically–marginalised backgrounds (Davidson, Saunders & Phillips, 2018). My aim here is to show the interconnectedness between the design of centralised bureaucracies like the NTDoE, its connections to political power as flows through the policy architecture, and its role within a NT remote Aboriginal education policy abyss.
6.3.1 The NT Department of Education (NTDoE)

I think longevity and consistency is definitely something that can help and support schools and support systems and processes. I’ve noted different [DoE policy] processes within different regions, so the way you might approach something in one region is different to how it is approached in another region. (R10 Aboriginal school principal)

My extensive experiences with the NTDoE suggest it has always been a self-deterministic entity that structurally, materially and philosophically has been unable to remove itself from its condition, with its pyramid design and racialised hierarchy fuelling this dynamic (Moodie, 2018; Westwood, 2003). Those often appointed to senior roles tend to have qualities favoured by government, such as being racially ‘white’ as the main criteria (Werner, 2015), followed by political and ideological alignment, despite the NT being highly multicultural. This is confirmed in Table 1 in Chapter 1 (p. 20), which shows Aboriginal members absent in the senior roles of power and control over education policy (NTDoE Annual Report 2015–16, p. 69–70). Under these internal features, the compliance and audit charter cement an organisational culture that is impenetrable to change beyond its role as a political instrument of government (Matthews, 2013; Poell et al., 2000), as reflected in Figure 14.

Figure 14: A critical view of the organisational dimensions of centralised education departments

![Organisationally reflective of government ideology](#)

![Racialised hierarchy in power design](#)

![Culture of command and control](#)

![Mechanised culture of audit and compliance](#)

![A structural design toward organisational self-determinism](#)

![Focused on incremental policy shifts, rather than paradigm shifts](#)

Arguably, government bureaucracies appear as benign, tax-payer funded entities that exist for the public good and to service the needs of community. These bureaucracies are purported to exist to deliver specific public service charters and modelled upon a multitude of policy frameworks covering human resources, financial and performance accountability (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). However, the human machinery within public organisations produces variations in organisational effectiveness, where ability is vaguely aligned to roles, and resources are commonly limited to economise and build competition through ‘rewards and penalties’. And it is through application of recruitment metrics, aligned to a ‘whitened’ standard, that Aboriginal peoples miss out (Matthews, 2013; Werner, 2015), as the NTDoE Annual Report 2015–16 reveals. These dynamics of institutional hegemony, as described of the US context by Lissovoy and McLaren (2003), enable linkages to establish within the bureaucratic modelling of State as a key instrument in the (re)production of disciplinary power, with notions of an ‘objective’ truth underpinning bureaucratic rationality that ‘legalises’ exclusion (Jenkins, 2008).
In this way an individual possessing the credentials, skills and abilities are one thing; being the right ‘fit’ is another, and such subjective selection is particularly highlighted in the interview process, where the difference of an outsider seeking to gain employment through convincing an interviewer of their skills and similarities (Jenkins, 2008). CRT scholar, Werner (2015), in discussing ‘whiteness as property’, highlighted that public organisations exist as legalised entities that uphold ‘white’ privilege and argued that “corporate privileges whites over people of colour, both in terms of disproportionate material gain and through its reification of the property interests in whiteness” (p. 130). One outcome to this is ideological cloning, whilst another is the marginalisation of specific groups reflective of gender, disability, socioeconomic and minority cultural identities (Eisenberg, 2006; Vaught, 2011).

In detailing the institutional capacities to liberate from this condition, school discourses draw attention to schools as ‘promises to the utopian experience’, where both distributive rewards in the form of resource compensation (as detailed in the Gonski report on differential funding models) and attempts at building social equality are coalesced in complex and dichotomised contests (North, 2006). This is where government and educational policy facilitate the reproductive structures, maintenance and distribution of ‘white’ cultural capital and hegemony (Savage, 2011; Werner, 2015), and for this reason schools are highlighted for their inability to build capacities in addressing matters of social justice and alleviating discrimination and underprivileged Indigenous group formation (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Diamond & Spillane, 2002). But, before moving to this discussion, I turn to a brief outline of the structural dimension of education bureaucracy to provide foundation to my later discussion focused on the NT DoE.

**Education bureaucracy**

Centralised education departments have their origins from the 19th century, aligned closely with the development of industrialisation and where large-scale employment brought with it needs of linking skills to jobs (Connell, 1991). Key theorists including Taylor, Fayol and Weber contributed extensively to the design modelling of large-scale organisational structures, including the demarcation and hierarchical partitioning of the various levels of managerial responsibility and power (Brint, 2001; Wagner, 2011). At the core of understanding was a view that workers were disempowered bodies situated with little rights, where organisational self-determinism required the needs of industry and organisation to come before the individual (Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011; Robinson, 2015; Werner, 2015). These origins within scientific organisational theories (Sungaila, 1992) have since undergone shifts, including liberalisation of work practices where “outcomes in individual performance exist as manifestations of the individual, based around equality of rights and liberty” (North, 2006, p. 51).

Intersecting with this dynamic, a projected agency identity of a ‘public good’ is constructed through cultural hegemony working to reproduce ‘white’ identity privilege (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005;
Vaught, 2011), as discussed in Chapter 1. In this way, individuals do not win positions of seniority, as much as they are only open to specific identity and cultural traits (Eisenberg, 2006; Jenkins, 2008) and claims of democratisation sit hidden and unchallenged alongside the organisational ‘normalising’ of ‘whitened’ rules, patterns of engagement and value (Ladson-Billings, 1998; North, 2006; Werner, 2015). Thus, I argue that where social complexity is met with this polarisation, there exists a nexus between education departments and schools, as socially organic systems. In this exchange my unwavering experience of the NT system is that it is has always been about power and control over schooling policy through an economic policy agenda. Critical pedagogists Lissovoy & McLaren (2003) commented on this philosophic usurping of the social condition of learning and knowledge:

Not enough attention, however, is paid to this first step, in which the complexity of human consciousness is reduced to an abstract quantity. Kohn (2000, p.3) has noted that a cultural penchant for attaching numbers to things valourizes information presented in numerical form as ‘reassuringly scientific’. (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003, p. 133)

What this philosophic milieu spells for this Story is that education bureaucracies are hierarchical entities functioning in self-deterministic fashion, anchored in ideological as much as political forces and senior membership that galvanises a cloning and alignment with government directives (Pring, 2000; Werner, 2015). Key policy levers thus manufacture ideological prescription where a national, positivist-driven policy framework polarises rational-linear reforms undergoing amplification through bureaucracy; exerting enormous organisational, specialisation and integrity demands upon schools (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Matthews, 2013). It is here that the mapping of this corporatised design across education deconstructs individuals into fragmented components, serviced through segmented organisational structures featuring curriculum, teacher standards, human resources, student services, corporate services and finance (Ranson, 2003).

In my experience, this division on one level denotes partitioning to accommodate an increasingly complex industry under heightened public attention, however also characterises a widening distrust and disempowerment of a teaching profession caught within social ambiguity (Klenowski, 2011). It is within this space that a homogenised conceptualisation of education is embedded across a decentralised frame and where a mechanistic bureaucracy abrasively interacts with the open, arbitrary properties of schools (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000). It is a space where capitalism is challenged by the social, organic nature of schooling; a profile that slides significantly across disadvantaged districts and confounds policy modelling. In the next section, attention turns to the flow of these power dimensions of centralised bureaucracies across the complex sociopolitical spaces of the NT remote Aboriginal education policy context.
6.3.2 Australia’s education policy architecture

In analysing the degree by which external variables impact on school capacities to build organisational learning processes, Leithwood, Leonard and Sharrat (1998) found the most impacting were the district, school leadership and school culture, and, across a multitude of schools involved in their research, found the district and school culture were the more consistent impactors; a view shared by García and Guerra, (2004) in their discussion of the US context. These findings suggest that where NT remote Aboriginal students are to receive a quality education experience, the enabling blocks won’t come from the present policy approaches, as demonstrated in the performance outcomes discussed in Chapter 4. In such a nexus the responsibilities of State that have interacted with the rights and responsibilities of families require recalibration if system-driven inequality forces are to be countered (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Klenowski, 2011). At present, this nexus has continued to be expressed in dichotomised ways, with systemic inflexibility clashing heavily within Aboriginal social realities (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

In presenting the disastrous account of present education policy reforms directed at NT remote Aboriginal families, a case can be made that district or regional policy environments are a domain where the external pressures impacting schools may be more effectively rationalised and geared toward their improvement, as Garcia and Guerra (2004) outlined in their discussion of the US context. This counter-narrative, which focuses on the external properties of organisational positioning, offers an important opportunity in maintaining the integrity of schools as functionally about teaching and learning. Christie (2005), for example, in citing a 2003 study by Teese and Polesel of Melbourne public investment in making curriculum more socially inclusive in poor schools, identified that the reform agenda required teachers to act in isolation, seeking to compensate for ‘weakness’ in student ‘cultural capital’. While this point has a rational location in ongoing debates of ‘fixing the broken’, such ‘weakness’ is later reified in Chapters 7–8 as a strength, rather than deficit (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Yosso, 2005).

In this context, negative imaging across education gives rise to individuals sharing a collective fate which penetrates consciousness in a way that Nieto (2007, p. 301) described citizens of society as adopting the overarching ideologies and belief systems, and in the case of racism, to “breathe in the smog” of societal influence. In stressed contexts, schools seek to respond to missing or fragmented capital and issues of access, equity and poverty, and these have the effect of flexing the service charter-often to the detriment of the school community, particularly when in isolation of the existential dimensions of the local community (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Yosso,2005). In NT remote Aboriginal schools this is profound, but it is also important to note that, while not the focus of this study, it is also a condition of urban schools. In all instances what occurs is a fraying of the structural and organisational properties of schools, often insufficiently resourced to counter such forces and tearing at
their internal properties and organisational integrity, inflicted through institutional policy violence (Vaught, 2011; Westwood, 2003).

Overlaid to this dichotomy, recent refinements have included a focus of strengthening the segmented stages of the system. These have been in childcare standardisation (National Quality Framework), early childhood (Early Years Learning Development Framework) and in improving pathways into primary, middle years and senior secondary. While these reforms are significant, they represent an orthodoxy that has failed in altering the patterns of Australian educational inequality (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This structural flexing to navigating a tiered society has been absent within official policy modelling, despite extensive evidence of schools and their local jurisdictions undertaking programs that seek such outcomes, often through spasmodic policy and programs. An example in the NT are schools that have operationally–expanded frames toward one-stop-shop models. Such schools (some of which this researcher was a principal of) have sought to strengthen the integrity of the teaching–learning charter through adding layers of service modelling, such as health and community services support and access structures.

While it is critical to build localised responses to local diversity, these actions have remained within an unaltered paradigm of performativity (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Klenowski, 2011). For Indigenous children, the obstacles toward success are materially challenging, but against the headwinds described, the physical structures in service provision cannot compensate for cultural and identity alienation. The interactions these hurdles present in the existential world of the individual are real, but are ignored in neoliberal policy approaches (Fenwick, 2000; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). Thus, in my experience, where schools are organisationally incomplete in reflecting the structures of service modelling that alleviate these disconnections, they internally haemorrhage and opportunities of success through the education system are downwardly geared. This organisational dynamic is yet to be factored within the national reform environment, which continues unabatedly subscribed to scientific organisational approaches and the fracturing this produces across the social condition of schools (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Pring, 2000; Sungaila, 1992).

6.3.3 The problematic design of Australia’s education paradigm

Since the late 1980s, Australia’s decentralised education system has strengthened centralised control, while divesting accountabilities to schools, and this has led to reform debates masking disempowerment of the teaching profession (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers, Van der Krogt & Wildemeersch, 2000). One causality of this has been within ideological interfacing, where the complex uncertainty within schools functioning under democratic, egalitarianist ideals sit incongruent with policy that is rational-linear, reductionist and “structural-functionalist” (Dimmock & Walker, 2000, p. 147). This dualism is exacerbated by pressures to improve school specialisation and professional orientation through siloed,
national policy frameworks and segmented delivery mechanisms. The power differentials emanating from governments seeking to control education reforms have thus resulted in tightening centralised controls, against an anchoring of schools to postcodes (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Chivers; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). These attempts to reduce education participants into objectified agents forces schools into a conflicted dynamic that establishes rationality through assimilating the driving principles of capitalism and a US-inspired ‘effective schools’ theme (Alston, 2004; O’Brien & Robinson, 2012; Cele, 2007).

Thus, as Australia’s education paradigm has come under the influence of economic rationalist doctrine (Ranson, 2003), an effective schools philosophy has been embedded within ideals of accountability, quality strategic planning, teaching, assessment and reporting to generate schooling improvement (Alston, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; O’Brien & Robinson, 2012). Accompanied with policy instruments promoting choice and competition, recent leadership models have focused on increased specialisation of sector knowledge, as well as knowledge and skills specific to the business, corporate and organisational properties (Matthews, 2013). Within ideals of decentralisation, schools are self-managing entities functioning as Learning Organisations capable of renewing and adapting to uncertainty and change through transformational leadership, based on ‘dialectic team-work’ (Copland, 2003, p. 377). Against this trend, intensity toward improved NAPLAN outcomes has amplified demands on principals and staff as key instruments in school growth, who struggle to establish application of reform models predicated on private industry competition with the social properties that enable its implementation (Reid, 2002; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009).

It is in classrooms that a national education prescription, underwritten by neoliberal economic doctrine, has propelled numeracy and literacy to displace other bodies of knowledge and legitimised it as a “positional rather than public good” (Klenowski, 2011, p. 79). One outcome apparent to this study has been what Long (1990, p. 23) argued has been the emergence of a hidden curriculum, indoctrinating the three courses of “punctuality, obedience, rote and repetitive work” (see also Rahman, 2013). So, where competition amongst schools propels innovation tailored to capitalism, at the same time choice and meritocracy drive marginalisation of poorly performing schools, where teachers operating with deficits struggle in reconciling attachment to ideals of success that often fail to materialise (Giesinger (2011). Forced to adopt vertical teaching/learning models (Coppeters, 2005), teachers are evaluated against the performance of a standardised concept of student, despite complexities and impactions of socioeconomic or innate dispositions to learning (Klenowski, 2011; Matthews, 2013).

It is within this policy tension that pedagogical models constrict and ‘performance failure’ ascribed to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, often unable to invoke behavioural change without possessing some internal meaning with learning (Hough, Paine & Austin, 1997; Taylor, 2010).
have experienced, this tension facilitates conflict, propelling schools into penal constructs, leaving a ‘falsified’ meritocracy and choice to play out daily in classrooms (Souto-Otero, 2010; Vaught, 2011). This relocates ‘empirical evidence’ to centre stage and is evidenced in the standard concept of student, a weakening teaching profession functioning within a deficit narrative and anchored to a reform climate that constricts learning to a 20th Century industrial model (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). For me, this dynamic in human partitioning finds a logical, rational seating and application in classroom and schooling realities, and against such conditions, otherness emerges as a deficit to punish (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Taylor, 2010). Building on this analysis, the next section turns to discuss the coagulation of the NT’s centralised education department and its delivery of a problematic Aboriginal education policy design.

6.4 The NT: Aboriginal interactions with a destructive centralised bureaucracy design

To understand the NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment, it is necessary to gain insight into the bureaucratic machinery of government and their colonising properties. In 2009 a major investigation was conducted by James Ladwig and Indigenous researcher Chris Sarra into the NTDoE. This review titled Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (SRNTDET): Delivering the Goods (2009), was commissioned by the NT government after the first NAPLAN results revealed the NT was by far the lowest performing jurisdiction in the country (ACARA, 2008). The key objective of the SRNTDET (2009) was “to refocus the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) to more efficiently deliver the government’s commitments to improved school attendance and levels of literacy and numeracy and meet future challenges in education” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 9). The reviewers found a structure rife with internal deficiencies around two dominant themes: structural incoherence, and a lack of focus on the quality of performance and results (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009). These included:

- a lack of systemic direction
- high levels of systemic de-coupling and silo building
- ad hoc decision-making around allocation and distribution of resources
- a history of partial reforms
- a focus on unrelated initiatives and search for a ‘silver bullet’ that failed to materialise
- over-extension of capacity within the central departmental office
- many staff working across an excessive number of programs and initiatives
- a lack of performance review of individuals and schools, noting a corporate APIF35 did not exist
- a lack of internal improvement cycles hampered by a lack of internal research that also considered prior successes and trials;

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• a lack of institutional memory and succession planning
• an absence in identifying and rewarding its most effective staff and programs


The result of this turmoil in one sense exposed an organisational self-determinism, where the orientation of work of supporting schools was less a focus than maintaining a small and privileged membership of bureaucrats (Vaught, 2011) who seemingly lacked the ability to work together to develop organisation coherence, or were unable to do anything about it for reasons not identified. Either way, the reviewers highlighted this performance had led to “interwoven elements of observed dysfunctional organisational culture” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 25). This view is evidenced through the SRNTDET (2009) data collected through interviews, as shown in Table 49. The SRNTDET (2009) laid clear the complexities in creating responsive service provision constructed within the corporate design of bureaucracy, as much as the political overlay that gravitated around the feet of senior bureaucrats unequipped with the means or will to advance beyond this condition (Matthews, 2013). What was missing from the review findings was—and remains the case—a culture of embedded denial of Indigenous representation at the senior levels across the organisation.

Table 49: NT DET organisational culture 2009: Expressions of internal political decay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptance of inefficiencies across the system</th>
<th>Prevalence of push back through the system</th>
<th>A culture of complaint</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of unprofessional behaviour</td>
<td>Prevalence of low expectations</td>
<td>A culture of blaming others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presumed need for more personnel and resources</td>
<td>Embedding of self-interest defences</td>
<td>A culture of non–acceptance of personal responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 25)

As earlier discussed, that while the SRNTDET (2009) focused mainly on centralised systems, particularly those focused on improving schooling access, SRNTDET (2009) it included policy areas relevant to remote contexts. These were defined in the terms of reference and, of relevance to Aboriginal cultural inclusion, reference three included a focus on the language of instruction and learning, which picked up on the threads discussed in the previous review. This included a need to “consider the adequacy of teaching and learning programs being delivered in urban and regional, remote and very remote schools and learning centres” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 7). In providing advice to the NT DoE, the findings were structured around six main themes. Of relevance to Aboriginal cultural inclusion, particularly in the links between Aboriginal employment and approaches to language and curriculum, was theme four: increased participation of Aboriginal personnel at all levels of the system. Unlike the Learning Lessons (1999) review (discussed in Chapter 7), the relationship between Aboriginal employees, identity maintenance and Aboriginal languages was not articulated.
The theme calling for increasing participation of Indigenous personnel at all levels of the system included commentary around the tumultuous turnover of imported ‘southern recruits’ that left after brief stays in the Territory, particularly in remote Aboriginal schools. In presenting a case that the NT DoE invest in its own, the reviewers argued this would improve employee self-esteem and morale, productivity and sustained commitment (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009). The reviewers highlighted the department had an ongoing policy of Growing Our Own (GOO), and while reflected a whole of government strategy in sustaining its public service, found this had stagnated: “At present, however, there are several serious impediments to successful implementation of this policy within NT DET” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 41). The reviewers found the department had a reliance on southern imports, particularly new university graduates to staff remote schools; most of whom were not well inducted into the teaching service, resulting in many leaving within the first 7–9 months (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009).

Against this the GOO strategy seemingly did not apply to Aboriginal peoples, as the reviewers stated:

> The percentage of Indigenous personnel in DET clearly does not match its student population. Indigenous students made up 41.7% of the government preschool population, 46.4% of the government primary school population, and 37.4% of the government secondary school population. Projections within DET suggest that the overall proportion of Indigenous students in government schools will reach 50% within a decade. This mismatch, the under-representation of Indigenous people in the educational system of the Northern Territory, requires immediate re-dress, if the system hopes to address its educational challenges. (p. 16)

This review found that despite the large presence of Aboriginal peoples in the NT, the low workforce number revealed it to be a serious issue and despite being raised a decade earlier, the number had gone backwards: “NT DET does not appear to have a serious strategy for the systemic training and mentoring of Indigenous people involved in education—either in schools as teachers or as principals, or in regional or central offices in senior roles” (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 41). This review then proceeded to outline the challenges in numbers, which essentially detailed the depth of systemic failure:

> The biggest challenges in meeting these targets, however, will come in the development of Indigenous teaching staff and Indigenous principals, simply due to the large numbers required. Of the current approximately 3,200 teachers in DET schools, Indigenous teacher numbers are substantially less than 100. Of the current 150 principals, only four are Indigenous. To meet the goal of around 1,600 Indigenous teachers in 10 years, approximately 150 new Indigenous teachers per year is required. (p. 42)

The charter for the SRNTDET (2009) did not include investigation into the teaching and learning domain, though in the section ‘Recommendations relative to the Terms of Reference’, included a minor

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36 Southern recruits refer to education employees sourced from Australia’s southern regions to work in NT remote communities. This group is highly transient and often lack understanding of remote Aboriginal community contexts.
comment against ‘Specific Objective Three’, ‘COH4b: Strengthen coherence between supported literacy programs and specific Indigenous language and literacy initiatives’ (Ladwig & Sarra, 2019, p. 46). Beyond this the problematised domain of Aboriginal inclusion in the delivery of remote schooling services was not an area of focus. Theme five of this review, for example, focused on strengthening the regionalisation of DET. This included within recommendation 2, the statement of a need to increase and strengthen ‘formal’ consultations with local community representatives. This recommendation focused on the need to increase opportunities for local governance, but offered scant detail of what this might mean within the sociopolitical context of the NT, as Bandias, Fuller and Holmes, (2012) have described.

A decade on from this review, the profile of Indigenous representation had deteriorated. In Chapter 1, Tables 1–3 provided an outline of the continued Aboriginal under-representation and marginalisation, produced through the continuation of an embedded racism that has silenced Indigenous realities in surfacing as a counter-narrative in education policy development (Moodie, 2018; Walter, 2016). So entrenched has this become that the 2016–17 NTDoE Annual Report had resorted to embellishing Indigenous involvement at the lowest level of the system, made conspicuous through the absence of information at the higher ends. This report, differing significantly from earlier reports that included this employment data, also laid clear its imperialist dimensions through its presentation of ‘formal education’ as separated and superior to the local remote and ‘educationally-backward’ Indigenous context:

Of our 634 Aboriginal employees, 80.8 per cent were female. The most common classification of Aboriginal employees was assistant teachers, with 249 employees, representing 39.3 per cent of all Aboriginal employees. Assistant teachers work in school-based roles supporting student learning in the classroom and provide a valuable link for students between formal education and local culture. (NTDoE Annual Report, 2016–17, p. 102)

This reporting against a ‘white’ metric did not reveal explicit numbers about how many Indigenous teachers were employed, and where and at what levels they occupied. Instead, this report offered generalised details buried in colourful graphical descriptions of Aboriginal employees located numerously in the lower levels of participation, and promises of intention concerning the future. The latter part of the above quote is particularly revealing of Aboriginal involvement alongside the neocolonial construction of ‘formal’, signalling the official status of ‘whiteness as rightness’ through standardised qualification (Brayboy, 2014; Werner, 2015). Arguably, the NT education system is a recipient and advocate of deleterious power flows tied to the orthodoxy behind a brutal centralised education department design, institutional racism (Moodie, 2018) and its alignment to a stratifying national education paradigm (Vaught, 2011). Bound to a corporate public service model and
encumbered by a national education policy design anchored through funding partnership ‘agreements’, the NT education system has long been broken and irrelevant to NT remote Aboriginal families.

This othering that continues to be overlaid across Aboriginality reveals the existential conflicts within a western cultural identity struggling to normalise an im/moralised encoding of neoliberal western education and lifestyle (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003), against a backdrop of ongoing racialised discrimination and marginalisation of Aboriginal families (Brayboy, 2014; Stewart-Harawira, 2005). Through ongoing social-Darwinian inspired empirical acts, Aboriginality in the NT arguably continues to be observed as a form of deficit (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Ornstein, 2007), signifying neocolonialism’s coupling feature to a neoliberal-fuelled capitalist design that clones to reproduce itself (Bone, 2012). Across this, a social perversity of colonisation has been the galvanising of Aboriginal opposition through a collective identity framed on resisting oppression, and opposing, western ideals of false meritocracy and choice to rationalise ‘Indigenous dysfunction’ and social inequality (Brayboy, 2014; Dixon et al., 2010; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003).

Aboriginal cultural infusion has thus remained outside a western consciousness bound within a national pursuit of colonisation and assimilation (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). For me, such macro exchanges across a capitalist design and the democratic lens in which it is experienced illustrates that choice and meritocracy are powerful instruments in shaping a national, standardised norm in identity; rendering incapacity to question such conditioning positioned deep within a western consciousness (Vaught, 2011). This is featured internationally and maintains a profound relationship to global poverty and unsustainable social fragmentation (Ornstein, 2007), and Australia's policy responses in CTG between Indigenous and non-Indigenous remain weakened by this ideological polarisation. In the NT, this has been demonstrated in the regressive policy actions of the SEAM program in forcing student attendance through punishment. This policy action reflected the ideological bankruptcy within the NTDoE, pursued for a decade, even after it was revealed as an abysmal policy failure in its second year of implementation (Langbroek, 2012).

6.4.1 School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM): Policy regressions across a social dichotomy

Quite a few families are not getting their money because their kids aren’t coming to school. Particularly when they’re sixteen, parents feel very disempowered around their children, who, they’re ruling the roost. They don’t want to go. They go through ceremony and through that they’re a young man now; they don’t want to be sitting in front of a teacher. I’m a man now, you know, not a boy. So, it’s hard for them. (R6 Aboriginal principal)

A major dysfunction of the school enrolment and attendance through welfare reform measure (SEAM), which ended in 2018, had been the premise to ‘punish the punished’, based on the erroneous belief that what was being taken away (welfare money) was directly linked to the behaviours it targeted (Taylor,
2010; Velardi, 2017), despite policy-makers being aware of some of the myriad social, economic and cultural factors at play (Department of Education, 2014). The SEAM assumed a vertical problematising that moved those being punished closer to the poverty line and hardship, but the perversity also is that when governments step in as a ‘pseudo parent’, responsibility shifts to the State, increasing external controls, increasing internal complexities in schools, whilst fuelling welfarism and ‘absolving’ individual parental responsibility. In NT remote Aboriginal settings where labour markets are scarce, schools have thus been situated in a manner that is ideologically removed from everyday lived experiences, and the narrative of inflicted punishment for being Aboriginal has cemented this dichotomised policy distance (Austin-Broos, 2011; Tatz, 2009).

The SEAM was a federal government policy response emerging from the 2008-09 Welfare Payments Reform Initiative (Department of Education, 2014). This policy sought to make Aboriginal parents send their children to school, using the lever of welfare quarantining. Outwardly, it maintained a rationale with the behaviours targeted. For example, welfare can indoctrinate a ‘sit-down’ mentality, and breaking the tide of intergenerational welfare is important, as prominent Indigenous researchers Langton (2011) and Pearson (2013) have long stated. But what remains not respected is the degree to what was being ‘lost’ through punishment was of material value to those targeted (Westwood, 2003). And overlaid across this were problems with policy delivery. The SEAM Evaluation Report (2010), for example, stated that “targeted families’ awareness of the program was low” and that “the approaches adopted by principals varied widely, unclear about task responsibilities, confusion and the role of allied stakeholders (including Centrelink)” (DEEWR, 2010, p. i–v).

One of the core tensions in the SEAM program was its postulating that students’ lowered school attendance was derived from ‘poor attitudes’, with this view underpinned by an assumption that financial pain was a recipe to attendance improvement (Short, 2003). The report, in its executive summary, sought to extoll the ‘successful’ steps of the program’s punitive approach; however, the lack of synergy with effective social policy was evident in the narrative, with three telling statements:

[i] While six parents (involving seven children) in the NT and 79 parents (involving 104 children) in QLD had their income support payments suspended for failure to comply with enrolment requirements, no parent had their payments cancelled; [ii] It appears that many families faced complex and significant barriers which thwarted their attempts to make sure their child attended school; [iii] Results show one quarter of all notified parents took reasonable steps to improve their child’s school attendance although this was not always reflected in an actual improvement in attendance’ (DEEWR, 2010, p. i–v, numbering with emphasis added).

The SEAM was extended in the NT, and to date no final report on the NT experience has been made public. These include the resource costs of policing this unpopular policy that NT DoE policy workers saw as failing (see Chapter 5), and analysis of the impacts this had on Aboriginal families being
punished to engage in government-run education. Austin-Broos (2011, p. 148) made a similar point in citing Gregory (2006), that “policies geared to increase demand for workers within a community would always struggle to achieve enough”. The SEAM was a response to a crisis in remote education disengagement: In 2008, 13% of remote children were not enrolled; attendance was 64%, and 80% failed to reach minimal benchmarks in literacy and numeracy (DEEWR, 2011, p. 60). These numbers reveal a problem with the design of education on offer, yet, and consistent with the earlier discussion on government agency dynamics, government pursued an incremental approach, regardless of its significant design faults.

For the NT government, these results perversely reinforced a view of getting tougher (Hulgin and Drake, 2011), and in 2011 legislated to link family income with school attendance under the policy *Every Child Every Day*. Despite this attempt to punish parents, school attendance has not improved, and Phillips, Franklin and Viswanathan (2011, p. 47) stated at the time that it was unworkable: “A getting tough on parents’ approach will not contribute to better educational outcomes in the long term, and is likely to exacerbate financial hardship, for example through the imposition of fines or the long-term suspension of social security payments under the school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM) program”. Aboriginal children at the time represented 43.3% of students in the NT (Northern Territory Government, 2011, p. 28).

The point to be made here is that material loss has relevance for those who have something to lose, otherwise such actions tend to produce the opposite; galvanising a sense of injustice linked to broader experiences, where punishment breeds resentment and resistance (Dixon et al., 2010; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). In discussing the ‘difference of other’, Prasad and Prasad (2002) highlighted this social milieu as functioning as a binding in the formation of resistance, and this was similarly canvassed in a United Nations Human Development Report (2013, p. 42), which captured this point made by one of humanity’s most notable leaders: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any” (Mahatma Gandhi, cited in United Nations, 2013, p. 42).

Against the NT’s continued attempts in brutalising Aboriginal families to engage in a dysfunctional education paradigm, other jurisdictions recognised the futility in pursuing the policy. In June 2012 the Queensland government announced that it would not participate in an extension of the federal government's SEAM trial on the basis that it had failed to improve student attendance rates in the thirty trial schools in Logon, Mornington Island and Doomadgee. The then Minister for Education, Training and Employment, John-Paul Langbroek (2012), stated that:

> Continuing the trial would further burden our schools without any financial support from the federal government. The federal government’s own evaluation report into the effectiveness of the trial showed that the suspension of income support payments made no
impact on improving school attendance. This big stick approach just basically doesn't work and at the end of the day, ends up impacting on the kids. (p. 1)

A key concern this raises is the orthodoxy that underpins penalty models is seldom problematised in its converse paradigm (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Vaught, 2011). That is, enrolment and attendance might alternatively be framed within a policy environment of rewards, where engagement emerges as the enabler of attendance and active participation in school. In reaching the underprivileged, this counter–narrative, which I outline in my Chapter 8 counter–Story, represents shifts more consistent with motivational drivers of engagement. Policy entanglements that bounce from penalty modelling to demands for additional resources have their foundations predicated on Fordist philosophy (Brint, 2001; Robertson, 2005; Wagner, 2011) that has long been recognised as limited in problematising within human social complexity (Fabac, 2010). While rational-linear and quantitative policies might assist in observing how many children do not attend school, as Matthews (2013) outlines, such policies have remained silent in explaining why. The next section outlines how this disengagement is symbiotically associated with the NT’s political economy.

6.4.2 The political economy and the interest convergence/divergence of NT remote Aboriginal education inequality

A structural property that overlays a dysfunctional NT education bureaucracy design and a deleterious Indigenous education policy environment is the political economy (Austin-Broos, 2009). The NT is a small jurisdiction by population with a lowered economy, and relies heavily on the Commonwealth to pay for public services and stimulation of the private financial sector. As discussed in Chapter 4, the ratio of Aboriginal families at around 30% of the NT’s population attracts significant Commonwealth funding to address Indigenous inequality. But, given the spread of Aboriginal inequality across a non-Indigenous NT population, the details of investment have long been masked. This is despite most Aboriginal peoples in the NT live in non-urban locations (see Table 38), where expenditure can be traced. As discussed in Chapter 4, COAG has accepted a high level of ambiguity within the NT’s reporting of Indigenous-related expenditure (SCRGSP, 2014). Since official NTDoE annual public reporting commenced in the NT in 2000, little has been reported in regard to the fine details around Aboriginal education funding.

This dynamic has played into the NT political economy; one where Aboriginal structural inequality has been treated as a ‘cash-cow’ to address the systemic issues of poor ‘white’ inequality (Vaught, 2011). This entanglement of inequality has facilitated a political environment of ongoing colonisation and embedded racism that has perversely been strengthened through the disengagement of NT remote Aboriginal families (Moodie, 2018; Vaught, 2011). Within this binary exchange of neocolonialism and neoliberalism, the NT context has functioned along a path of structural decay that is socially, economically and politically unsustainable. In this world of philosophic instability, which overlays
across a fractured central service provision delivering a neoliberal form of education policy approaches, the outcomes for NT remote Aboriginal families have reflected the NT policy context.

A recent Commonwealth Report of GST\textsuperscript{37} Revenue Sharing Relativities (Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2018, p. 2) revealed the NT’s condition of structural inequality plays into this matrix of social and economic policy convolution. In Table 50, the figures reveal the allocation of GST to the States and Territories, across 2017-18 and 2018-19. While this is one of several Commonwealth funding streams (a key other source is direct Commonwealth funding), it illustrates a significant foundation of the NT political economy. In this table the Commonwealth Grants Commission has measured how the social, economic and demographic characteristics of each jurisdiction affect the relative expenses incurred (relativities) to provide a service, which includes infrastructure and the relative ability of the State/Territory to raise their own revenue share (Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2018). Of significance is the statement around minimal averages in service provision:

These shares aim to give each State in 2018–19 the fiscal capacity to provide the average standard of services and associated infrastructure for its population, if it makes the average effort to raise revenue and operates at the average level of efficiency. (Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2018, p. 2)

The figures reveal the NT political economy is underwritten by Aboriginal inequality that, from a relativities or equalizing formula, requires a multiplying factor of four that translates this smallest jurisdiction at $11,181 per capita, which is almost five times higher than Australia’s largest State by population, New South Wales, at $2,246 per capita. Despite this multiplying factor, Aboriginal leaders have argued this has not fully been expended as intended. This is made clear in a recent submission by the Yothu Yindi Foundation\textsuperscript{38} to the Australian government’s productivity commission’s inquiry into the Australian system of ‘Horizontal Fiscal Equalisation’. This inquiry, which underpins how GST revenue is allocated to the NT through the Commonwealth grants commission (CGC), identified $522m unaccounted in 2006–2007 alone. Responding to this Inquiry, Bowden (2017), the foundation’s Aboriginal chief executive and former member of internationally recognised Aboriginal band, Yothu Yindi, stated:

Indigenous Territorians in particular retain unresolved concerns that the Northern Territory government does not fully apply the funds it receives as assessed by the CGC for the benefit of Indigenous people. What is certain from our point of view is that a pattern of underspending compared to need has become entrenched in the Northern Territory. To our

\textsuperscript{37} GST refers to Australia’s broad ranging Goods and Services Tax.

\textsuperscript{38} Yothu Yindi is a wholly Aboriginal owned organisation from north eastern Arnhem Land in the NT that is based on the pioneering Aboriginal rock band of the same name, whose former lead singer, the late Mandawuy Yunupingu, was Australian of the Year in 1993.
knowledge this pattern had been occurring since the early 1990s, and presumably had been occurring since self-government in 1978. (p. 3)

This dynamic of inequality offers insights into the sociopolitical dimensions of the NT that flow into the institutional dysfunction of the NTDoE (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009; Vaught, 2011). This multiplying equity-based formula it seems has not flowed to NT remote Aboriginal members, at least from the perspective of empowered Aboriginal voices in education policy, strategic employment within the education sector and student schooling engagement and performance outcomes (Tatz, 2009). Additionally, it seemingly hasn’t flowed toward halting the carnage that flows into the NT prison system and the incarceration of Aboriginal adults at rates far higher than any jurisdiction in Australia (see Graph 18 and associated discussion in this section).

Table 50: Adapted table: Relativities, shares and illustrative GST distribution, 2017–18 and 2018–19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Relativities</th>
<th>GST shares</th>
<th>GST distribution</th>
<th>Per capita allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017–18</td>
<td>2018–19</td>
<td>2017–18</td>
<td>2018–19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>0.87672</td>
<td>0.85517</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>0.93239</td>
<td>0.98670</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>1.18769</td>
<td>1.09584</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>0.34434</td>
<td>0.47287</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>1.43997</td>
<td>1.47727</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>1.80477</td>
<td>1.76706</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
<td>1.19496</td>
<td>1.18070</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>4.66024</td>
<td>4.25816</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2018, p. 2 & 35)

In considering the details of this equity distribution, the 2018–19 NT government budget papers (NT Government, 2018) identified NT revenue for the non-financial public sector was expected to be $6.3 billion, with expenses exceeding this figure at $6.9 billion. In detailing the breakdown of costs, education is afforded a major proportion, as revealed in Graph 17.
Education and training

The NT government’s budget papers outlined the 2018 Budget investment of $1.23 billion in education and training across the Territory through several key policy levers, which included $506 million to deliver the best possible education for NT students (NT Government, 2018–19). This was to be through ensuring schools were properly resourced, and $50.5 million to improve Aboriginal student outcomes through the Indigenous Education Strategy, aimed at delivering effective programs that are ‘proven’ to make a difference for Aboriginal students. Given the latest NT DoE annual report (2017–18) discussed in section 1.1, the evidence of what doesn’t work, as outlined in Chapter 5, has been the basis of policy actions that have been reconstituted into the broader condition of NT mainstream inequality. Within this, one consistency appears to be the convergence of perpetuated Aboriginal education inequality through the political interest of a ‘white’ western consciousness, grounded within a cultural hegemony that interlocks and rejects other forms of consciousness (Vaught, 2011). In the next section I turn to the outcomes of this political economy.

6.5 NT remote Aboriginal social outcomes

6.5.1 Pathways to intergenerational welfarism

The outcomes of colonisation, centralised institutional dysfunction and a stratifying national education policy landscape have cemented a NT political economy that has created and is created through Aboriginal inequality. In discussing findings from *The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*, Phillips, Franklin and Viswanathan (2011, p. 42) identified three factors to economic
growth in Indigenous communities: self-rule and decision-making power, capable governing institutions empowered at the local level, and congruence between formal governing institutions and Indigenous political culture. These power structures remain elusive within the NT’s sociopolitical context, and in this ideological vacuum the life trajectory of NT remote Aboriginal families has been along a continuum of welfare dependency and the dynamics that spiral from this socially-constructed condition, as captured in ongoing data reports. This inequality situates within a moralising Australian coloniser State that undertakes actions toward alleviating Aboriginal inequality as ‘evidence’ of a moral, caring society (Matthews, 2013; Vaught, 2011), while suffering the internal costs.

Intergenerational welfare has been discussed at length as a scourge of Indigenous economic advancement (Pearson, 2013), and solutions to this vexing issue are as elusive as they are global. A United Nations Human Development Report (2013) for example in discussing the capacity of capitalist markets in building economic frames to liberate the condition of social inequality, stated:

> Capital markets have failed to provide sufficient credit to the excluded, even though they have demonstrated their creditworthiness through low default rates in the microcredit market. And formal capital markets have not provided financial instruments to attract the savings of the excluded and transform them into investment assets in the faster growing corporate sector. (Malik, 2013, p. 37)

Intergenerational welfare has been discussed extensively for its negative impacts around education, but is also often treated narrowly in its cause and effect relationship concerning community progress. The Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP), in operation for many years across the country, was for example terminated by a federal government believing that working for the dole could be replaced by ‘real’ jobs. In NT remote Aboriginal communities there has long been an absence of defined western market architecture that would enable job creation, in the same way as small non-Aboriginal communities that are culturally-aligned to a market economy (Altman, 2005; Tatz, 2009). Yet, this rationale prevailed under the Howard government’s 2007 Intervention (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; O’Dowd, 2009; Velardi, 2017). The defunct (or in many locations a dramatic scaling down) CDEP program was facilitative of community development through its capacity to mobilise part-time employment, which largely situated upon hybrid economies that facilitated the emergence of local enterprises that gave commercial value to Indigeneity, such as in customary law and governance (Austin-Broos, 2011; Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012).

In this respect the CDEP program offered a platform for remote communities with under-developed market economies, led through an agenda of community development, rather than paid individual jobs per se. The winding down of this program was so significant an impact that a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) identified that the demise of the CDEP program led to an estimated 60% of the decline nationally in the Indigenous employment rate between 2008–2013, and remote communities were hardest hit. This report also found the decline was partially driven by the
reduced scale of the CDEP program. For example, the “employment rate for Indigenous 15–64-year olds increased from 37.6% in 1994 to 53.8% in 2008, but then declined to 47.5% in 2012–13 (SCRGSP 2014b)” (p. 4). In this milieu there has remained entrenched and unsustainable welfarism in the NT and the associated social carnage inflicted upon remote families.

**NT Aboriginal social statistics**

The ABS Census (2016) identified the median age of NT Aboriginal members in 2016 was 25yrs. Against this young population, the NT’s racialised policy mistreatment of Aboriginal families has been debilitating. Child mortality rates in the NT are double or near double that of several other Australian States including New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, and had the highest child mortality rates (305 per 100,000) in 2013–17, and the gap was the largest in the NT, being 207 per 100,000 (ABS, 2016). The *CTG Report* (2018) highlighted the NT was not on track to meeting goals in literacy and numeracy (as detailed in Chapter 2), and there had been no improvements in the schooling attendance rates of Aboriginal children across Australia. In the NT, Aboriginal student attendance went backwards by 5% between 2014 and 2018, double that of other Australian jurisdictions (Australian Government, 2018). This crisis of schooling disengagement in the NT has flowed into all domains of Aboriginal family life (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

One outcome has been over-representation in the penal system, where Aboriginal children have been oriented to violent experiences in prison. National media coverage in 2016 detailed the brutality that adolescent Aboriginal boys experienced in youth detention at the Don Dale Centre, which included prison guards using ‘torture’ techniques (Meldrum-Hanna & Worthington, 2016). A royal commission, initiated after extensive dysfunction was exposed, stated: “The youth detention centres used during the relevant period were not fit for accommodating, let alone rehabilitating, children and young people. Detainees were frequently subjected to verbal abuse and racist remarks” (Australian Government, 2017, p. 101). In 2018, a media investigation by Australia’s National Indigenous Television Network (NITV) found little had changed several years later: “As of today, 100% of the children in detention are Aboriginal. The proportions have not changed since the royal commission” (NITV, 2018).

This ongoing treatment of Aboriginal youth has fermented deep social under-currents of anger and disengagement that, while manifesting during adolescent years, is for me a direct outcome of a violent education policy environment inflicted on remote Aboriginal children; one that has sought to rip away their identities. As Westwood (2003, p. 276) discussed, “violence etches itself into the consciousness and unconscious mind”, and this starts early in the NT, where flows into the juvenile justice system

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39 Youth Detention Centre (youth prison) named after Don Dale, a past NT government minister.
were consistent with Aboriginal adults. In discussing the June quarter 2018 profile of daily Indigenous imprisonment, the ABS reported:

The Northern Territory continued to have the highest imprisonment rate of all States and Territories with 965 persons per 100,000 adult population, increasing from 958 per 100,000 adult population in the March quarter 2018. Western Australia had the next highest imprisonment rate with 347 persons per 100,000 adult population, increasing from 342 per 100,000 adult population in the March quarter 2018. (ABS, 2018)

**Graph 18: Average daily imprisonment rate by States and Territories, June 2017 and June 2018**

As highlighted in Table 51, the NT Aboriginal prisoner rates of recidivism were also significantly higher than other Australian jurisdictions (NT Correctional Services Annual Statistics 2016–17).

**Table 51: NT Aboriginal prisoner recidivism rates 2016–17**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recidivism rate (%)</th>
<th>2016–17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Graph 19: NT Aboriginal prisoner recidivism rates 2016–17**
Aboriginal health profiles and school dis/engagement

Aboriginal families acknowledge a need to adapt to survive within a larger capitalist economy, yet the data on schooling attendance in most NT remote communities show otherwise, despite early survey feedback revealing most Aboriginal parents express concern that education was an important part of their children’s futures (Australian Government, 2011; see also Chapter 5). This contradiction, however, is demystified when the enabling blocks to educational engagement beyond the social frames canvassed are explored, even at the most cursory of levels. For example, much has been written about Australian Indigenous health profiles, yet little from a policy perspective has been articulated in the interactions that systematically relate to the impacts of health, particularly in respect to school attendance and engagement factors. In Chapter 5, participant feedback revealed various program responses around this link, but all were localised school responses, rather than products of systemic policy.

Carrington et al. (2012) highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of the impacts of an external policy environment that many Aboriginal families struggled to accommodate, due to policies having stemmed simultaneously from multiple directions and within social forces that are often irreconcilable, such as within a health–education nexus (Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). For example, in seeking treatment for illness to issues in childcare for parents who have been required to travel with Elders, and seeking to do so on welfare, has been akin to “running the gauntlet” under policies such as the SEAM (Taylor, 2010, p. 690). Obscured within education reform policies, health has long necessitated structural flexing, beyond the siloed models long favoured. In Table 52, national data for Indigenous health offer insights into the costs associated with insufficient policy flexing. Data is drawn from the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: First Results, Australia, 2012–13, conducted by the ABS.

Table 52: National Aboriginal health statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 2012–13: outcomes based on age standardised proportions</th>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were twice as likely as non–Indigenous people to have asthma.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over were half as likely as non–Indigenous people to have reported excellent or very good health,</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were twice as likely as non–Indigenous people to have asthma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely than non–Indigenous people to have diseases of the ear and/or hearing problems.</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rates for heart disease were significantly higher than the comparable rates for non–Indigenous people in all age groups from 15–54 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely than non–Indigenous people to have heart or circulatory diseases.</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were three times as likely as non–Indigenous people to have diabetes/high sugar levels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2012–13, daily smoking was more prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non–Indigenous people in every age group.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over were more likely than non–Indigenous people to have exceeded the single occasion risk guidelines.

In 2012–13, 21.7% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years indicated they had used an illicit substance in the previous year.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females and males were significantly higher than the comparable rates for non–Indigenous people in almost every age group.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were more likely than non–Indigenous people to have high blood pressure.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over had consumed more than two standard drinks per day on average, exceeding the lifetime risk guidelines.

In 2012–13, around one in six (18.0%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over said that they had used an illicit substance in the previous year.

In 2012–13, just over one in five (21.7%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over said that they had used an illicit substance in the previous year.

Obesity rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over were overweight or obese (28.6% and 37.0% respectively), according to their BMI.

These national health statistics were pronounced in the NT. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2017 Report* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017) revealed disturbing key findings, of which a sample is provided in Table 53. This sample, above all other data sets on the NT political economy, reveals a damning trend that, while reprehensible on so many levels, has shown little change, and the reasons for this social outcome have been evident in the ongoing narrative of embedded colonial racism in the NT. Indigenous CRT theorist Moodie (2018) discussed this patterned outcome and highlighted that knowing the problem and responding has long remained within a self-regulatory dynamic that maintained ‘white’ privilege, which here is enabled by the im/moral dualistic dichotomies this expresses.

Table 53: NT Aboriginal health statistics (2012-2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>2012–13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low birth weights were twice as common in the NT in 2014 for Indigenous mothers (14.5%) than non–Indigenous mothers (6.0%)</td>
<td>In 2012–13 NT the rates of kidney disease for Indigenous people aged 18 and over was 40% of the population, being 4.6 times higher than non–Indigenous people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rates of hospitalisation across all age groups in the NT 2013-2015 was 517 per 100,000, which was 1.7 times the rates for non–Indigenous people</td>
<td>Between 2013–15 the rate on non–congenital syphilis in the NT Aboriginal population was 6.5 times higher than non–Indigenous people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rate of NT Aboriginal hospitalisations for injury and poisoning was 72 per 1000 persons, being 2.3 times the rate of non–Indigenous people.</td>
<td>Between 2014–15 40% of NT Aboriginal peoples aged 15 and over reported having a disability or restrictive long-term health condition, being 2 times higher than non–Indigenous people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15% of Indigenous peoples in the NT had a heart/circulatory condition, being 1.8 times the rate for non–Indigenous people and increasing.

Between 2014–15 Indigenous people aged under age 65, whom used a disability support service, was 3.2 times higher than non–Indigenous people.

Between 2013–15 hospitalisations for Aboriginal peoples with high blood pressure was 4 times that of non–Indigenous people.

Between 2014–15, 11.4% of NT Aboriginal children had hearing loss, and represented an associated rate of hospitalisations at 2.1 times the rates as non-Aboriginal children.

In 2012–13 NT the rates of diabetes for Indigenous people aged 18 and over was 27% of the population, being 4.7 times higher than non–Indigenous people.

Between 2012–3, the rate of Aboriginal peoples aged 18 and over reporting high or very levels of stress and anxiety was 22%, compared with 8% for non–Aboriginal people.

In 2014–15 NT, 53% of Aboriginal families reported living in overcrowded households, compared with 8% of non–Indigenous people. This deteriorated in remote communities to 59% living in overcrowded conditions.

In 2014–15 71% of Aboriginal children up to 14 years were reported to be living in households with daily smokers, compared with 21% for non–Indigenous people.

The financial burden associated with treating Indigenous Australians has been excessively high. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017), of Australia’s total health expenditure 2010–2011, $4.6 billion was spent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, approximately 3.7% of the nation’s total recurrent health expenditure. Expenditure per person was approximately $8,000, which was 1.47 times that of non–Indigenous members (approximately $5,500/member). These figures, however, also situate within political discourses, and are misleading. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2017, p. 156), “in 2013–14 in the Northern Territory, health expenditure per person on public health services was similar for Indigenous Australians and non–Indigenous Australians ($663 compared with $667).” This statement is significant in demonstrating this chapter’s argument concerning the usurping of NT remote Aboriginal inequality to ‘white’ inequality, through a converged and simultaneously diverged interest (Gillborn, 2014; Vaught, 2011). It is in this regard that no such reporting of NT education expenditure breakdown has been as clearly reported.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has told the Story of the sociopolitical context behind the disastrous education policy environment aimed at NT remote Aboriginal families. This has included examination of the threads of Australia’s brutal campaign of colonisation and its flows into a contemporary NT context (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). Against this backdrop, discussion has included a critique of the institutional features of the NTDoE, drawing on organisational theories to explore the various ways that racism and western cultural hegemony move through the structures of this centralised organisation, and what this has meant for ideals of education progression (Vaught, 2011). The third
element of this contextualisation involved further discussion on the structural conflicts that arise from the movements of a stratifying education reform environment across NT remote Aboriginal schooling contexts. Finally, attention was given to the outcomes of the NT’s political economy and the associated life outcomes for remote families and the ways this dynamic remains structurally interlocked around NT Aboriginal inequality. In the next chapter attention is turned to my analysis of Chapters 4–6 and what these suggest about the nature and location of progressive policy responses.
Chapter 7. Unpacking the Story of NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction

7.1 Introduction

And I’ve been around long enough to have witnessed the vibrancy around the remote area teacher education program [RATE]; it was vibrant and people were successful and were wanting to be involved and it was growing a workforce out in communities that was there for decades, if it had continued to be supported; and then, watching the whittling away of those programs to the point where we now go, let’s have a look [Flicking through the pages to a specific section of A Share in the Future review]: Indigenous teaching principals are [numbering only] three! So, if we want to talk about cultural inclusivity, that’s where it begins with this agency [DoE]; that’s the telling point. (R3 DoE policy worker)

In Chapters 1–3, it was necessary to tell the Story about the nature of the problem of NT remote Aboriginal educational inequality, before telling the Story of the nature of the problem from the perspective of the secondary and data outcomes and their flows within the NT’s sociopolitical context told in Chapters 4–6. Telling of the Story in this way enables people to understand ‘the problem’ with all its social messiness. This is a problem borne out of racialised colonisation that, as has been told, privileges a capitalist western world over that of the Indigenous cultural worldview.

Chapter 7 tells the Story of how the key policy issues discussed can be responded to in ways that respect the multidimensional directions that interlocking forces concerning NT remote Aboriginal education inequality, stem (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This chapter tells how remote families are unable to engage with the education design on offer, pointing towards the three problematised policy domains as key to advancement beyond this condition. Discussion then turns to analysis of these policy domains, responding to the political economies of both western and remote Aboriginal communities. This includes critical analysis of the intersectionality of neoliberalism and neocolonialism as driving political discourses across wealth and racialised Aboriginal educational inequality (Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). This chapter outlines a disrupting counter–narrative (Brayboy, 2014) that NT remote Aboriginal education is advanced through education reflecting synchronisation with the broader macro forces shaping its institutional functionality, defined through the existential windows of Aboriginality for its purpose to be reified and made relevant enough with which to engage (Yosso, 2005).

7.2 NT remote Aboriginal communities struggle to engage the education design on offer

As told in this Story, NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction is a complex interaction of racism, capitalism and the collective and diverse choices of Aboriginal families to disengage from
education in most NT remote communities, as outlined in the recent Australian Education Review, *The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous Voice in Education* (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). The scale of this conflict cuts through a national social contract that participants are expected to subscribe to, as part of a broader national membership. While this Story is about the NT, it is also about the limitations of western capitalism’s capacity to address the deep undercurrent of Aboriginal social inequality that has plagued the country and is magnified in matters of Indigenous social justice (Tatz, 2009). To understand the nature of this dynamic, analysis includes reference to the three major reviews, due to their relationships to the three problematised policy domains advanced in this study and the racialised policy violence they expose.

While the three reviews spoke to a broad range of issues related to NT remote Aboriginal education, a common feature across all was a series of recommendations that featured the importance of developing local Aboriginal employment, governance and voices in the delivery of schooling services and its connections to maintaining local cultural identity. While Aboriginal inclusion was problematised, it varied across all three reviews, it is clear from the statistics shown in Table 1 (Chapter 1) that little traction has been made in the 20 years since *Learning Lessons* (1999). Significantly, over this time the voice of Aboriginal community members fluctuated from being strong in 1999, gradually weakening and eventually ending towards 2014, through the demise of the Northern Territory Indigenous Education Council (NTIEC). This lack of voice was in fact the purpose behind an Australian Education Review, *The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous voice in education* (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

Alongside these trends and connected to Indigenous inclusion, purpose and function of remote education had remained ambiguous, producing a nebulous education policy environment that has bounced around Aboriginality and its links to welfare dependency and ‘material’ poverty (Matthews, 2013). This ambiguity was evident in conversations around the role of bilingual or bi-literacy practices in education, where the theory of the staircase model (discussed in Chapter 2, p. 67) was itself argued as precariously situated against widespread diversity of interpretation and application. At the core of this policy instability was the often-limited time that standard Australian English was spoken in remote communities, placing it as a prioritised communication medium and curriculum focus within the daily school program, on a basis that this was one of the limited opportunities for students to learn about western knowledge systems through English.

The second common theme was that the policy planks around the accessibility of remote school services, were dislodged against the fragmentation of policy settings concerning Indigenous inclusion, particularly around how access supposedly could be improved without policy levers that responded to local Aboriginal cultural realities. The evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 confirm that the three main policy actions in recent years had, in many instances, produced the opposite outcome to those
intended (see Chapter 4 & 5). In the first instance, pain was not a good teacher if there was little to lose, and second that a ROTE-learning approach to teaching English was seen by many to be driving students from school. And in the third instance, the practice of sending students to secondary boarding institutions was impacted by the legacies of a fractured education design and delivery system, regardless of whether they were local or not.

A third common theme discovered across all three reviews (Chapter 5) was that employment pathways and its relationship to community development, were obliquely aligned with education. As discussed, this has been due in large part to an absence of strengthened regional and local economies and defining what community development looks like in respect to paid employment, but also as concerns the untapped role of community cultural capital (Altman, 2005; Yosso, 2005), unpacked in Chapter 8. But it also reflects an education system that has failed to prepare children for a western world where, as even in locations that have economic growth potential, relatively few children had embraced the opportunities (see Chapter 5). Welfarism is often problematised as a cause for student disengagement (Langton, 2011), but this offers a narrowed view of social disadvantage, particularly as linked to identity and self-worth and their translation into community development (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

This Story is thus concerned with policy gearing and how it synchronises with the lived and fluid lives of those targeted in advancing education performance and its alignment with community building, within a broader environment of western culture and capitalism. This analysis employs CRT as the main framework of analysis, drawing on its connection to a branch of critical pedagogy that pays attention to racialisation. This analytic framework is used in unpacking the power relationships that flow through mainstream ‘white’ Australia, their interactions across the racial category of Indigeneity, and as these exchanges emerge within school organisational spaces within the NT. In applying CRT, this analysis is drawn around the three problematised policy domains of Indigenous cultural inclusion, access of remote school services and pathways to employment and development on Country.

### 7.2.1 Contextualising policy performance dysfunction and interest convergence/divergence

Building on the discussion in Chapter 6, the three policy domains are problematised in this chapter on the basis that each have long existed in defining the policy parameters and unresolved debates concerning NT remote Aboriginal schooling, either in isolation of each other or in geared policy frameworks. In this chapter, critical questions are posed that interrogate and consequently disrupt how these domains connect to a defining ideal of Indigeneity (Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013) that is situated as the key platform to improving student success in education. Aboriginal cultural inclusion, as an existential identity driver in building education purpose, is no different to how non-Indigenous ‘white/ened’ Australian children engage with their social realities. It is not exotic nor a romanticised or essentialised standpoint to argue that a sense of belonging is at the core of our social, gregarious
condition; yet, this is unresolved in education policy modelling for NT remote students, as evidenced by its absence (Tatz, 2009).

A second aspect to this unpacking of the problematised policy domains that is undertaken in this chapter is that accessibility of remote school services needs to operate in ways that reward and support transmission of identity, as a key motivating driver in school engagement and learning. If the processes and platforms around engaging in the schooling system fail to function in synergy with this construction of being, then it is corrosive to a point where the reality of who a child is, including their plural identities, sits in contest to organisational social projections. As found in Chapters 4–5, accessibility of NT remote education services is unresolved at the most fundamental of NT remote existential realities, since policy actions to date have not made schooling more accessible.

The third major policy domain advanced in this chapter is that pathways to employment and development on Country are fundamentally about community building and this defines the whole purpose of education, as delivered through its school services. This domain plays out more definitively in the larger communities, where the scales of local economy are evident and is facilitative of NT remote community building, on a basis of a schooling design that offered structural integrity around its responses to Aboriginal existential realities. In the next section I critically examine why each of these policy domains are non–negotiable components of a progressive school architecture, if a counter–narrative of education success is to be achieved, after which discussion is about how these are reified through the intersections of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. Through these key points of analysis, this chapter defines a centrist approach, where the qualitative dimensions situate as the platform in which economic and community development progressively emerges, with education situated within its core.

7.2.2 Indigenous cultural inclusion

In being inclusive of culture at a local level, I don’t think we need reviews and research to know that this is a significant part of the local context and the importance of including it in the curriculum that we deliver on the ground. I believe that we have our key learning areas and, within the Australian curriculum we teach to those achievement standards which, in my opinion, don’t include this very important language and culture component, which is telling the community that we don’t value it as being important. (R8 Aboriginal school principal)

Aboriginal cultural inclusion in remote school services contains many forms. These include representation of community voices and perspectives, governance and capacity to shape the important components of service provision, the overlaying of Indigenous perspectives across curriculum and teaching practices, relevant socialisation and cultural approaches to working across kinships systems and relationship protocols, cultural reinforcers, symbols and artefacts (Tatz, 2009; Yosso, 2006). Central to this overlay is Aboriginal employment at all levels of school services. In every remote school
visited in this study these threads of inclusion existed, but as discussed in Chapter 5 were usually in a weakened state because they weren’t pervasive nor observably functioning as an embedded social policy foundation to student and community engagement.

It is within this limited translation on the ground that the NT’s education policy environment is visible through its absence in projecting a detailed and mandated Indigenous cultural inclusion modelling; one which embraced cultural inclusion from this widened approach, but particularly its most definable components of curriculum and Indigenous employment. Of the three major reviews, only *Learning Lessons* (1999) linked these domains under an articulation around language and literacy acquisition. The *SRNTDET* (2009) highlighted Indigenous employment, but did not highlight inclusion insofar as its articulation in curriculum. The most recent review, *ASITF* (2013), while also highlighting the need for increased Aboriginal employment across all levels of the education department, also did not articulate a link between Aboriginal employment and what it termed biliteracy programs, despite advocating it should be supported in schools that have a rigorous and well-defined language program.

*Learning Lessons* (1999) occurred around the time the NT government phased out specific purpose funding for bilingual education, in 1998. The controversy from this decision cut into the role of the school in reinforcing Aboriginal identities, as much as how learning English was achieved within environments where it was and remains a second or third language. The review stated that “the announcement quite simply polarised what may otherwise have been more equivocal positions” (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 119). *Learning Lessons* (1999) found that most Aboriginal families supported bilingual programs, based on its “value in reinforcing and strengthening Indigenous identity in all its forms” (p. 120). This view recognised the importance of English acquisition, though not at the expense of their own language and culture and expressed this as a two-way, both-ways learning approach. The researchers pointed out that while such desire was not premised on “any linguistic theory of facilitating an easier transfer to English”, but rather the main aim had been “the cultivation of proficiency in both languages” (p. 120).

This desire of retaining bilingual education was driven by Aboriginal families and cut through the NT government’s decision, most notably in the way bilingual education had been problematised. In referring to a case study (no. 24), one Aboriginal teacher was particularly clear:

> Bilingual is not to blame. My son was taught here for 2 years in this bilingual school. Then in High School in 97 and 98, now he is at [a residential college], he got a B in maths. I think that bilingualism is not bad for education, but not coming to school is bad for education. If you are saying that Indigenous kids are not doing good, is it because they are bilingual? (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 120)

According to *Learning Lessons* (1999), the shift in bilingual education had been one of rapid expansion from 1973, to attempts at ending it in 1976, a consolidation between 1978 and 1986, and by 1998, there
were 20 schools delivering accredited bilingual programs in various forms across the NT (Collins & Lea, 1999). The design of bilingual schools was based on the earlier discussed staircase model (see Chapter 2), with 95% of instruction in the early years conducted in the vernacular, reciprocating to English by Year 7, based on Cummins’ (1981) “interdependency principle” of building academic achievement in a child’s home language, prior to transferring to English (p. 121). The review found that the staircase model had been branded the “Zorro model”, due to variance in approaches that ‘zigzagged widely’ (p. 121). This issue, when placed against high non–Aboriginal staff turnover (many of whom were reported as hostile to the program) and staff not properly trained for their roles, led to bilingual education being blamed for remote student underachievement (Collins & Lea, 1999).

According also to Learning Lessons (1999), assessment of bilingual schools until 1988 was externally conducted on a basis of one-on-one assessment of students, using standard tests; with school results cross-referenced with a group on non–bilingual schools. With the focus on competency in English literacy and numeracy, a random example of one Arnhem Land school selected from a mass of evaluation data from this period revealed the bilingual school ‘had higher percentages of students who mastered the tests than the reference group in all the four tasks in English’ (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 122). After 1988, approaches in the way students were assessed had changed to a form of internally-moderated self-appraisal, which was to include external assessment data sourced from the NT’s early standardised tests, which at the time was the Primary Assessment Program (PAP) and later Multi Assessment Program (MAP). However, few sites included the external assessment data, which left bilingual schools unable to compare their performance to non–bilingual schools (Collins & Lea, 1999).

7.2.3 Accessibility of NT remote school services: Policy implications

Two groups of people are living very different lives and often the parents of families in these systems that run up and down the [Stewart] highway, often they are living a five-day week arrangement, living in a Judeo-Christian calendar that defines your holidays and school terms, and outside of that in remote communities, it is irrelevant. (R2 DoE policy worker)

NT remote communities have been disengaged from western education and its school service models for a long time and this performance is not showing signs of patterned improvement (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). In Chapter 5 an overview of the three reviews highlighted that access and equity was the most common priority recommendations. However, feedback from the case study respondents indicated remote schools had not become more accessible, and in many instances, became less. The data trends for the NT in Chapter 4 identified that children’s attendance levels have been poor, and when it is considered that the percentage attending four out of every five days per week has been around 30%, the evidence is unequivocal.
These outcomes reflect an absence in real consultation and long-term responses to what communities have been saying about improving their capacity to participate successfully in education. Analysis indicates the two reviews after *Learning Lessons* (1999) reflected less consultation, because the voices of Aboriginal peoples were less reflected in the problematised domains. This has been particularly around an Aboriginal voice that translates into modelling and practice; Aboriginal ontologies and ways of overlaying identities and cultural imaging across remote school services; employment and the overall alignment of policies with the internal dynamics of remote community life and Aboriginal identities; all being key existential elements raised about the NT context by researchers including Tatz (2009).

The internal dynamics of NT remote Aboriginal communities are a potent mixture of clashing across several fault lines that remain obscure within policy formatting. For example, while culture and its role in human social capital has long been recognised as one area of critical importance (Carson, 2011; Yosso, 2005), its location within change and adaptation to capitalism has been on the periphery, as pointed out by Savage (2011). There has been limited recognition of the structural socioeconomic forces impacting remote families’ capacities to engage school across the myriad lifestyle obstacles that shape and constrict member choice and opportunity (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This is particularly within the existential realm of making sense of the ideals that schools’ project. Against this challenge remoteness inflicts challenges for economic development in small isolated communities that render western education and its service providers in schools as having little function and purpose, since they are preparing children for a life of choice and opportunity that does not exist (Matthews, 2013); a false promise that Berlant (2011, p. 24) referred to as “cruel optimism”.

Flowing through these challenges are the impacts of hardship experienced by most NT remote families at a far higher rate than any other group in Australia, as discussed in Chapter 6. These impacts debilitate people and their ability to engage in an agenda of change, particularly where they are based on distorted and false utopian ideals, as much as what Walter (2015) highlighted are the dichotomies that exist between the bonds of family social capital and the value tensions required of being socially-mobile. Family units within NT remote communities are very different from those within large urban contexts. For example, ‘everyone knows each other in remote communities’, and most have some form of kinship connection. In these contexts, ‘difference’ is also marked, due to the trauma of conflict produced from years of disadvantage, born out of racialised colonisation, which functions as a social and psychological plague in splintering a desire to participate in ideals of externally-imposed community development (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

While children may typically be raised by an extended family structure, these are as much ‘solid’ as they are ‘porous and fluid’. That is, responsibility for children’s development, care and wellbeing is ambiguously situated, being ‘everyone’s and nobody’s responsibility’. While western approaches place this responsibility at the feet of biological parents and/or government-endorsed carers, this is not the
case in NT remote Aboriginal communities. Demanding change aimed largely at the ‘nuclear’ family misses the extended family structure and has not produced engagement because families simply cannot engage beyond their reach (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Westwood, 2003). This has significant consequences when we consider that within the stratified world of Australian capitalism, recognition of opportunities for collective remote Aboriginal development is weighted heavily on systemic modelling that facilitates capacity for choice and opportunity around a change agenda to emerge, rather than its opposite (Savage, 2011). Importantly, this agenda needs to be driven by Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal governance models, for nuanced and relevant responses to Indigenous social realities.

### 7.2.4 Pathways to employment and development on Country

In Chapter 5, it was clear from analysis conducted on the three major reviews that all had failed to conceptualise educational pathways to remote employment and community development. Of the three reviews, only *Learning Lessons* (1999) offered detailed investigation in respect to Aboriginal employment in schools, and is canvassed in this section. In Chapter 1 the data revealed that the participation of Aboriginal workers in education services, especially in teaching and senior roles, is abhorrent to the point where the most recent reports do not offer specific data on this level, or above. In contrast to this, *Learning Lessons* (1999) acknowledged that local Aboriginal employment was not just about employment and a teaching perspective, but significantly in lifting the standing and self-esteem of Aboriginal staff in schools:

> It provided the first real opportunity for Indigenous people to determine the type and style of education wanted for their children. It is fair to say that bilingual schools have acted as the crucible for Indigenous teacher training and the increasing success of employing local Indigenous people to staff bush schools. This is an enduring legacy of bilingual education and arguably its greatest achievement. (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 123)

*Learning Lessons* (1999) highlighted that during the late 1980s, 80% of students in the former Batchelor College[^40] were from bilingual schools and the majority in senior teaching positions were from bilingual schools. A decade later, 50% of the 168 student teachers at Batchelor were from bilingual schools, despite these schools comprising 20% of total schools (Collins & Lea, 1999). When it was announced that bilingual schools would be phased out, Aboriginal educators revealed they saw no role for themselves in an English-only education and would quit: “What role will there really be for Indigenous staff, professional and para-professional in English only schools? The scenario could be a predictable stream of non-Indigenous staff passing through, first year out teachers with little ESL training and limited appropriate experience” (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 124). As government policy concerning bilingual schools moved to a nebulous and ideological free-fall by the mid-1990s, NT remote schools

[^40]: Now known as Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), which provides teacher training for Aboriginal students.
remained within a natural state of bilingualism and employed a combination of vernaculars and standard Australian English in their teaching and learning models.

As Matthews (2013) discussed, these shifts were part of a national movement away from ‘multicultural education’, and in the NT, debates emerged from supporters of the Cummins staircase model (see Figure 5, p. 68) and those advocating a 50:50 model; prompting calls for a broader debate: “The ‘bilingual or not’ debate conceals and distorts the generic concerns that are in need of urgent analysis” (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 124-125). From this debate the two-way (50:50), ‘flexible’ model was argued by the reviewers as moving away from unhealthy debates between linguists, on the basis the two-way model reflected environments switching between local vernaculars and standard Australian English (SAE). This included moves toward an outcome–based curriculum that incorporated SAE and ESL/EFL MAP tests to enable comparable, longitudinal data (Collins & Lea, 1999). At the core of this was advocacy of a defining policy document outlining two-way learning, based on two elements: the soundness of basic concepts and philosophy and the effectiveness of its delivery.

As one contributor to the review stated:

When there is no clear guiding philosophy to inform our practice, we will tend to be unsure of what it is we are supposed to be developing in our students, and thus the focus of our efforts will straight away turn to resource development (which) ….is generally uncontroversial and creates the impression of supporting the main educational enterprise. But what is this enterprise? Do those of us involved in Indigenous education truly have a clear idea of what it is we are supposed to be doing? (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 125)

As revealed in section 4.10, Aboriginal languages are regularly spoken daily within the NT. It was in respect to this reality that the Learning Lessons (1999) reviewers (Collins & Lea, 1999, p. 127) made a key point around what this meant for education policy: “The NT should be leading Australia in policy development and pedagogy for the use of original Australian languages in education”. The reviewers further commented on language culture and teaching:

We should be at the leading edge in the production of educational curriculum material in this area, but we are not. The NTDE has a policy of support for Indigenous languages that suffers from vague ambition. All students are meant to have the opportunity to study Australian Indigenous languages ‘where possible.’ How this is to be done, with what resources, time allocation and curriculum materials, is left unspecified. (p. 129)

Following Learning Lessons (1999), ASITF (2013) was the first comprehensive review of Aboriginal education since Learning Lessons (1999), prompted after the failure of policies to improve the schooling achievement of remote children became apparent, which included claims it had deteriorated. This review affirmed the internal decay of the NTDoE, as highlighted in the SRNTDET (2009) (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009). While this review advocated improvement in the number of Aboriginal peoples employed in remote education services, it failed to articulate why this was important in the domain of identity,
self-worth and where local languages and other cultural inclusion and voices might situate, particularly in schooling purpose and community development (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015; Tatz, 2009). Aboriginal employment impacts an Aboriginal presence in service provision, particularly in respect to cultural infusion in the way education services are delivered. As highlighted early in Table 1, Aboriginal employment has long remained in a poor state and at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid; factors born within a racialised schooling system built upon ‘whiteness as property’ (Werner, 2015).

The ASITF (2013) found that Aboriginal employment, particularly Aboriginal teachers, was extremely low. About this abysmal record, and citing the NTDoE’s target of 200 Indigenous teachers by 2018 within the Smarter Schools National Partnership, the review highlighted the politics through its ambiguity:

The review supports targets and dedicated efforts to improve the numbers (and quality) of Indigenous teachers. Effort has been applied to articulate career pathways for Indigenous employees, but the resourcing and design of initiatives to achieve progression along the pathway are less clear. High profile initiatives such as the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) Program have faulted, and there is a lack of coordination and consistency across the human resources domain. (Wilson, 2013, p. 195)

On the matter of Indigenous principals, the reviewer further commented:

The number and proportion of Indigenous staff at Principal level in the system has declined in recent years. This is a function partly of low levels of promotion across the Indigenous workforce in general, although some respondents to the review argued there were employment decisions based on performance issues in some cases. It is difficult to overcome this problem at present, until there are more qualified Indigenous teachers occupying more senior roles. (p. 195)

The ASITF (2013) identified that in 2013 there were 603 senior teachers and 2,046 teachers employed by the NTDoE, and within these 22 senior teachers and 83 teachers were Indigenous (Wilson, 2013, p. 196). At this time Indigenous employment was around 4%, against an Aboriginal student profile of approximately 40%, which in turn was against 75% of NT schools located in remote Aboriginal settings. ASITF (2013) noted that many Aboriginal teachers were from bilingual schools, prior to their phasing out. Also identified was a key Indigenous teacher training program, Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE), delivered from the 1970s until the 1990s through BIITE, in partnership with the NTDoE. After it was later resurrected under the title of Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) and delivered through Charles Darwin University (CDU), the NTDoE again walked away, of which the ASITF (2013) stated: “This is another example of the early termination of programs before effective evaluation and without opportunities to adjust the approach in the light of evidence” (Wilson, 2013, p. 196).
The ASITF (2013) pointed out that the NT had been involved in the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI).\footnote{MATSITI was a national employment initiative in 2011-2016 to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in Australian schools.} MATSITI included a range of scholarships, fellowships and cadetships (Wilson, 2013). Yet, despite this opportunity, the NT retained just twenty-nine teachers from an original forty graduates of the MATSITI program. Only fifteen of these graduates were employed in remote schools in the NT. Reasons cited for this outcome included low literacy and numeracy skills of potential students, and that these were made more challenging by the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) requirement that teachers need to be in the top 30% in literacy (Wilson, 2013).

While Charles Darwin University offered programs such as the Tertiary Education Preparation (TEP), this required high levels of costly support, often for a small group of students, which, according to Wilson (2013) made the cost–benefit unsustainable. In respect to Aboriginal teachers in remote locations, the ASITF (2013) review advocated for another version of the RITE program, with changes including a more rigorous selection, that learning should be delivered in school time and that each school be funded for a coordinator to support students. This included face-to-face training, that defined support agreements existed between the school, student and tertiary body and that standardised assessment was essential (Wilson, 2013). At the core of this ten-year proposal, this review highlighted that success is reliant on the government’s ongoing support and guarantee that graduates would have a job in schools.

On the role of Aboriginal languages, the ASITF (2013) identified a need to train Aboriginal language teachers and proposed the NT adopt a model similar to that used in Western Australia, being a ‘Limited Authority to Teach Basis’, and argued it a more likely model to succeed, particularly in meeting the needs for the teaching of languages in a more consistent way, one which could facilitate teacher career pathways, building on languages as a strength, rather than impediment (Wilson, 2013). A claim discussed in this review focused on issues of standards and teacher quality. The claim was that some tertiary institutions had deliberately allowed standards to drop, that this enabled some students to graduate, with the review highlighting the dangers of allowing poor quality teachers into classrooms.

While Aboriginal participation was raised in the ASITF (2013), this review failed where Learning Lessons (1999) succeeded. That is, the ASITF (2013) employed a westernised matrix in problematising the role of Aboriginal knowledge systems in an Aboriginal world and as reflected in ideals of remote schooling services. The use of terms such as ‘poor quality’ for example can alternatively be viewed as a poor version of ‘whiteness’. This was not how Learning Lessons (1999) approached the issue, which instead highlighted that bilingual education dignified an Indigeneity as the foundation in building the
‘quality teacher’, which necessarily meant a recalibration of the term and the nature of the way Aboriginal employment, on Country, could gain a foothold in remote locations where employment was scarce. In the next section attention is turned to the sociopolitical context of the NT to unpack why and how this consciousness that has situated hidden within westernised policy problematising, as reflected within the ASITF (2013), is so pervasive, and what approaches are needed in navigating and countering these challenges.

7.3 Locating the intersectionality of neoliberalism and neocolonialism across NT remote Aboriginal education policy contexts

In Chapter 1 the intersectionality of wealth and ‘race’ was identified as at the core of understanding the multi-dimensional interactions of power and identity behind Indigenous inequality (Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013), and pivotal to this discussion is understanding how the forces of neoliberalism and neocolonialism destructively operate within NT remote Aboriginal education policy design. To achieve this understanding, analysis needs to include the legal status of NT remote Aboriginal settlement, since this sets the most important human development foundation around Indigenous ideals of community development and the functionality of remote education (Curchin, 2013). It is also important to recognise how neoliberalism and neocolonialism situates within the architecture of NT remote Aboriginal education policy, beyond discussion so far. This means unpacking why remote schools cannot work organisationally in the service forms favoured by government bureaucrats and their senior policy advisors. The point of this section is to bring these other fronts of debate into analysis and discussion of the multiple layers of a western political economy and its intersecting political discourses in neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

7.3.1 Locating the intersections of remote education within the NT political economy

In Chapter 6, I discussed the NT’s political economy, specifically its gravitation around an interest convergence/divergence that gives rise to the ‘white’ economic interests behind NT remote Aboriginal education inequality (Gillborn, 2014; Vaught, 2011). But this does not fully explain this racialised narrative and its entanglement with Australian democracy, as expressed across rights to a quality education (Vaught, 2011). Indigenous rights strengthened alongside a national trend towards social-liberalism during the 1960s and 1970s (Langton, 2011; Savage, 2011), when the Whitlam Labor government in 1972 established an Aboriginal Land Rights Commission (Nettheim, 2007). In 1973, Justice Woodward investigated how land rights legislation could be recognised under Australian law (Duffy, 2008). This legislation titled Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Australian Government, 1976) was to establish a process by which former reserves were handed over to Aboriginal claimants and managed by Land Councils, vested with powers to act on behalf of Aboriginal traditional owners in dealings with government and outside interests, including mining (Nettheim, 2007).
These included large areas around the Daly, Alligator and Roper rivers, Groote Eylandt and Lake Woods regions within the NT (Gray, 2011). The Whitlam government established the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and an advisory body in the National Aboriginal Consultative Council (NACC) and around this time (1976) land rights legislation emerged as a flagship human rights symbol that resulted in large tracks of NT land transferring to inalienable land under Aboriginal control (Austin-Broos, 2001). These institutions precipitated key social justice entities that had direct influence on the NT’s economic policy trajectory for remote families, and these included the Aboriginal Land Councils and Associations Act 1976, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989, a system of land use agreements implemented under Native Title (1993) and the Land Fund and Indigenous Land Corporation (ATSIC Amendment) Act 1995 (Hocking et al., 2009).

Despite these ‘progressive’ policy acts, which were concerned with ideals of self-determination, self-management and inclusion (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), this period ushered in the contesting of Indigenous sovereignty (Robinson, 2006), leading prominent Queensland Indigenous lawyer and activist, Noel Pearson, to label the 1967 referendum a ‘Trojan horse’; that despite providing rights, policies continued Aboriginal members as “wards of the State, rather than active, empowered peoples” (Austin-Broos, 2011, p. 76). Langton (2011) also stated of this point that “the quarantining of the newly won lands from modernisation was the outcome of the policies that Indigenous commentator Noel Pearson has described collectively as ‘passive welfare’” (p. 9). The convolutions thus in these so-called progressive policy actions have reflected for this Story the interlocked binding nature of capitalism and its assimilatory threads (Austin-Broos, 2009).

As Stewart-Harawira (2005, p. 221) argued, this existed as part of a larger capitalist discourse in the “privatisation of goods and services and the contradictory advocacy of freedom and tightening of civil liberties”. In 1997, the Howard Liberal government undertook a review into NT land rights legislation (Australian Government, 1976). The review, Building on Land Rights for the Next Generation (1998), advocated the NT government compulsorily acquire Aboriginal lands, removal of the Central and Northern Land Councils42 and establishment of a centralised governance structure, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Council, which was to disseminate funding to 18 smaller regional councils (Austin-Broos, 2011). While unsuccessful, this signalled that a leftist shift from 1970 was short-lived. Land ownership and control meant power, and the interests of capitalists in pursuing wealth ensured gravitation to those in control (Duffy, 2008; Moodie, 2018; Ornstein, 2007), and at its core were hegemonic forces working through Australia’s Westminster legal system, which was tasked with defining land ownership and the validity of terra nullius (Duffy, 2008).
In the NT, a rights-based social agenda has projected ideals of equality, but also a pursuit of sovereignty (Robinson, 2006). In commenting on the legal challenges from Indigenous peoples, Poirier (2010) highlighted the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, NT Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976 and the Native Title Act 1993 enabled Aboriginal families to engage in political and legal recognition of their rights. About the Mabo Decision (1992), leading Australian jurist Justice Brennan referred to the decision of the International Court of Justice in its advisory statements, when examining the theory of terra nullius:

A common law doctrine founded on unjust discrimination in the enjoyment of civil and political rights demands reconsideration. It is contrary both to international standards and to the fundamental values of our common law to entrench a discriminatory rule which, because of the supposed position on the scale of social organization of the Indigenous inhabitants of a settled colony, denies them a right to occupy their traditional lands. (Nettheim, 2007, p. 175)

This interpretation was later challenged by government on a shift from ‘collective rights to individual rights’ (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 127); a potent instrument in the absence of a treaty. The westminster legal system has functioned to serve capitalism’s discourse through denying Indigenous rights to land ownership and control (Vaught, 2011). As Short (2003) and Duffy (2008) revealed, unlike Canada, the US, or New Zealand’s 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, colonial Britain did not seek a treaty with Australia’s First Nations peoples. In this way, a lack of Indigenous sovereign rights encouraged ambiguity within the law, as despite the failure of terra nullius, subsequent repeals to Mabo watered the decision down by economic interests, given mining and pastoral leases did not revoke Native Title (O’Dowd, 2009). In repealing legislation, the Federal Howard Liberal government argued that non–Indigenous rights were eroded through the legislation (Gruenstein, 2008), presenting the perverse case that non–Indigenous Australians were disadvantaged by an Indigenous ‘advantage’.

As a result, terra nullius has been weakened against an international and customary law enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Nettheim, 2007, p. 169). But, as Gruenstein (2008) pointed out, the UN watchdog CERD also discouraged preferential treatment of Indigenous groups, deepening arbitrary interpretation inside legal debate. Thus, the continued challenges of capitalists’ claims over land to fuel industries such as mining and agriculture have reflected an economic categorisation of people situated upon individual and group identities (Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Vaught, 2011). Within this legal maelstrom, the concept of proof of continuous occupation (central to the Mabo and Wick Decisions) remains a basis to exclude large numbers of land rights claims (Poirier, 2010), where it has become difficult for Aboriginal members to seek compensation through identity recognition (Duffy, 2008; Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). At a group level it has equally been challenged, since wealth is situated upon the individual and ideals of competition, and the ‘communal’ community seeking to generate wealth around raciologies, confounds at the interpersonal level (Austin-Broos, 2011).
As discussed by Moodie (2018), this binary exchange in neoliberalism and neocolonialism arguably remains at the core of the onslaught on Australia’s First Nations peoples’ sovereignty and its impacts radiate deeply into western, social-liberalist ideals. Being social and liberalised at the same time renders dualistic tensions between the left and the right that has led to a dichotomisation in social and economic policy that attempts to locate an unstable middle-ground in addressing educational inequalities (Lees, 2007). For NT remote Aboriginal families land rights legislation established an important social reform, putting into law the concept of inalienable freehold title, where land itself cannot be bought or sold (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Bradfield, 2005). For this Story, I argue that this very action across NT remote community settlement has fractured across a geopolitical landscape of remote Aboriginal socialism. That is, a key reason for the abysmal performance of education policy is due to NT remote Aboriginal communities being anchored to the rarely explored and minimally understood condition of social capitalism (Walter, 2015), of which government policy has been predicated against.

This is a property of the existential experience of being an Aboriginal community member committed to a non–materialist, spiritual attachment to Country (Blair, 2015; Walter, 2015), but it is also an outcome forged within the interactions of the intersections of wealth and ‘race’ (Moodie, 2018). The condition of ‘inalienable land’ has meant the triggers for materialism have remained ‘dampened’ through the interlocked exchanges of both western and Aboriginal law, and in this way, neoliberal flows into the institution of education have clashed with the neocolonial flows of racism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003) and consolidating within the NTDoE. A significant reflection of this consciousness is captured within the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (NATSIEAP) 2010–2014, and its iteration in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy (NATSIES) (2015). This is problematised on the basis this policy represents a majoritarian political economy, and its damaging philosophic flows have failed to reduce a national education layering and its compounding impacts across the NT (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

7.3.2 Locating the paradigm faults of a national Indigenous education policy architecture
Prior to the NATSIAP and NATSIES, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Plan (NATSIEP) was established in 1989 under the Hawke Labor government. The NATSIEP reflected Indigenous voices and a prioritisation in cultural inclusion, Indigenous participation and an education experience that reflected the needs and aspirations of Indigenous families (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Matthews, 2013). Emerging from this landmark policy was the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program, which enabled Indigenous parents to participate in formal advisory bodies connected to school councils. ASSPA was replaced in 2004 by the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI), which placed emphasis on Indigenous committees to apply for funding grants, rather than focusing on the injection of Indigenous voices in education. Other initiatives from 2004 included the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), which provided in-class tuition...
support for Indigenous children. These programs ended in 2009 and the driving principles of the NATSIEP, such as Indigenous community participation in education, have steadily been eroded (Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer, 2017).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the period from the early 1990s, of Australia’s moves to deregulated financial markets, resulted in an overlay of economic–rationalism across a national education policy landscape (Ranson, 2003). The shifts also to national standardisation from 2000 resulted in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (NATSIES) 2015, as shown in Figure 15. Based on the goals of the Melbourne Declaration 2008, this shift in policy modelling was subtle, yet damaging to First Nations families, since it represented departure in the sociology of school organisational spaces, as highlighted in its predecessor (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). In the NATSIES (2015) framework, identity is located as a layer, rather than the foundation.

While this seems insignificant, it is important to signal because for my counter-Story in Chapter 8, an alternate Aboriginal-led social modelling posits the opposite. In stressed and disadvantaged environments, and as plays across Indigenous social realities, this approach is responsive through its attention to addressing the ‘under the table’ forces shaping Aboriginal student and community attitudes, and the subsequent behaviours that ripple from this state; issues the 1989 NATSIEP and its Keating Federal Labour government follow up in the National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (1996–2002) sought to respond to (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017).

**Figure 15: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015**

(Education Council, 2015, p. 4)
The NATSIES (2015) is premised on the ‘homogenised child’, as opposed to the system of learning, and with learning outcomes as the core goal, rather than as a by-product of the environmental frames of the school. What is cloaked is a dichotomised view away from recognition that learning is fundamentally a social exchange and that knowledge and skills applied within a social context are underwritten by the ethical and moral dimensions (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Yeaman, 2005). Conflict in schools, for example, arguably occurs less for deficiencies in student knowledge of what constitutes appropriate behaviour, than how such behaviours are ‘legitimised’ within the broader culture of the school and community (Hinde, 2004). While an agenda of performativity has led to tightened controls, such attempts struggle to flex with the constant social tides they are bound within. It is here that Christie and Limerick (2005) argued that politics and market conditions often have more pivotal roles in the way education has been problematised, and this policy has been a sinister application of these sociopolitical forces.

This profile reflects the influences of a neoliberal discourse behind power enclaves that seek to polarise positivist-driven framing of the social condition of schools (Hulgin & Drake, 2011; Matthews, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 6, education bureaucracies have functioned as self-deterministic servants of government, instituting policy reforms through command and control systems, based on perceived school deficits (Pring, 2000). In this way, the movement from the 1990s toward decentralisation of the Australian schooling system has largely resulted in amplified levels of accountability, threats and disempowerment of principals and schooling communities who struggled to establish application of reform models predicated on what Reid (2002, p. 571) described as a “quasi-market”, with the social properties that enable implementation (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Ranson (2003, p. 459) warned this philosophy had strengthened so much in the past 40 years that it is no longer an instrument of the system, but “is the system”. This problematising, when layered across NT remote Aboriginal contexts, has been an abject failure.

The present discourses of ‘empowering’ and ‘providing additional resources’ to school communities appear likely to remain tempered within this prevailing environment; one that supresses the capacity of schools to upwardly navigate this positivist agenda, which produces buckling at the organisational levels (Hulgin & Drake, 2011; Matthews, 2013). It is within this tension that Eisenberg (2006) suggested a radical departure from an individual choice and merit-based model of competition and market-driven reform agenda, in favour of alternative policy paradigms. Moran (2010, p. 48) argued this discourse in NT remote Aboriginal communities is especially dysfunctional “where there is little agreement between governments and Aboriginal people on what constitutes development”. In the absence of defined agreement between Aboriginal members and non–Indigenous government bureaucrats on what constitutes education in remote settings (Tatz, 2009), education in NT remote community contexts has remained captured within a nebulus and irrelevant policy discourse.
A counter-paradigm to school organisational design

The paradigm reflected in the NATSIES (2015) remains unchanged, despite its failure to advance NT remote Aboriginal education beyond its lowered, patterned expression (see Chapter 4). But while discussion has been ongoing about the need for an alternate and more progressive paradigm, a key problem has been that even when this materialises with the research evidence from schools themselves, the intoxication with neoliberalist discourses have not shifted (Apple, 2000). For example, in 2002 the federal government provided funding grants to schools under the program title Boys in Lighthouse Schools Project, which sought ways that boys could be better engaged. These grants were based on reports that, at a national level, it was evident that boys were disengaging school at rates far higher than female students (DEEWR, 2008). After participating schools, which included a school this researcher was managing, provided detailed reports and data back to government, a publication from the (then) Australian Curriculum Corporation was published, titled Success 4 Boys (2006).

This publication recommended ways of engaging boys better in schools and included a framework which required the school culture to respond to the needs of its children through a sociological framing that respected student identity and sense of self as the defining starting point of school strategic design (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Rahman, 2013). While the differences between the two may outwardly appear to be minimal, their differing locations point to deep undercurrents and interactions in how schools are problematised from an ontological research lens and the policy frameworks that arise from overt political acts (Brayboy, 2005). In Figure 16, the consciousness is about manipulating the learning environment, designed by adults, whereas in Figure 15 a student sense of identity is the source radiating out across teaching pedagogies, whole of school strategic planning and community. In the latter model, the school learning environment is significantly crafted through the consciousness of children.

Figure 16: Engaging before attendance: The existential location of the self in school strategic design

The conceptual framework was underpinned by three key assertions, which from the Evaluation Report (DEEWR, 2008), included three key elements:

[i] Understand[ing] boys better. It is necessary to understand how boys’ sense of self as male subjects, their relationship with others, and the cultures within which these develop are implicated in their overall experience of schooling, and in the ways they engage with school learning; [ii] Provide
high-quality teaching and learning opportunities. High-quality pedagogy is the bedrock—the indispensable condition—for enabling students to engage in high-quality learning opportunities; [iii] Ensure that wide school practices and structures are supportive of teachers’ practices. Teaching practices do not exist in a vacuum. They are variously enabled, disabled, constrained or coerced by wider school - and out-of-school - practices and structures. (DEEWR, 2008, p. 71)

Most striking in the feedback from this report was that Australian educators, from an approximate 350 participating schools across Australia, positioned pupil identity and sense of ‘self’ as the foundation to all actions. This contrasts with the bureaucratic lens behind the NATSIES (2015), and resonates with what I have highlighted about the existential experience of Aboriginal students (Blair, 2015; Daniels-Mayes, 2016). A core feature of this paradigm was that, when students were liberated socially and emotionally, they and their school were capacitated in engaging in the higher-order demands and charter of learning (DEEWR, 2008). While in an earlier role as a school principal of a medium-sized urban primary school of approximately 450 students, of which 56% were Indigenous, it was the path taken by this Aboriginal researcher.

While the details of this experience are extensive, it is relevant to briefly comment here that this approach was achieved through working with the school’s student representative council to collect, through survey method, whole of school responses to three questions: 1) how could the school be a fun place for students; 2) how could the school be made a safer place for students; and 3) how could student learning be improved? This school’s strategic plans were derived from this voice of children and resulted in the school winning a major award in schooling excellence in 2010, during the NT’s ‘Smarter Schools’ awards. This award, for the highest acceleration in literacy and numeracy outcomes across the whole school, occurred at a time when no professional development opportunities in these subject areas were available to the school over the period 2008-2010. This strategic agenda, led by the voice of children, had resulted in a rapidly responsive teaching and learning environment for children, elevating the school beyond the anchors within its damaged postcode.

Despite this school being selected as one of two schools in the NT for research that was to inform the National Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework (APIF) in 2009, no acknowledgement of this achievement was received by senior education department bureaucrats and no interest was conveyed to this researcher around how a school with a history of major violence and social dislocation, high staff attrition rates and low performance was interrupted from this pattern. This bureaucratic indifference to a recalibrated social design away from the thoroughfare of neoliberal performativity is not unique. For instance, as Apple (2000) stated of the US context:

Unfortunately, the prominence of relatively unreflective and at times almost self-congratulatory policies around markets, standards, testing, and reductive forms of accountability is prominent. There are numerous examples of extremely effective schools in our urban and rural areas that succeed through using much more democratic and critical models of curriculum, teaching and evaluation. (p. 430)
This indifference is locked within a self-replicating social world of internal decay that everyone pays a high price, especially NT remote Aboriginal families, unable to engage with the education policy on offer. It is against this dynamic that the policy domains of Indigenous cultural inclusion, improved accessibility of schooling services and pathways to employment and development on Country are problematised as policy pillars, given they each remain at the heart of NT remote Aboriginal education progress.

7.4 Summary

This chapter has told the Story of how key structural policy issues can be responded to in ways that NT remote Aboriginal education inequality might be overcome. This chapter has conducted analysis of what the data in Chapter 4 (secondary data) and Chapter 5 (primary field data) have suggested about the depth and nature of the education policy environment, particularly its links to the NT’s sociopolitical context, discussed in Chapter 6. The evidence reveals NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction is embedded within the intersecting political forces of neoliberalism and neocolonialism (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Stewart-Harawira, 2005), and a national education layering anchored across wealth and racial identity (Gibbons and Telhaj, 2007; Kenway, 2013; Ranson, 2003). As I have argued, at the core of this has been Australia’s pursuit of an unstable agenda of social-liberalism and its treatment of a third-way middle ground that has situated awkwardly between socialism and capitalism, as highlighted by Savage (2011).

At the core of this policy failure has been the political economy (Brayboy, 2005; Gillborn, 2014), operating on two levels. For me, the first concerns the NT’s economic dependency relationship, as outlined in the discussion on interest convergence, which has functioned to offset Aboriginal inequality against poor ‘white’ majoritarian inequality under the veil of ‘mainstreaming’ (Gillborn, 2014; Vaught, 2011). The other level has concerned the nature of NT remote settlement upon inalienable land, from which Aboriginal community development has been constructed upon a shared, collective wealth. This economic trajectory, while having strong synergy with the existential realities of remote community life, has been incongruent with western education policy models that are predicated on individualism and materialism (Hulgin & Drake, 2011), corroding further its relevance to remote families. It is argued that these policy agendas persist because, as Tatz (2009) describes, they reflect an NT political economy that is unable and seemingly unwilling to pursue policy approaches that situate beyond the western consciousness that has created this social outcome.

What these key analyses indicate is that the very nature of NT remote Aboriginal education policy dysfunction is due to its operating as part of a broader political economy that has worked to reproduce and maintain remote Aboriginal inequality and arise through conscious acts about power and control (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Vaught, 2011). NT remote Aboriginal families have been
misrepresented as intransigent, when the debate has long been about engaging change from a
strengthened Aboriginal identity because identity is the foundational plank from which to engage a
changing world (Blair, 2015; Daniels-Mayes, 2016). It has been shown that the education policy
architecture has been predicated on making remote children ‘whitened’, while assaulting their own
culture, languages, dignity and identity, and to prepare for a life that doesn’t exist (Daniels-Mayes,

I argue that if the solution to this social mess is to reside anywhere, it is within the hands of Aboriginal
families (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This requires real power being
distributed within a collective Aboriginal First Nation as a fundamental right of Indigenous First
Nations sovereignty, which offers the capacity to form governance models and their flows from
regionalised representation to community development (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Moodie,
2018). This point is captured by Castagno and Brayboy (2008) when discussing Indigenous peoples
links of sovereignty and self-determination:

> The unique status of tribal nations as political entities within the United States means that
issues of Indigenous education must be understood, researched, analysed, and developed
in ways that take into account the sovereign status and self-determination goals of
Indigenous communities. (p. 948)

This approach enables an Aboriginal consciousness to situate policy development in more culturally–
responsive ways because policy becomes much more nuanced around Aboriginal life experiences
(Brayboy, 2005). This concerns the key policy areas of Indigenous cultural inclusion in the delivery of
education services, making remote education far more accessible and relevant, and in strengthening
education pathways to employment and development on Country. The next chapter is my counter–Story
of one alternate pathway, born out of privileging Aboriginal voices, and it demonstrates what can
949), in discussing this policy matrix in respect to Indigenous peoples, stated: “Although tribal
communities have a strong sense of the connections between education, sovereignty, and self-
determination, these connections are rarely recognised among mainstream educators or educational
policy makers”. I thus now turn to defining these connections in Chapter 8.
Chapter 8. Advancing the counter–Story of culturally-responsive policy approaches

8.1 Introduction

That Department [DoE]; you know, the people and the workers, whoever gets employed and, if we are going to make up a true collaboration and true partnership, let go! Let the community run it and they can feel, like we made a mistake, probably do this other way. And they know, eventually they will make any changes, but will be effective. I use my [Dreaming] logo. Slowly but surely you walk, but they look where they’re walking. (Respondent 5, Aboriginal principal)

In Chapters 1–7, I told the Story of education policy failures aimed at NT remote Aboriginal children and their families, and the destruction this has produced for remote Aboriginal communities. While it has been a necessarily long set of interconnecting Stories, they are largely about what transpires when Aboriginal voices are not included in educational policy (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). Chapter 8 is thus different because here I tell the counter–Story (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002); one that has Aboriginal families centred in the education of their children and the broader policy conditions by which this outcome is achieved and sustained to the benefit of the broader community. This chapter is my Aboriginal voice, but it is one of many thousands (Blair, 2015). In Chapter 8 I honour their key messages, and when these are listened to, a new and progressive social reality emerges; one that responds to the existential dimensions of remote communities and the pivotal role that Indigeneity has always had in advancing education policy performance within the layers of Australian capitalism.

The goals set out in this study’s Stories have longstanding recognition, being encapsulated in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) 1989 (Department of Education Employment & Training, 1989), endorsed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. A key statement made by Indigenous Task Force members at the time was clearly articulated: “A new approach to Aboriginal education can only succeed if the Aboriginal community is fully involved in determining the policies and programs that are intended to provide appropriate education for their community” (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017, p. 18). This study has demonstrated that over the past 30 years this has not happened in the NT. The argument set out in this Story thus echoes that previously presented; namely the need for education policies that better respond to NT remote Aboriginal existential realities, voiced by the communities themselves. Specifically, these are: Aboriginal cultural inclusion, more relevant education accessibility models in remote education service provision, and pathways to employment and development on Country.

The argument I extend is that remote education engagement/disengagement is a political act, and as such the sociopolitical dimensions matter. In discussing the international context of Indigenous groups
retaining identity as the central platform in community development, Duffy (2008, p. 506) highlighted that “preservation of cultural identity depends on complex social, political and economic factors”. This chapter thus provides a counter–Story of how creating responsive policy approaches can, through a CRT framework, destabilise these problematic structural forces that anchor NT remote Aboriginal education inequality. At the core of this counter–Story is my view that NT remote Aboriginal student achievement in education can significantly be strengthened through their Aboriginality, and this can be achieved through successful navigation of the political economy (see Chapters 6–7). Lloyd (2008), in this respect, stated:

The idea of ‘regimes’ of political economy affords a means of conceptualising systemically integrated social structures of production that incorporate an analytical hierarchy of forces and powers, including ideologies, cultures, governance arrangements and institutions, financial institutions, workplace regulations and practices, organisations of production processes, and distributional processes. The complex interconnections into a systemic process with stability and path dependency of these social structures of production is theorised as a regime of regulation in both formal and substantive senses. (p. 44)

Therefore, a discussion of the political economy is also a discussion of capitalism, and an attempt in navigating around and/or through the multi-layered and multi-directional anchors (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Bone, 2012) is an advancement of social capitalism. This is restated in further detail in the final sections of this chapter on a basis of offering the broader, synchronised dimensions to this study’s key assertions and what they suggest about the nature of a culturally–responsive and sustainable future NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

Arguably, Aboriginal social capital theory has been under-utilised in understanding how the key institutions of development can be advanced (Page, 2015; Walter, 2015) and in this chapter I respond to this call, after I have outlined the practical policy dimensions that underwrite my claims to this middle ground, which I outlined in Figure 8, section 3.3.

8.2 Locating the counter–Story of success

This counter–Story emphasises that after two centuries of colonisation, Indigenous families need to be centred in the solutions because the anchors stem from an external world geared to inequality, and the group who can change this are Indigenous people. This means locating education beyond the economic and bankrupt practice of its wrapping around a market-driven neoliberal, colonial discourse (Brayboy, 2014; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). However, research framed within ideals of social enhancement, where the goal in life is happiness sought through “practices that are ends in themselves” (Stevenson, 2010, p. 278) and should be geared within Australian education policy architecture, is problematic. That is, while such ideals sit upon a ‘gregarious’ property in human socialisation as a ‘social law’ that is facilitative of building strengthened social bonds across populations, aggression is a persistent feature.
in everyday human interactions, and it too has its anchors, particularly where it manifests around materialism and/or delivers advantage to those whose privilege it is constructed upon (Vaught, 2011).

Thus, in advancing culturally-responsive education policy approaches (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Yosso, 2005), the evidence of ‘what works’ needs to be critically analysed against the political economy, since this is where sociopolitical power interactions occur and give rise to action (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). This is because ‘what works’ is contextually bound spatially and across time, given the fluid nature of the physical and social world (Bauman, 2005), and is often projected within environmental vacuums. Therefore, in advancing responses simultaneously at the individual, school and community and societal levels, means wading through the porous ‘evidence’ and locating the axioms and caveats surrounding NT remote Aboriginal education progression. In understanding then how ideals of equality of educational opportunity might be manufactured within an Aboriginal world, ‘what works’ is calibrated around the foundational sociological axioms and policy platforms to engagement, rather than specific intervention programs.

So, while this counter–Story is about strengthening the NT’s remote Aboriginal education policy environment, it is does so through pushing back against ‘white’ hegemony (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) in ways that assist in navigating the problem of a stratified mainstream schooling system, and with it, opportunities in tempering Australia’s destructive and costly neoliberal trajectory (Matthews, 2013; Savage, 2011) (See Apple’s (2000) similar discussion on the US and UK contexts). Figure 17 depicts this response through ‘inverting the consciousness’ behind the problem. In this diagram, the triangle represents Australia’s broadened base of those with reduced wealth and the social challenges this produces, and the circle represents the location of Aboriginality as the key mechanism in countering NT remote Aboriginal inequality (Altman, 2009; Tatz, 2009). This chapter sets out the argument for how this can be achieved within a policy sense, which starts with revisiting some of the key foundations that have functionality with NT remote Aboriginal existentialism.

Figure 17: Inverting the consciousness: Indigeneity as a foundation for patterned NT remote Aboriginal student achievement within a stratified western education system

![Diagram](image-url)

Indigeneity: The key to equality of educational opportunity within societal stratification
8.2.1 Foundations to NT remote Aboriginal community advancement

The legal underpinnings of NT remote Aboriginal community ‘communal’ development

In telling this counter–Story, it is important to highlight the western legal framework underpinning ownership of Aboriginal land in the NT, since it provides a foundational context to much of what is to follow. As discussed in Chapter 7, Aboriginal community ownership of lands is bound within complex NT land rights legislation that makes clear that land is ‘owned’ under a communal arrangement; but still under the control of ‘white’ privilege, as the 2007 Intervention revealed (Vaught, 2011; Velardi, 2017). As defined in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, and as amended in 2011, this legislative instrument provides the western legal framework in granting of traditional Aboriginal land in the NT, for the benefit of Aboriginal families, with the management of these lands divested to Aboriginal-led Land Councils (Commonwealth of Australia, 1976). In the NT this comprises the Northern Land Council, the Central Land Council and the Anindilyakwa Land Council. These established models in Aboriginal governance include Aboriginal regional boards of management and accountability processes with the NT and federal governments.

However, this communal ownership of land has specifically been put forward as a ‘barrier to development’, for example, in areas such as in attracting capital for investment and home ownership (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Bradfield, 2005), being used as a key argument of government in the 2007 NTER. At that time the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) determined through the Working (Stronger) Futures program (referenced to the NT 2030 Plan and CTG) that reforms occurred through six building blocks of: early childhood; schooling; health; economic participation; safe communities; and governance and leadership (Australian Government, 2010, p. 4). These six building blocks were situated upon twenty ‘growth towns’ (fifteen identified by the NT government with an additional five from the federal government) as a means of extending capitalism into the bush. This model had rationalised and justified homelands as a low priority, including communities outside the designated growth towns, which were based on populations of above one thousand members (Austin-Broos, 2011).

This raises key concerns for Aboriginal community development and ideals of education policy improvements. The first is that the Northern Territory Intervention (2007) sought (as part of the additional layers of intervening) the leasing of Aboriginal townships to a government entity, which, as detailed earlier, required a suspension of the 1976 Act to enable subleases for businesses to stimulate investments from the private market (Terrill, 2009). In support of this action, Aboriginal advocate Warren Mundine, member of the National Indigenous Council, stated: “We need to move away from communal land ownership and non–profit community-based businesses and take up home ownership, economic land development and profit-making businesses” (Bradfield, 2005, p. 3). However, in telling this counter–Story, such economic essentialism not only perpetuates failed colonising accounts of how
remote Aboriginal community development happens, but, as Tatz (2009) makes clear, fails to factor an Aboriginal existential position in development, which continues to be ignored in policy design.

In my extensive experiences in living and working alongside Aboriginal families across four regions of the NT, home ownership is not a deeply pursued goal. For the vast majority I have met and know well, it is the spiritual connection with land and the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture that are important; not the mortar and bricks, as important these are as places to live. It is this existential value of everyone owns the community and the land, as Duffy (2008) pointed out: “The relationship to the land is collective, rather than individualised. Land is not conceived in monetary terms, but as inextricably connected to Indigenous culture” (p. 508). For me, it is this rejection of materialism (Blair, 2015) that a ‘socialist backdrop’ is legitimised across the tensions between social and capital, and I thus now turn to what I consider are the foundations to this claim.

**Locating the foundational policy elements behind NT remote community development**

In identifying the foundations to remote Aboriginal community development, Morley (2015) identified seven factors: community ownership and control; embedding Indigenous culture; employment for Indigenous families; strong community governance; a harness of community capacities; trusting partnerships; and flexibility around development. This list offers the foundational elements required in local community development because they point to the strengthening of identity and pride as the cornerstones of an Aboriginal political economy engaging unequally with a western political economy (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Page, 2015). The list points to Aboriginal development constructed by Aboriginal families, with Aboriginal families and for Aboriginal families. In this section each of these are briefly unpacked as a collective foundational precondition to NT remote education policy advancement. While this section deals with the material side of culturally-responsive schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), the areas discussed are part of the much tabled ‘constants’ in community development. The Story that follows investigates the policy undercurrents that give rise to the elements previously discussed.

**The story of community ownership and control**

The Story of community ownership and control is significant because it offers direct responses to community need and provides for authority and autonomy over community-led projects, building commitment and enthusiasm of those involved in the program (Campbell et al., 2004; Hoffmann et al., 2012; Smith, 2010). A key issue in self-management and determination is that for resources to flow into these ideals (i.e. housing and other infrastructure development as projects under Indigenous ‘controls’), western laws and rules that accompany funding apply through instruments of government auditing and ‘whitened’ accountability mechanisms (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Page, 2015; Robinson, 2015). That is, ownership and control remain caught and subjected to unrelenting racialised western narratives about how development should happen.
Countering/disrupting by embedding Indigenous culture

Embedding Indigenous culture into policy and practice is highlighted as critical to Indigenous success, especially in respect to disrupting 200 years of colonisation that have scarred families (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). Indigenous healing programs focused on addressing intergenerational trauma deliver programs that have Aboriginal participants immersed in their own culture, and as valued in a contemporary context (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). It is here that local community-controlled organisations are central in maintaining local culture, as they are embedded in their community, cultures and country, and provide ‘culture’ in a way that others cannot. Writing about the similar experiences of North American Indigenous Peoples, Brayboy (2014) stated in respect to education:

Education in its many forms is imbued with power: power to control young peoples’ bodies, epistemic engagement, curriculum and teaching; power to best determine how education and schooling are utilized and to what end; power to control what kinds of knowledge is shared-or not-when, and where. (p. 396)

An important aspect of embedding culture is privileging an Indigenous worldview; one that is relationally and holistically based on community and family obligations, and one that situates at the centre of aligning an experience of education that strengthens a sense of individual and communal identity (Martin, 2008).

Employment for Indigenous families

Employment for local Indigenous peoples is a major factor in remote community development, the same as elsewhere (Brayboy, 2014; Campbell et al., 2007; Smith, 2010). Morley (2015) discussed this point, citing the Child Growth Project at the remote community of Gapuwiyak in the NT. At the core of this investigation, I identified the employment of local Aboriginal staff familiar with the community’s issues as a key ingredient to communicating the program in appropriate language and in a way that matched their local social and cultural values (Morley, 2015). Tsey et al., (2009), highlighted research by Tsey, Harvey, Gibson and Pearson (2009), where Indigenous facilitators working in a family wellbeing program were critical to its success given their Indigenous life experience and emphasis on values that resonate with Indigenous belief systems. Further, the AIATSIS study also stressed the importance of staff development to ongoing Indigenous organisational success and that “skilled, competent staff are crucial building blocks for a strong organisation” (AIATSIS, 2007, p. 18).
**Strong community governance**

At the core of effective and sustainable community-managed programs and service is strong governance. For example, Morley (2015) told of the Old People’s Program, which provided community-based aged care services for Warlpiri Elders in the NT remote community of Yuendumu, where I was a school principal. As witnessed, services included social and health support, meals on wheels, personal care and short-term housing (Morley, 2015). The service sourced a family model of care, based on principles of cultural comfort and community control. This service was designed by local people and provided “from within Warlpiri cultural practices rather than Warlpiri needs being accommodated within another cultural construct” (Morley, 2015, p. 6–7, citing Smith et al., 2010). In practice, this meant the service was delivered by local Warlpiri, according to local kinship and cultural protocols, such as respecting avoidance relationships and adhering to the rules of kinship. This model, which had culture as the central consideration, was seen as the main factor for the very high community acceptance of the service (Morley, 2015).

**Harness community capacity**

Harnessing existing community capacity is important to building responsive community enterprises. Campbell et al. (2007) in Morley (2015) outlined the example of a Walpiri program in Yuendumu, Central Australia, that was focused on addressing the endemic problem of petrol sniffing; one where I, in an earlier role as principal of this community’s school, had some involvement. Part of its success was due to community members having experienced previous, successful family counselling programs (Campbell & Stojanovski, 2001), and evaluation of several community projects revealed that success was directly due to Indigenous leadership (Burchill, Higgins, Ramsamy, & Taylor, 2006). As I found through numerous experiences in Yuendumu, as in the other regions that I lived and worked, strong Indigenous leaders associated with projects strengthened other success factors, such as trust and flexibility (Burchill et al., 2006), and above all, the opportunity for family members to engage in communal development.

**Trusting partnerships**

The research literature confirms that a key success factor underpinning effective Indigenous-managed programs is having strong, trusting relationships with partner organisations (Campbell et al., 2007; Hoffmann et al., 2012; Morley, 2015). It is common for programs in Indigenous communities to be run in partnership or shared governance and funding arrangements with government or another organisation, where success is contingent on strong, trusting relationships (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). In the decade that I led remote community schools, I did so in partnership with families and children, and at the core of this was always trust and respect. Building trusting relationships takes time (Burchill et al., 2006; Campbell et al., 2004) and programs do well when there are strong personal relationships between key representatives of partner organisations and when regular face-to-face visits and communication channels are used to stay in touch (Hunt, 2010).
Flexibility around development

Flexibility in work/project implementation factors in cultural obligations and the dual worlds of NT remote Aboriginal families. Citing the case of the Yolngu Child Growth Project in Arnhem Land, NT, Morley (2015) highlighted that inadequate timelines led to frustration with the project and government funding agency. In cases of partnerships between Indigenous communities and external organisations, long-term commitments establish and maintain collaborations within the community context and over time (Hoffmann et al., 2012; Smith, 2010; Morley, 2015). Here, Indigenous families focus on the material and human assets within the community, rather than what does not exist. This approach rejects raciolgies of ‘deficit’ and ‘disadvantage’ (Garcia & Guerra, 2004) and identifies Aboriginal community-based social networks and assets and the value these hold for development (Walter, 2015). This includes principles of bottom-up development, empowerment, community ownership and decision-making, and informed through community members’ strong connection to land, family and culture (Kenny, 2011). As Arefi (2008), in authoring a United Nations report on human settlement, stated:

Instead, it aims to encourage an attitude favourable to change and capacity-building by cutting across professional boundaries. This asset-based approach seeks to identify, and capitalize on, the tangible and intangible assets available to a community, rather than what it lacks. (p. 3)

As this example of an international counter–narrative shows, this approach moves away from externally-determined racialised, deficit discourses of ‘what doesn’t exist’ (and is therefore needed) to one that identifies what does (Yosso, 2005), particularly in respect to Indigenous human and social capital, now discussed.

8.2.2 NT remote Aboriginal community cultural capital: A counter–Story to ‘white’ deficit discourses

At the core of NT remote community education policy dysfunction is the imperialist backing of a failed policy environment (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), even when outcomes have consistently shown the abysmal failure of such views and where the unsustainable costs are encumbered to the economy and the broader community (Matthews, 2013). In studies of the US education system, Garcia and Guerra (2004) highlighted that school reforms targeting under-served communities often failed to address the core issues of policy dysfunction; instead, pathologising the students as the problem in need of ‘fixing’ (Macoun, 2011). Of this tunnel-vision, Yosso (2005) stated:

Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child’s education. As a result, schooling efforts usually aim to fill up supposedly passive students with forms of cultural knowledge deemed valuable by dominant society. Educators most often assume
that schools work and that student, parents and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system. (p. 75)

A key reason for this raciology has been a limited framework in understanding how Aboriginal family ways of knowing, being and doing are shaped from the perspective of being Aboriginal and the different ways in which reality is constructed and experienced (Blair, 2015). While discussing ‘communities of colour,’ Yosso (2005, p. 75) identified these limitations around “personal sociocultural and linguistic experiences and assumptions about what constitutes appropriate cultural outcomes”. This world of Aboriginal families is disconnected from the cultural capital of western education, where NT remote schools operate across dualistic and competing realities (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). For this counter–Story, while cultural capital is comprised of the elements of culture, the central mechanism is how these are framed and applied within the social spectrum of human relationships and how these transpire within an economic environment, predicated on human capital (Carson, 2011). I argue that it is here that cultural capital, which Yosso (2005) defined as having six forms, has its role in NT remote Aboriginal community development.

8.2.3 Applying an Aboriginal metrics to a counter–Story of success

Employing a CRT lens, Yosso (2005, p. 77) asserted marginalised communities of ‘colour’ are far from being empty vessels in need of filling with western culture and, through application of humanistic metrics, asserted these communities instead nurture cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital, as depicted in Figure 18, below.

Figure 18: A model of community cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005, p.77)
Aspirational capital
For this counter–Story, Yosso’s (2005) aspirational capital has long been with Indigenous Australia, because after 200 years of colonisation and racialised acts, families have survived and reformed in strength, as Table 7 (p. 54) reveals. Yosso (2005) defined this as the ability of having resiliency and hopes and dreams for a strengthened future, despite the obstacles and the deaths and attempts at assimilation inflicted on Indigenous groups. In this context Brayboy (2014, p. 402) stated: “Survival should not be simply marked as ‘hanging on’. Instead, survival should be viewed and framed through a lens of possibility, building on and strengthening local capacity, and revitalization”.

Linguistic capital
For Yosso (2005), while the function of language is about communicating and includes the intellectual and social skills in communication, language identity and the importance of bilingualism, linguistic capital prioritised the importance of racialised cultural history and language (Yosso, 2005). As discussed, this has been a central theme in this thesis, as raised in the tensions concerning bilingual schools in the NT and its role in identity. Linguistic capital has remained a key element in the rejection of the current education models on offer (Collins & Lea, 1999).

Familial capital
For Yosso (2005), familial capital referred to the transmission of cultural identity through extended kinship systems. At the core of this are the Elders, the holders of knowledge and importantly wisdom, whose voices I have echoed in this study. Brayboy (2014, p. 401), on this point, stated: “In order to live and survive, communities need people with wisdom. Their wisdom, however, is tied to places where Stories and wisdom reside. In this way, wisdom is more than simple education; wisdom is about what we know toward particular ends, namely for survival”.

Social capital
While social capital has been discussed by many, there has for some time been criticism of the lack of importance placed on the role of subjectivism and the deepened nuances within social networks, as discussed by Bottero (2009). In contrast, it is the acceptance of subjectivity that Yosso (2005) defined social capital as the strength, which is applied in this counter–Story. For Yosso (2005), social capital was defined as the networks of people and community resources that can collectively be harnessed in supporting individual and community success.

Navigational capital
For Yosso (2005), navigational capital referred to the resilience and sophisticated ability to navigate through social institutions, including those racially hostile bodies that have played roles in Indigenous inequality. For me, this is the basis for my thesis, which is to reject ‘white’ accounts of Aboriginal
educational inequality, through unpacking the failures and advancing sophisticated policy pathways through this social milieu.

**Resistant capital**

*Resistant capital* was defined by Yosso (2005) as the knowledge and skills wealth accumulated through the opposition to racism and subordination to unjust acts, which my earlier Stories have shown. It is this ability to deepen clarity in maintaining Indigenous culture as a defining existential foundation to identity in engaging an external world, where majoritarian colonial discourses are dislocated and countered (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Vaught, 2011).

**Applying Yosso’s (2005) framework of community cultural wealth**

This framework of community cultural capital reimagines the NT’s remote Aboriginal community context as one of persistently untapped social wealth by education policy designers. The counter-Story is that most Aboriginal families in most NT remote Aboriginal communities continue to practice language, live by the key institution of Aboriginal customary law and resist a colonising and irrelevant education offering. In this universe, the alternative is to live a life that is to be and remain Aboriginal, and achieve this through resisting coloniser attempts to move this existential foundation through the ‘weaponizing of education’. This is what I mean by policy violence and why it cannot work.

This educational policy violence, unpacked through Chapters 1–7, has been ongoing around the key Aboriginal existentially-related policy domains of Indigenous cultural inclusion, relevant accessibility to school services and pathways to employment/community development on Country. In Chapter 5 the findings of the field research highlighted the deep conflicts between NT DoE actions, as they interacted across these policy domains in NT remote Aboriginal community contexts. The dominant themes that emerged from the Chapter 5 analysis of these domains offered primary data evidence to three sets of ‘truth’ concerning remote education. Key to the discussion in this chapter, these are restated here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The NT remote community reality</th>
<th>Government policy responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Aboriginal cultural inclusion is at the core of improving remote Aboriginal school services as it offers a sense of functional purpose in the lives of those targeted.</td>
<td>This has not been a centrally located service platform within NT remote education policy formatting since the demise of bilingual education policy in 1997.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The accessibility of remote school services has not improved. At the core of disengagement is lack of purpose and low participation rates of local families, as revealed in the secondary data reports on attendance reveal.</td>
<td>Key policy approaches in SEAM, DI and boarding schools have not worked for most students disengaged from education. In many instances these policies have been complicit in increasing the disengagement of Aboriginal children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pathways to employment and development on Country are non-negotiable and more likely to develop through expanded Aboriginal-controlled local and regional economic hubs.

No coherent nor sustainable education policy mapping exists that links to a broader pathway to employment on Country, particularly one that factors in small communities and homeland centres.

**Values central to Indigenous education policy formatting**

This mismatch between policy intent and policy outcomes has occurred because two very different realities have played out around what is understood to be education and the values that shape schooling performance. In commenting on this in relation to Indigenous education in the US under the neoliberal trajectory of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Castagno and Brayboy (2008) stated:

> Schools are moving further away from providing an effective, high-quality, and culturally-responsive education to Indigenous youth. Indeed, to equip a child with the capability to exist in the world requires value judgments about what that child needs to succeed (p. 946).

Drawing on the US Indigenous context, Castagno and Brayboy (2008), citing Skinner (1999), identified a core set of values and cultural norms that I argue have relevance to the design needs of NT remote Aboriginal schools:

> Amidst our cultural and linguistic diversities, we share guiding values that could form the base of a tribal code of education or could become curricular content, learned through interdisciplinary activities. These shared values include generosity and cooperation; independence and freedom; respect for Elders and wisdom; connectedness and love; courage and responsibility; indirect communication and non-interference; silence, reflection and spirit. (p. 956)

In then considering the structural arrangement of Indigenous culture in the formatting of education, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) caution that its placement in school services is hinged upon its location within a holistic and integrated platform that facilitates its likelihood of long-term success. In responding to this need, the following section outlines my ‘Enabling Policy Pillars’—my policy propositions in light of the key findings asserted in this study. It is important to note that up to this point in the thesis I have used the term ‘problematised policy domains’, as a way of drawing attention to why they matter, and how and why these domains haven’t been fully understood in education debates aimed at NT remote Aboriginal contexts. This terminology now changes to what they can look like through an Aboriginal, counter–Story perspective (Blair, 2015; Yosso, 2005).

These are now described and reified as ‘pillars’, and are expanded conceptually in ways that offer a coherent and disrupting policy trajectory to that discussed in Chapters 1–7. I devote the remainder of

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43 Brayboy (2014) uses the term Indigenous in reference to Native American Indian/ First Nations education.
this chapter to a policy way forward. It is an Aboriginal-owned policy architecture: a path that locates Aboriginality at the epicentre of NT remote Aboriginal education, and how this is achieved and sustained through the global and stratifying forces of Australian capitalism. This path can only truly be appreciated until after the long road travelled in this thesis, where I necessarily needed to dissect and strip away policy interactions across wealth and ‘race’, and their binary exchanges in neoliberalism and neocolonialism.

8.3 Progressing a counter–Story of education in NT remote Aboriginal community contexts: The enabling policy pillars

8.3.1 The case for robust, geared policy pillars

The following policy pillars are presented in their collective capacity to improve the NT remote Aboriginal education policy environment. A ‘geared’ approach, as represented in Figure 19, respects that multi-directional social, cultural, economic and political forces require geared policy pillars to serve as foundations to improving the sociological condition of education (Matthews, 2013; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004), and thereby offer a counter–Story of educational ‘success’ that is defined through an Aboriginal metric. They are the axioms and constants in the sea of variables that play out within a fluid world of change and uncertainty (Bauman, 2005) that impact the existential world of NT remote Aboriginal community life (Yosso, 2005).

As already mentioned, these policy pillars are not new, but they are reified here because, as this thesis has shown, they are not well understood and the ongoing attempts that have sought to connect into the spaces they reflect continue to fail, as Chapter 5 highlighted. My enabling policy pillars are presented in this counter–Story as the guiding lens into what matters to those living within the envelope of an Aboriginal inner reality that is complex and overlaid by colonisation and embedded racism (Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillborn, 2014).

Figure 19: Framework of geared education purpose
Applying a relevant sociological modelling to remote Aboriginal schools

For a geared policy pillar framework to work, it needs to be located within social and cultural policy, as the enabling foundation to engaging the hearts of Aboriginal children (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). It is from this point of entry to school that is critical in environments of oppressive colonisation (Brayboy, 2014; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). And it is also where social capitalism emerges to counter this onslaught, which is for children to experience the institution of education as a positive experience, based on love and connections that radiate outward to functional purpose. This modelling runs counter to contemporary western-style approaches, which operate on a premise of connecting with minds first, through popular discourses of school, as the key mechanism to engagement (see Chapters 2 and 7). As discussed, this popular neoliberal policy approach has arguably never been a particularly successful model for mainstream majoritarian schools (Giesinger, 2011; Oginga-Siwatu, 2011; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009), let alone in remote Aboriginal community contexts.

This strategic approach where engagement of the existential self as the first step, where the quality of learning outcome is regulated through the quality of the social frames (in which learning is enacted and embodied) isn’t new, as my discussion concerning the Success 4 Boys program (2006) reveals (see page 220). At the core of this approach is recognition that engagement is the defining metric of existential connectivity with the psycho-social dimensions of school, where attendance is a by-product. This approach sits at the core of engaging Aboriginal families and has important implications for a national policy architecture seeking to interrupt mainstream majoritarian education layering (Gibbons and Telhaj, 2007). In a world of inflicted trauma, the core values of love and respect, and their roles in healing and strengthening human dignity, are the foundation from which quality teaching is framed in its humanistic dimension. It is here that social capital is constructed through allied strategic policies and programs, functioning to create a geared response to countering the multipronged nature of disengagement.

Disengagement is different from non-attendance because disengagement is an expression of motivation, whereas the latter is its outcome (Taylor, 2010). Disengagement occurs where families either see little clarity in school, it is difficult to access daily, or competes with Aboriginal customary obligations, culture and other life priorities and challenges (see Chapter 6). Engagement within a ‘whitened’ view of school education, privileges how well children apply themselves in valuing a western world. So, while engagement is about the existentially-driven motivation to participate in education, the translation of this dimension into the strategic education policy environment, beyond the class teacher, has been largely absent (Brayboy, 2014; Daniels-Mayes, 2016). This is evident in the SEAM policy, with its focus on punishing, rather than navigating complexity through increased engagement approaches (Horin, 2011). Discussion in the next section thus focusses on how policies
that respond to such complexity may materialise, through unpacking the key policy planks to Aboriginal cultural inclusion.

8.4 Policy pillar 1: Aboriginal cultural inclusion in NT remote education

Policy pillar 1, Aboriginal cultural inclusion in NT remote education, is at the core of Aboriginal student participation in western education because it is about identity recognition and healing (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Identity is in one sense the ‘human soul’ and the social world reinforces the value of social agents, and where identity is under attack, people attack back because who we are is not negotiable and cannot be re-written through imposed and falsified social indoctrination attempts (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015). In speaking to this, Neville, Viard and Turner (2015) stated: “He who is reluctant to recognize me is against me. In a fierce struggle I am willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility” (p. 248).

As has been shown, the impacts of racialised colonisation have been brutal in trying to eradicate Indigenous identities, creating the social problems and intergenerational trauma that leads to family violence and alcoholism, but also resistance to assimilation (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Westwood, 2003). As Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer (2017, p. 9) commented in an Australian Education Review (2017) into Indigenous education policy, stated: “Indigenous children carry with them the educational and trauma debts of their parents, grandparents and communities”. Thus, in this policy pillar, cultural inclusion is linked with Peace Education because it responds to identity maintenance, education debt and curriculum capacity for children in navigating the racialised turmoil that radiates into the inner sanctum of dignity and pride- and a belief in a future that involves Aboriginal youth as productive members of community development (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

Peace Education strengthens the policy architecture in the way NT remote education services are problematised and responded to, particularly its response to the education debt left at their feet (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is important to clarify that this is not about replacing the Australian Curriculum entirely in respect to the knowledge and skills that children need to survive in a broader world of western capitalism. But the issue is that the curriculum is colonising, and needs to alter in content and formatting and reflect cultural–responsiveness (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Rahman, 2013). Peace Education is a direct policy response to the previous discussion in Chapters 6–7 around the extent of Australia’s history of colonisation and the continued racism directed at remote families (Cowlishaw & Morris, 1997; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017), how this has interacted with the sociopolitical and neoliberal discourses of the NT education policy environment, and their flows into the present.
This policy pillar has four proposed planks: a relevant bicultural curriculum, Aboriginal formal employment in education, application of the principles of Peace Education across curriculum, and Aboriginal governance (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). As revealed throughout this study, the inclusion of Aboriginal culture has a history of fragmented policy attempts, moving from bilingual schooling models in the 1970s, to mainstream majoritarian western formats during the late 1990s (Devlin, 2009; Collins & Lea, 1999). At the core of this shift has been a silencing and denial of Aboriginal voices and identities in policy architecture through the apparatus of institutional hegemony, which has functioned solely to preserve and reproduce ‘white’ privilege in the same that we see in countries such as the US involving First Nations peoples (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Brayboy, 2014). This bankrupted approach is unsustainable, and the counter–narrative is that Aboriginal families are the solution, and at the core of this is Indigeneity (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017; Yosso, 2005). In this policy pillar, four key planks are identified, and will now be discussed.

**Applying the principles of Peace Education**

Peace Education is not new, having long been advocated by the United Nations, since its formation in 1945 (Page, 2008, p. 1). Peace Education as a key element of curriculum is about helping children to learn how to live powerfully within their identities (Yeaman, 2005), where the primacy of a neoliberal agenda of performativity (Matthews, 2013) is filtered out by a prioritisation around ‘Aboriginalised’ curriculum perspectives and learning content. At the core of Peace Education is the infusion of Indigenous cultural content across education, because it matters profoundly in the absence of legislated policy instruments. Australia is the only first-world country that does not have a formal treaty with its Indigenous peoples (Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer, 2017), and the policy violence from this sits acutely within a national curriculum (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Thus, while Peace Education has its original focus on contexts of extreme violence (Harris, 2007), its application here is expanded and considered relevant in countering the embedded racism that is fuelling educational violence within NT remote Aboriginal communities (Westwood, 2003).

It is in this discussion that Harris (2007, p. 6) identified five areas of Peace Education: international education, human rights education, development education, environmental education, and conflict resolution education. In this counter–Story, Peace Education is adopted in its application of conflict
resolution education, given it is a social process that requires social policy modelling which gives capacity for children to learn how to live and thrive as Aboriginal within a non–Aboriginal world. That is, learning about the external world through a strengthened Aboriginal identity. Here, Peace Education is not an exotic attachment to curriculum; it is a concept of knowledge and of a process of learning that finds natural synergy with the social modelling that has largely been left out of the NT’s education policy designs, particularly those policies that have been discussed in previous chapters.

In Canada, Peace Education has philosophic links to Treaty Education, as the Office of the Treaty Commissioner in Saskatchewan stated on its website: “Education is an important aspect of treaty implementation and the treaty relationship in Saskatchewan. Without a foundational understanding of the history of First Nations in the province and the treaties it is very difficult to have reconciliation” (Office of the Treaty Commissioner, 2019, n.p). Tupper (2011, p. 39) stated of this same context: “To be clear, this mandate is not just teaching the facts of the numbered treaties; rather, it is about teaching through Indigenous worldviews and exploring the historical and contemporary relationship between First Nations and settlers”. Since Australia’s First Nations peoples are still denied a treaty, the architecture of curriculum has remained locked within the flows of embedded colonisation and racism (Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Rahman, 2013). Therefore, it is argued in this environment that the Australian Curriculum is violent and a plausible and progressive alternative beyond this mess must be a decolonising curriculum experience.

A decolonising bicultural and bilingual curriculum

In considering this, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) cautioned that simply inserting Indigenous content (i.e. as a subject) into the curriculum is insufficient in building success through identity. Curriculum defines what is important, legitimised and taught to children and as discussed in this study, has served as a major colonising tool through privileging ‘white’ knowledge and belief systems and contests of political power (Brayboy, 2014; Daniels-Mayes, 2016; Rahman, 2013). Advocacy of a bicultural and bilingual curriculum pursues a fundamental human right, but is also non–negotiable because it connects with the existential domain of what it means to be Aboriginal, living in NT remote communities. This point was very specifically unpacked in Chapters 5–6.

In discussing the disrupting CRT narrative of treaty education in Canada, Tupper and Cappello (2008) highlighted the importance of its ‘culturally–valid location within curriculum:

Dismantling dominant narratives is essential to anti-racist education. Teaching treaties provides students with an education that makes visible the mechanisms through which legal and social categories of “other” are created, maintained, and why these processes were deemed necessary. (p. 570)

Curriculum that responds to Indigenous needs is decolonising, and while there is nothing especially new or mysterious as to why this is raised (see discussions by Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Devlin,
2011; Moodie, 2018), the point is that a policy pillar dedicated to Indigenous cultural inclusion (and one that is independent and empowered through Aboriginal peoples in deciding where resources are channelled) will value Aboriginal first languages as part of the curriculum, unlike the present modelling. Locating Aboriginal cultural content as the learning Story of western curriculum allows Aboriginal children to learn about, with and through their identity.

Deloria and Wildcat (2001) discussed how Indigenous children and communities are robbed of a quality education, premised on western content and values:

Indigenous peoples presently do not know how to bring knowledge and information back to the tribe because [schools] have not paid sufficient attention to the history and culture of our people. We have been deluded into thinking that there is no applicability of information on behalf of the tribe or no possibility of making our knowledge meaningful. (p. 86)

As previously discussed, this robbing of cultural histories has long been part of the NT’s education agenda, where Aboriginal educators have been subjected to peripheral and subservient roles to ‘white qualified’ teachers, as the staffing statistics revealed in Table 1 (p. 20). Against this has also been the silencing of debates concerning bilingualism and other views considered important to Aboriginal communities. At the centre of this has been the silencing of a collective and authentic Aboriginal voice in education,44 after the NT Indigenous Education Council ceased in 2014; an act consistent at this time with other Australian jurisdictions that also took the view that Aboriginal voices were not important enough to invest within education policy formatting targeting Aboriginal families.

**A strengthened Aboriginal workforce**

Investigation within this study reveals that Aboriginal formal participation in the NT education system has long been abysmal. This problem has been discussed at length in the previous chapters, where it was shown that despite the continued promises of ‘improvement’, there is an ongoing ‘cloaking’, such as within the NTDoE Annual Report (2016-17) (see Chapters 1 and 6–7). Such ‘cloaking’ relies on a ‘white’ standard metric, and shifts for Aboriginal peoples are unlikely to occur while ‘white’ metrics are applied (Brayboy, 2005). Arguably, this ‘white’ metric is singularly one of the most significant instruments used in the denial of Aboriginal people’s rightful place as educators in NT remote Aboriginal education services. This absence of Aboriginal members in key roles of education service provision has served to denigrate Aboriginal worth and denied the provision of bilingual and bicultural education, but also perpetuated the myth that western knowledge can be taught independent of the existential position of Aboriginal children and their right to a quality education that is not based on equality, but equity.

44 Aboriginal voices are diverse and from different points. Authentic in this instance refers to the broad and major voice of disadvantage.
Integrated Aboriginal governance

The governance of school, such as through school councils, is limited because schools in NT remote Aboriginal communities are strongly interconnected with other areas of community governance (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This proposed modelling already occurs in those (almost) fully-devolved sites, such as the case with Independent Public Schools (IPS) within the government sector (see discussion on page 239 concerning the NT’s only remote Aboriginal IPS). The important lesson, however, is that control over school expands to a broader network of Aboriginal workers, resources and ability to shape education in ways responsive to community needs, rather than imposed ‘white’ agendas. At the core of this is political control and responsibility over the trajectory of schooling policy, and its tailoring to remote Aboriginal community life.

8.5 Policy pillar 2: Accessible remote education services

Policy pillar 2, accessible remote education services, as shown in Figure 21, is about culturally–relevant and responsive policy approaches that enable remote education services to become more accessible. As revealed in Chapter 5, while the bulk of NT policy recommendations and actions were focused on improving the accessibility of remote education services, these had little impact in improving student attendance rates. At the core of this problem has been the absence of attention to engagement, and therefore policy pillar 2 has four planks that respond to this policy vacuum. These include an expanded Aboriginal governance structure at the regional level, the implementation of a rewards approach and integrated service provision, particularly in health and education (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). These have been ignored as pivotal policy, despite having direct relevance to the existential realities of NT remote Aboriginal community life. It is important to point out here that remote outstations are serviced through their hub schools, and on this basis are not separately considered.

Figure 21: Advancing a framework of improved remote education accessibility

Aboriginal regional education hubs

Engagement through rewards for participation

Education & health integrated service provision

Accessible remote education services

Aboriginal regional education hubs

The NT DoE’s corporate structure (2018) is informative in understanding why Aboriginal voices have been silenced, and why this thesis argues the case for Aboriginal regional education hubs managed and led by Aboriginal people. This modelling, shown in Figure 22, revealed a bureaucratic response assembled around an Aboriginal voice, but not through it. This model highlights the points raised about
the nature of institutional hegemony and interest convergence/divergence (Brayboy, 2014; Gillborn, 2014; Vaught, 2011; see also discussion in section 7.3.1). As I have unpacked, the peculiar coupling of international education with Indigenous education, and the designation of a unit titled ‘student engagement’, denotes an inability of a NT education bureaucracy to build a strengthened corporate representation of Aboriginal children’s educational interests. This, despite the evidence (see Chapters 4–5) highlights widespread disengagement in most Aboriginal communities across the NT (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Fenwick, 2000; Klenowski, 2011). It is through the embedding of Indigenous ontologies that the consciousness of an organisation shifts toward understanding the reality in community settings that responsive policies and their associated delivery mechanisms happen.

This is the point made by one Aboriginal principal respondent in Chapter 5:

I think we need to increase Indigenous employment at all levels, and I’m talking about regional directors. Until that happens, you won’t get a real voice. They’d have the Indigenous perspective; they’re looking through those eyes and seeing the real picture. The other thing is being able to work with the people in the community; being able to talk, listen and bring back to the table what’s important to the community. (R8, Aboriginal school principal)

Aboriginal voices and their nuanced policy responses materialise where the structural levers shift away from the balkanising design of bureaucracy, enabling unencumbered Aboriginal representation to a world only known acutely to Aboriginal families. This means a departure from the worn-out machinery of the NT’s centralised education department that has been unable to move beyond its condition.

**Figure 22: NT DoE (partial) corporate structure (2018)**
Policy pillar 2, accessible remote services, responds to this need. This advocated policy pillar has three proposed policy planks: regionalised Aboriginal education hubs; a renewed paradigm/story in developing educational engagement; and strengthened institutional integration in health and education service provision. This policy pillar concerns the widened materialisation of Indigenous voices in education, and has international backing from key events such as the World Indigenous People’s Conference (WIPSCE) 1993 and 1999, which led to the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Education (1999). This statement outlined two key principles: Indigenous people’s rights to an education in Indigenous language; and the need to teach cultural knowledge, spirituality and content (Gillan, Mellor and Krakouer, 2017). Aboriginal ownership of education is a key element in centralising and privileging community voices and injecting the sophistication and wisdom needed in building effective policy responses. This counter–Story is embodied within Gunbalanya, an Aboriginal community located in remote west Arnhem Land in the NT (see map, Chapter 1, Figure 4).

In 2015, the Gunbalanya community, which I am well familiar with, became the first (and to date, only) remote Independent Public School (IPS) within the NT (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This is an extraordinary achievement, and only came about after many decades of the community fighting for self-control over their education services, as one field research participant stated: “We had to wrestle back control of education” (R1 DoE employee). An IPS school is a government school granted increased autonomy concerning most aspects of schooling services, though it remains ‘subscribed’ to government legislation and policy, including a national curriculum and accountability measures. Significantly, even within the challenges imposed by these frames, this school has strengthened autonomy through the governance of a local Aboriginal education board. This Aboriginal governance structure, which has resulted in the delivery of a bilingual program and balanced employment of Aboriginal and non–Indigenous staff around this charter, including high attention to the school’s secondary Vocation and Education Training (VET) programs and the tailoring to community development.

Gunbalanya’s education performance has been acknowledged as outstanding, as highlighted in the recent Australian Education Review, The Case for Urgency: Advocating for Indigenous Voice in Education (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017):

Since 2013 Gunbalanya School, situated in East Arnhem land, has consistently outperformed all other remote schools across the Northern Territory in student achievement. The average student attendance rate in 2016 was 53 per cent with 8 per cent of students attending 90 per cent or more of the time. What sets Gunbalanya apart from most other very remote schools is its ability to consistently have a core of students graduate Year 12. Over the past 4 years, 27 students have graduated with this qualification and moved onto employment or tertiary education. (p. 69)
During visits to this community, I have consistently observed a strongly engaged and integrated services model which included health, early childhood and allied partners and employment organisations. This school, which has the only dual principal model in the NT that comprises an Aboriginal principal working collaboratively alongside a non–Indigenous principal (which, for both principals has existed for some 15 years), is an example of the trajectory in Aboriginal sophistication, as discussed by Moyle and Gillan (2013) in their research into this partnership. But despite this high-performance outcome, there is little evidence that suggests this community Story has been extended by the NT government, particularly in ways that this excellence tells about policy advancement and the underlying Aboriginal political power and governance that Aboriginal education needs to be encased and reified.

This example suggests the future of remote Aboriginal children’s education needs to be in First Nation’s hands, and facilitated through the larger-scaled models of governance (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). Regional education hubs led and managed by Aboriginal peoples have never existed in the NT, and they clearly should, given most schools in the NT are remote and in Aboriginal community settings. Regional education models exist (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012), but only as extensions of ‘white’, bureaucratic entities representing ‘white’ interests. Aboriginal regional hubs offer strengthened opportunity in building relevant policy responses to complex issues; and only those living this complexity are likely to understand the existential nature of problems and their policy responses. In commenting on the NZ context, Santamaria et al. (2015) offered an example outcome of Indigenous autonomy: “Responding to the issues being encountered by Maori within the Aotearoa NZ educational landscape in 2014, a core group of approximately 60 Maori and non–Maori school principals, independent of the NZ Ministry of Education, created the Maori Success Initiative (MSI)” (p. 95).

It is in this regard that Walker, Eketone and Gibbs (2006) outlined that the goal of MSI was to build a critical mass of education leaders and leadership approaches that rejected majoritarian reforms that had resulted in inequities in Maori education. This independence ensured policies aimed at Maori children’s education were based on research “by Maori, for Maori and with Maori” (p. 333). Similarly, the Alaska Native Knowledge Network decades ago developed a list of standards that were to be used alongside the majoritarian curriculum (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), that:

Culturally–knowledgeable students are well grounded in the cultural heritage and traditions of their community; are able to build on the knowledge and skills of the local community as a foundation to achieving personal and academic success throughout life; are able to actively participate in various cultural environments; are able to engage effectively in learning activities that are based on traditional ways of knowing and learning; and demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of the relationships and processes of interaction of all elements in their world. (p. 958-959)

For NT Aboriginal children, such approaches to education would mean, for the first time, the opportunity to learn through and about their Aboriginality.
Engagement through rewards for participation

As discussed earlier, the school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM) policy was premised on punishing families for not attending a colonising schooling experience, and it wasn’t until after a decade of continued poor attendance that it was thrown in the bin of policy failures (Horin, 2011). Remarkably, such failures were identified several years after it commenced, yet they were ignored. The Sydney Morning Herald, in an article titled ‘Welfare Stick Fails for NT Schools’, highlighted outcomes from the program’s first report: “An official evaluation of the trial’s first year shows it did not improve the attendance rate, and had little effect on lifting enrolments” (Horin, 2011). This failure was highlighted across the NT communities I visited in this study (see Chapter 5). Through my analysis of this policy, it is clear that the reason why this program never worked was because the threat of punishment was unsustainable from a resource perspective, and because punishment is especially of limited use in reaching through ideological chasms, particularly when it is targeting Aboriginal peoples’ identity and being.

In Aboriginal community contexts there is little about western, ‘white’ imperialism that family members value, as evidenced by the nature of systemic disengagement (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). The counter–narrative to that destructive, colonising voice is its reverse, which is to reward participation. Rewards come in different forms, but its relevance here is in recognising the oblique nature of remote schools means incentives for participating are better than punishment for disengagement. This approach, which also has profound implication for a layered mainstream majoritarian education service provision (Giesinger (2011), is arguably an important step in shifting schools toward functionality and responsiveness to the difficulty’s families have in reaching into what for many has emerged as a site of punishment for being Aboriginal (Tatz, 2009).

Education and health integrated service provision

The nexus in education and health has been discussed in Chapters 6–7, a nexus that affirms why these connections are critical in developing education services. Learning Lessons (1999) highlighted this need to move toward integrated service provision in NT remote Aboriginal community settings, as one key response to meeting the multiple layered nature of structural inequality in education services (Collins & Lea, 1999; Matthews, 2013). But several decades later this is yet to materialise—at least beyond the physical separations of service provision. The inter-relationships of education and health are significant factors in remote communities, and yet service provision still largely remains through institutional silos working within partnership agreements that express little departure from orthodox service provision.

In demonstrating the point of what the alternative can be, I had the great fortune to visit the Laramba Aboriginal community government school, located on Napperby station (Central Australia) around 2001. This experience, which occurred as part of a fact-finding mission by a delegation of NT school principals (of which I was a member), showcased Aboriginal sophistication in how integrated service
provision could, and should, look from an Aboriginal existentialist lens (Moodie, 2018). The model in operation at that time is reflected in Figure 23. In this Story, the Elder care facility was physically located in the school grounds, enabling the connections between Aboriginal education, as transmitted through the wisdom within story-telling, and western education. Students enrolled in VET programs were also connected into this education model through direct employment pathways, including those pursuing careers in the hospitality industry. At the Laramba Aboriginal Community at this time, VET students undertaking cookery would prepare meals for Elders in care and school children.

For this counter–Story, what is significant about Laramba, was the direct association of this Indigenous-led response with Altman’s (2009) late 1970s model of hybrid economy (see Figure 7 for the original, and my adaptation of this model in Figure 25). As Altman (2009) described, western metrics of performance have limited value in this form of social mapping and it was during my visit that this view became clear to me. Laramba revealed an investment in Aboriginal values, as the first and key pivotal point in education, and these values transported through employment and community development. The critical narrative about Laramba was that it showcased what remote Aboriginal social capitalism looked like, particularly through the high value placed on social connectivity at all generational levels and the distribution of wealth back into a community collective, through the bonds of kinship (Walter, 2015).

Here, and driven by what Brayboy (2014) highlighted as the location of wisdom, Customary, for me represents the largest investment interacting with the State and market.

**Figure 23: Integrated service provision from an Aboriginal lens**

Laramba is highlighted because it also reflects my family history. Napperby station is a cattle station located on Aboriginal land, and is where an uncle of mine worked for a few years in the 1940s. I once asked my uncle about this experience, of which he gave one reply: “That head stockman, he was very cruel. He used to make us [Aboriginal stockman] work all day, and he used a great big stock-whip, which he would hit me with. I was only a boy”. It is against this violent history that this continued resistance of sitting on their traditional homelands, 200 years after they were violently seized by colonialists, demonstrated the powerful dignity and endurance of an Aboriginal spirit. For me, Laramba demonstrated an Aboriginal consciousness in binding the institutions that matter, and which linked education as a relevant and lifelong learning act deeply integrated across the whole of community life,
from the very young to the elderly. This sophisticated webbing is very different from a western format, which separates and compartmentalises learning and its population.

8.6 Policy pillar 3: Education pathways to employment and development on Country

Policy pillar 3, education pathways to employment and development on Country, focuses alignment of remote education services in ways that increase employment and community building on Country. A key human development foundation is access to land and sea to generate local economies (Bandias, Fuller and Holmes, 2012). But as discussed in Chapter 5, none of the three major reviews into NT remote Aboriginal education offered explicit consideration of the pathways of education to jobs and development on Country. Yet, it is a critical aspect of education because it is about purpose (Matthews, 2013), and while this has been reflected in VET training and industry partnerships in the larger communities (see Chapter 5), it is also about increased opportunities for the thousands of young Aboriginal children living on Country, in small communities (Carson, 2011). This pillar includes the key plank of Aboriginal-led regional economic development, and while this in part already exists across the NT’s regional land councils and business entities, no policy frameworks exist that embed these organisations within NT remote education services.

Figure 24: Advancing a framework pathway to employment on Country

Policy pillar 3, education pathways to employment and development on Country, has three proposed key planks: regionalised Aboriginal-led economic hubs; an economic platform that pursues synergies with the hybrid economy long in operation in NT remote communities (Altman, 2009); and increased definition of education as pathways to Aboriginal employment on Country through the investments of human capital (Carson, 2011). The NT is the smallest jurisdiction in Australia with a population of 247,300, representing approximately 1% of a national population of 24,992,400, but the highest
proportion of Indigenous people, representing 25.5% of the NT population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Analysis by Carson, Taylor and Raman (2008, p. 4) in their study of the economic demography of NT small towns, identified there were “32 remote towns with between 200 and 500 people, 18 towns with between 500 and 1000 people, and 6 towns between about 1000 and 2000 people”. This presents significant challenges in respect to how economies of scale are developed to enable employment and development on Country.

A recent report snapshot by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018) into the wellbeing of Aboriginal youth aged 10–24 years, for example, highlighted this challenge for young people:

In 2014–15, almost 2 in 3 (65%) Indigenous people aged 15–24 reported experiencing one or more personal stressors in the previous year. The most common type of stressor was not being able to get a job (26%). Other stressors that affected young Indigenous people were death of family member or close friend and serious illness. (p. 9)

The very nature of most Aboriginal communities being small and remote, requires large public investment projects to encourage economic flow-on effects, and these need to provide not just jobs, but encourage investment to gear away from the debilitating impacts of welfare dependency (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Carson, 2011). At the core of this is incentive, and, citing Altman (2007), economic development in NT remote communities has needed to factor at least five conditions: a need to factor Indigenous diversity and difference that requires planning at the local and regional levels; genuine partnerships with communities and clear channels of Indigenous representation and aspirations; realistic local and regional investments; investment that enables opportunity to take advantage of traditional lands; building of local intercultural organisations and institutions and capabilities; and for planning at the local and regional levels, in order to achieve sustainable outcomes (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012).

This challenge in strengthening NT regional economies is not a new idea, but like the other policy pillars discussed in this chapter, needs to be resolved within the political economy (Carson, 2011). This economic strategy has a poor history in the NT, being corrupted with an ongoing narrative of neocolonial racism, poor politics and poor policy modelling. The 20 growth towns, as sites of economies of scale, emerged as part of the federal government’s ‘Stronger (Working) Futures’ economic agenda, linked to the broader policy disaster in the 2007 Intervention (Macoun, 2011), discussed earlier. This mixing of a strategic economic agenda was arguably ‘white’ Australia’s most racist policy act since the Stolen Generations, and achieved a major backward movement in Australian ‘race’ relationships, as acknowledged by government a decade later (Everingham, 2017). Against this history, the need for a coherent economic framework remains.
**Strengthening NT remote Aboriginal regional economic hubs**

Policy pillar 3, pathways to employment and development on Country, is connected to the design, function and purpose of remote Aboriginal education and cannot be ignored in the journey of Aboriginal self-determination. As Beadman (2004) stated about the continuous failures in coordinated development:

Coordination will not occur until effective local/regional organisations take command, determine their own priorities, and tell governments what will be convenient, and when. Some very significant regional developments have already occurred. On July 2001 the Tiwi Islands local government covering all of Bathurst and Melville Islands, replaced the community government councils at Nguiu, Pirlangimpi, Milikapiti, as well as an outstation resource centre at Wurankuwu. (p. 33)

But economic development cannot just be about Aboriginal peoples or non–Aboriginal people; it is about both because, as Bandias, Fuller and Holmes (2012) point out, private investment needs to be considered, of which land use and tenure is central (Carson, 2011). The key consideration here is to outline a framework of how economic strategy may develop in ways synchronised with the existential challenges of NT remote community life (Tatz, 2009). To achieve this, the concept of a hybrid economy is used to reflect the ‘natural’ intersections of the private market economy and Aboriginal identity, customary law and customary needs, and the State/public agency domain (Moodie, 2018). A view that the NT’s regional economic agenda should commence with the larger communities makes sense. As outlined in Table 54, sourced from Carson, Taylor and Raman (2008), the 20 communities singled out as growth towns are growing, some much faster than others, and one reason for this is due to an apparent contraction of many smaller communities.

A key finding by Carson, Taylor and Raman (2008) found the distribution of the NT’s Aboriginal population had reflected a trend toward the larger centres:

There has been a strong increase in the percentage of Indigenous people living in the urban centres (Greater Darwin and Alice Springs), and living in towns sized 1000-2000 people. On the other hand, the percentage of the Indigenous population living in locations smaller than 200 people has decreased from 30% in 1976 to 23% in 2006. (p. 5)

Demographic shifts occur for a variety of reasons, but the important understanding concerning NT remote Aboriginal families is that movement happens around regions, and people aren’t going far from their ancestral lands; it is about where people have belonging (Blair, 2015). With the rapid increase in population in many of the growth towns, the need for increased attention is evident, particularly in the largest and fastest growing communities of Galiwinku, Maningrida, Nguiu and Wadeye; all with low residential mobility. This is where an Aboriginal voice and perspective was needed, but was completely silenced during the 2007 government-initiated Intervention, as discussed by Bandias, Fuller and Holmes (2012) and Velardi (2017). An Aboriginal approach would enable consideration of the wider
geopolitical voices and economic development agenda, including large and small private industry investments, resource development and Aboriginal employment opportunities (Carson, 2011).

As Bandias, Fuller and Holmes (2012) assert:

Until Indigenous people have confidence in equal partnerships with non–Indigenous in the areas of mutual respect and relationship building, it is most unlikely that Indigenous people will be prepared to participate in mainstream majoritarian economic and social activities. (p. 60)

Several key factors of this independence include freedom to make key decisions impacting communities, consideration of cultural obligations, as overlay Aboriginal institutions such as health and education, and in establishing equal economic partnerships with government and private industry sectors.

**Table 54: Growth through Aboriginal regional frameworks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Growth pattern</th>
<th>Age profile</th>
<th>Residential mobility</th>
<th>% Females in the labour force</th>
<th>Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali Curung</td>
<td>&lt;500</td>
<td>Chaotic</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>35.56%</td>
<td>Mobile and chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angurugu</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>32.32%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borroloola</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>42.32%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagarugu-Kalkarindji</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Chaotic</td>
<td>Bi-modal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
<td>Mobile and chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot</td>
<td>&lt;500</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galiwinku</td>
<td>&gt;1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>49.52%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gapuwiyak</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>47.46%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunbalanya</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>39.41%</td>
<td>Working age and male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermannsburg</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>53.13%</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lajamanu</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Bi-modal</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>41.48%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maningrida</td>
<td>&gt;1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>42.89%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milingimbi</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>43.53%</td>
<td>Working age and male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguiu</td>
<td>&gt;1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>42.95%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngukurr</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>45.36%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
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<td>Numbulwar</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papunya</td>
<td>&lt;500</td>
<td>Chaotic</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>36.07%</td>
<td>Mobile and chaotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>Economic Profile</td>
<td>Employment Level</td>
<td>Growth Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramingining</td>
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<td>Fast</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>51.43%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
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<td>Wadeye</td>
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<td>Low</td>
<td>46.41%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yirrkala</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Even</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>47.19%</td>
<td>Fast growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuendumu</td>
<td>500-1000</td>
<td>Steady</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>41.62%</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constructing NT remote regional hybrid economies

The original ‘growth towns’ strategy came under much criticism for reflecting a neoliberal agenda of making ‘white towns’ in the bush, and failing to recognise the hybrid world of NT remote Aboriginal communities. Of this, Gosford (2009, p. 1) stated: “It is the reality of this Indigenous hybrid economy, which is the only reality in much of remote Australia, that the plan fails to recognise”. As introduced in Chapter 2, the hybrid economy is an adaptive economic and ecological model that, for this counter-Story, functions as the Aboriginal political economy. Here, this model framework considers the wider dimensions of diversified human capital, employment and education (Austin-Broos, 2009; Carson, 2011), and it reflects the interconnecting points between the State, customary and market, as Altman (2009, p. 322) outlines in his model, shown in Figure 25.

However, while Altman’s (2005) original, late 1970s model focused on “emphasising customary economic activity and cultural inputs to market-directed activity” (Curchin, 2013, p. 16), an altered construction is proposed here. This is because the original is limited in explaining how Indigeneity is developed, maintained and situated at the core of remote Aboriginal community development, social fluidity, and the deeply entangled exchanges between identity, culture and a remote Aboriginal political economy. As Curchin (2013) outlined, Altman’s model reified customary in respect to the commercialising of traditional cultural threads, such as living off the land and tailored enterprises, as intersected with the State and market sectors, with welfare, apparently, left as a ‘right’ of remote citizenship. These propositions situate with contextual variables that impact the levels that this model plays out (Curchin, 2013), and the latter dimension is problematic, given the damaging outcomes raised in this study concerning remote Aboriginal welfare, as discussed by Langton (2011).

In therefore building upon Altman’s (2005, 2009) hybrid model, this counter-Story conceives customary as within an Aboriginal sociopolitical positioning, which I advocate, must prevail as the dominant power structure in negotiating the onslaught of a western, turbo-charged neoliberal and neocolonial agenda (Bone, 2012; Curchin, 2013). This reconceptualising of Altman’s original model is due to the fact that (as outlined in this study) the dysfunction in Aboriginal education policy setting is an outcome of a western political economy, which, by definition, holds opportunity in navigating its
condition (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Curchin, 2013). In this way, ideals of hybrid economy (Altman, 2005, 2009) require renewal against a contemporary Aboriginal political economy in its moulding through a remote Aboriginal existentialism that is rooted in the past and informing the present. In Figure 25 this association is illustrated, where customary is replaced by Indigeneity in shaping interactions with State policy actions and western free-markets. For this Story, Indigeneity represents the customary, but within a sociopolitical context that advocates change and adaptation, rather than its static preservation (Curchin, 2013).

**Figure 25: The hybrid Aboriginal political economy**

This positing of Aboriginal political culture, as reflected in the structural bonds between religion, law, governance and regional frames, offers Aboriginal controls concerning an Aboriginal trajectory toward the prosperous alternative of integration, as opposed to the costly dysfunctional policy trajectory of assimilation. To reiterate, examples in the US point to three factors for Indigenous economic growth: “self-rule and decision-making power, capable governing institutions empowered at the local level and congruence between formal governing institutions and Indigenous political culture” (Phillips, Franklin & Viswanathan, 2011, p. 42). A key benefit of this framework is that controls transfer to Aboriginal families, enabled in responding to the challenges to identity and culture, their location and expression with the reality of remote communities, and their intersecting relationships with the State and a capitalist, market economy (Bandias, Fuller and Holmes, 2012).

This approach is about Aboriginal peoples responding to the big issues, through understanding the multitude of small issues within an Aboriginal existential world. This situates at the core of reasons to engage and navigate through the onslaught of a western political economy, and it was in this context that Phillips, Franklin and Viswanathan (2011) argued the CDEP had structural relevancy. Regional economic and governance hubs enable increased rationalisation of resources and strengthen capacity for resource renewal and privatised Aboriginal investments from peak funding bodies that derive their funding from mining on Aboriginal lands (Carson, 2011). It is here that opportunity to reconfigure conceptions of inequality emerges and the capacities for a treaty and reconciliation transpire functionally through its economic validation.
The point about pathways to employment and development on Country is that it doesn’t materialise without consideration of the broader Aboriginal political economy. Being on welfare was at one stage connected into this model through the now discarded CDEP, which was more about community development, rather than an employment program (Hunter, 2009). This model was discarded by the federal government, which wanted to bring a neoliberal brand of capitalism to remote communities, even though western economic platforms were limited (Carson, 2011; Curchin, 2013) and where a form of Aboriginal social capitalism had long been in operation, as the ‘natural’ ecological result of the intersections of capitalism and NT remote Aboriginal socialism (Altman, 2009). This gravitation around neoliberalism and neocolonialism is anchored within a mainstream majoritarian ‘white’ political economy (Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), as evidenced by the difficulties in countering its flows into remote Aboriginal communities. These are not insurmountable, and the following section reviews the challenges and opportunities that give strength to the proposed policy responses unpacked to this point.

**8.7 NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism in an era of post-capitalism**

As a principal I’ve asked myself many times: Where are these students’ heading? What kind of life path do I need to prepare them for? And I think there are some students who will stay on Country and not have a job and will go hunting every day and sustain their culture and their identity and have a life like that. So, education and the ability to read and write is very important for [students] to be able to switch between and walk in two worlds. (R10 Aboriginal principal)

As proposed in this study, a pursuit of the middle–ground between the political left and right can been constructed on the investments of a diversified human capital and social planks, as the foundation that NT remote Aboriginal education and its flows toward economic and community advancement are realised (Carson, 2011; Yosso, 2005). As part of this pursuit, care has been taken to avoid a romanticised, static and essentialised conception of Indigeneity (Harris, Nakata & Carlson, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005). Like all identities, Moodie (2018) describes the Story of Indigeneity as changing and adapting with a world of continuous, fluid, power-relations. With prosperity comes the opportunity for economic layering, since this is the world around Aboriginal families and which for Walter (2015) represents the disjuncture between social capital and social mobility. That is, I pursue here the Aboriginal right to equity in educational opportunity; not an equal education, since that is the source of the problem. This counter–Story then has also been advocacy for an NT remote Aboriginal form of social capitalism.

And since social capitalism is troubled with dichotomies between strengthening social networks and the distribution of wealth that finds its way to individualism and social mobility (Bailey, 2009;
Gamarnikow and Green, 2007; Walter, 2015), this section therefore discusses these key tensions and how these are navigated in this study.

The tensions of social capitalism
As Walter (2015) highlighted, research into Indigenous social capitalism is limited, of which most has focused on the tensions that exist across capitalism’s layering properties (Bone, 2012; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). As Ornstein (2007) noted of US capitalism trends, the impact of globalised markets and the movement to neoliberal welfare States like Australia (Austin-Broos, 2009) produce critical dynamics that buffer and incapacitate ideals of egalitarianism and Keynesian-style intervention (Curchin, 2016; Stewart-Harawira, 2005; Wagner, 2011). Indigenous Australia is bound within these dynamics, but also in the way ideology behind reforms, including the institutions of State, function in responding to the impact of group marginalisation, as outlined by Walter (2016). For this reason, there is need to articulate how a form of remote Aboriginal social capitalism can be embedded within a broader political economy of competitive markets and systems, to enable the institutional expressions within a distinct Australian education architecture.

In pursuing this counter–Story in reifying an Aboriginal form of social capitalism, conflicting issues situate at the core of ‘third-way’ approaches, which Gamarnikow and Green (2007) synthesised:

Essentially, we are arguing that, so far as deployment of social capital ideas is concerned, education policy is caught in an over-riding tension between idealised bottom-up, participatory forms, where the emphasis is on democratic networking for individual and collective benefit, and actual forms, which entail top-down, authoritarian and communitarian modes of management of social problems which are conceptualised as expressions of social capital deficits. (p. 368)

This counter–Story acknowledges that social capitalism includes social capital, as reified within the social democratic spaces, as well as its connections to community cultural capital and ideals of a ‘communal’ economic environment (Yosso, 2005). This situates at the core of wealth creation, since capitalism is an economic system that inculcates members toward individualised material gain through exploitation (Gamarnikow & Green, 2007). As I have argued, this Story is about strengthening the foundations of NT remote Aboriginal community settings through their existing ‘socialist’ dimensions. While in western contexts this is problematised in left-right tensions (Bone, 2012; Gamarnikow & Green, 2007), in Aboriginal contexts it refers to a cultural and economically-framed societal foundation, based on spiritual wealth and human capital (Carson, 2011; Yosso, 2005). So, while societies all share, arguably, the commonality in pursing capitalism in its various forms, such as described by Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) in discussing the various response models to economic change, it is this nexus between the social and capital that NT remote Aboriginal communities offer a powerful counter-Story.
This Aboriginal world, where individualism is observed as an anathema to NT remote Aboriginality, has been demonstrated multiple times during this researcher’s education leadership roles across four NT remote Aboriginal communities (see Figure 4). These experiences within classroom and community settings affirmed that individualism was expressed as trying to be ‘white’ or pursuing a status above others; often resulting in negative reinforcement from the group, as Walter (2015) discusses regarding ideals of social mobility. In these exchanges, individualism was observed also to be abrasively cutting across established kinship networks and power relationships, divided across clan groups. It is within this construction of an Aboriginal existential framework that the injection of social capital policy in education, as reified within ideals of a hybrid economy, materialises, and the role of Customary law is rational (Moodie, 2018). This is particularly the case when considering that the cultural clashing described in this study has shown little patterned progress in NT remote settings; being an outcome underpinned by inertia within the underlying philosophic and policy approaches aimed at NT remote Aboriginal existential realities.

**NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism**

Social capitalism within NT remote Aboriginal contexts is responsive to the systemic and philosophic issues raised in this Story and counter–Story about education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The discussion has set out a counter–policy approach, one that is not about creating a separated nation within a nation, as the intransigent former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard stated in his endorsement of his government’s racialised policy approaches toward Indigenous Australians (Genovese, 2011). Rather, this is my counter–Story in understanding the nature of the problem from an Aboriginal perspective, one that reflects the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal peoples in the NT (Altman, 2009; Tatz, 2009). The policy pillars advocated in this counter–Story wrap around a form of social capitalism because they offer synergy with a dominant social architecture in remote Aboriginal education policy and a tailoring toward an economic system that gives primacy to community building, rather than individualism.

As Page (2015) stated:

> While much research has been undertaken on Indigenous community organisations, since the mid-1970s, the potential benefits of social capital theory have been under-utilised. It can be useful in understanding how Indigenous community organisations use relationships and networks to deliver services and undertake political advocacy, by highlighting power across various levels of social relations, when contextualised within specific power dynamics and cultural environments. (p. 3-4)

In pursuing this counter–Story, I have thus taken western standpoints and problematising of so-called Aboriginal ‘disadvantage’ and turned these on their head. That is, the key elements that have formed the ‘problem’ are the design elements to solutions in education and their extrapolations in social justice for NT remote Aboriginal communities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As described in section 8.3, it is
about policy gearing capacities that enable Aboriginal children to have their Indigeneity front and centre in an equal opportunity to a quality education experience (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). This form of social capitalism reflects what has long been the NT’s remote Aboriginal political economy; one that has been ignored by a majoritarian political community. It is for this reason that future policy actions in education should be through real distribution of power and governance to remote communities, and recognition that policy levers need to be multilayered while privileging identity through cultural inclusion, strengthened access of school services, and pathways to employment and community development (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012). This framework is reflected in Figure 26.

Figure 26: NT remote Aboriginal social capitalism: Indigeneity as a levelling platform

8.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined my counter–Story to the failed education policy environment targeting NT remote Aboriginal families. In this chapter I introduced a set of three culturally–responsive policy pillars that gravitate around a form of NT remote Aboriginal existentialism, which I argued is one possible way to achieve a counter–Story of Aboriginal success. This existentialism, first unpacked in Chapter 1 and sign-posted throughout my thesis, and as reified within Indigeneity, is, for me, the key to advancing NT remote Aboriginal education policy performance. This chapter presented this argument on several levels, which included an outline of the evidence for successful NT remote Aboriginal community development, which rests upon: the legal status of Aboriginal land; ideals surrounding Aboriginal communal ownership; the economic design potentials available; and the power
and governance structures that need to be in the hands of Aboriginal peoples (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Carson, 2011). This chapter presented a counter–Story that re-images NT remote Aboriginal communities within a societal framing of social-capitalism that underpins opportunities for education to advance beyond its ongoing condition (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). In the next and final chapter, I provide an outline of the implications of this study concerning further research, as well as the social imperatives.
Chapter 9. Conclusion and future policy options

9.1 Introduction

We get a lot of people come in and like, they come in, they want to build houses and that, but then nothing happens. So, its same with education, you know. They come in here, say they gonna do this and that and nothing happens; that’s why people get frustrated and some [families] don’t want to talk anymore. (R9, Aboriginal school council)

In introducing the conclusion of this Aboriginal Story, I am once again reminded by recent events that the issues of domination and exploitation and the ideological foundations that give rise to such acts are, more than ever, in need of addressing. For example, in July 2019, The NT DoE used bribery to entice remote Aboriginal children to school, through the handing out of key rings that students could redeem for toy footballs or vouchers from their local community store (Breen, 2019). This action occurred just before the annual age/grade census, when student numbers are used to determine the level of federal government funding for NT Indigenous education (Breen, 2019). One statement from an ‘anonymous’ education department spokesperson was telling of this discourse, with its ideological scripture:

This initiative is just one part of the Department’s ongoing strategies to increase attendance at schools in remote areas. We know that consistent attendance is key to ensuring that all students have the opportunities that the Northern Territory education system provides so they can learn and grow in a positive environment and gain a bright future. (Breen, 2019, n.p)

While this most recent narrative speaks to the entrenched policy disfunction raised throughout this thesis, the very public display of this initiative confirms just how out of touch and ill-equipped the NT’s centralised education department remains in breaking through its own regulatory contribution to the patterns of Aboriginal student disengagement from schooling. This latest initiative shows the ideological free-fall that NT governments and their education bureaucrats have long found themselves, caught within the ideological vacuum of policy self-determinism, as discussed by contributors including Ball (2013). On another level, this recent public acknowledgement also demonstrates just how politically entrenched this ideological dynamic has become, against the perverse economic ‘benefits’ this provides within the broader dynamic of interest convergence/interest divergence, discussed in Chapters 1 and 7.

But against this pathetic pattern of domination for which everyone pays a high price, there are the counter–Story beacons from the Aboriginal communities. In September 2019, Dujuan Hoosan, a twelve-year-old Arrente and Garrwa boy from Alice Springs, who speaks four Aboriginal languages, addressed the United Nations’ Human Rights Council (Clayton, 2019). Believed to be the youngest ever person to address this gathering, Dujuan projected loudly and clearly on the same issues raised in this
thesis. Dujuan spoke of how his school experiences had left him feeling like a failure and how he was almost sent to prison at the age of ten (‘Stop putting kids in jail’, 2019):

I was always worried about being taken away from my family and I was nearly locked up in jail. But I was lucky because of my family because they know I am smart, they love me and they found a way to keep me safe. There are some things I want to see changed. I want my school to be run by Aboriginal people. I want adults to stop putting 10-year-old kids in jail. I want, in my future, to be able to learn strong culture and language. I hope you can make things better for us. (‘Stop putting kids in jail’, 2019)

For me, Dujuan Hoosan’s words are the enduring ‘truth’ behind why I wrote this thesis. This young Aboriginal boy called out the racism that situates within ‘white’ Australia, and wants to know why his rights to his cultural identity continue to be violated and why the education experience has left him with few options beyond incarceration. I too have long wanted to know why, and what the solutions might be, and hence this long journey to my thesis over 25 years.

This study conducted critical analysis of the policies behind the educational inequality experienced by NT remote Aboriginal communities, and through this unpacking, sought to identify the main ideologies and forces behind this deleterious condition and their links to the international contexts (Brayboy, 2005; Gillborn, 2014; Lissovoy & McLaren, 2003). As the opening paragraph to this chapter reveals, the translation of this narrative across the broader, non–Indigenous Australian population reveals both the impetus in interrupting this dynamic, and the continuing dominance in ‘white’ individualism as the defining platform by which participants’ engage this world of high-stakes competition in survival (Lloyd, 2008; Wagner, 2011). This ‘white’ western world of racialised narratives has defied philosophic improvement, despite its trajectory remaining interlocked against the decay etched within Australia’s societal fabric (Davidson, Saunders & Phillips, 2018).

This chapter sets out the final discussion on the research question, the implications of this study for further research, and what I see as two key social imperatives.

9.2 Addressing the main research question

9.2.1 What policy approaches aimed at NT remote Aboriginal communities will facilitate NT remote Aboriginal students [and their families] engaging meaningfully and purposefully with a western education system?

In telling this necessarily long Story, the main study question, outlined above, was answered through exploration of what hasn’t worked in NT education policy settings, against what is missing and why and how these are likely to produce a more functionally–engaging education system for remote Aboriginal families. At the core of this question have been the operative dimensions of engaging purposefully in education services across a stratified national education system. As my investigation has overwhelmingly revealed, government education policy actions strike across the layers of society
in different ways, because context varies and people are different in how they experience life, and for NT remote Aboriginal families, western education is a product that has not been valued because it has been as irrelevant as it has been inaccessible (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017). It is difficult to internalise and reconcile purpose if the benefits are outweighed by the negatives, and this situation is exacerbated when it is too difficult (if not impossible) to access school. The three sub-questions emerged through their continuous domain presence (Figure 27) and unresolved locations in remote education policy debates.

**Figure 27: The existential and uncompromising domains underpinning educational relevancy to NT remote Aboriginal families**

![Diagram](image)

**Sub-question 1: Why does the inclusion of Indigenous cultural identities matter in the strengthening of education services targeting NT remote Aboriginal students, particularly since western knowledges and lifestyle are the basis of education purpose?**

As revealed in my Aboriginal Story and counter–Story, Indigenous cultural inclusion takes many forms and at its core are an Aboriginal consciousness, voices and participation in developing education policy that are more nuanced and responsive to the social undercurrents that flow through remote communities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The study found that if Aboriginal families are to engage in a wider majoritarian western culture and its political and economic assimilatory forces, it happens functionally through a strengthened western and Aboriginal education experience, where bilingualism and bi-culturalism are enabled through a robust policy architecture and resource modelling. Arguably, this approach to living within the envelope of capitalism is no different to the other cultural groups in Australia, who adapt the inner, existential domains of identity as foundation in engaging the external world (Neville, Viard & Turner, 2015).

**Sub-question 2: What approaches in service provision make NT remote schools accessible to NT remote Aboriginal students, particularly in responding to the lived realities and experiences of remote community life and the need for caring for Country and cultural obligations?**

While (as detailed in Chapter 5) most of the policy actions related to the problematised policy domains—which I later referred to in Chapter 8 as pillars, have been around improving the accessibility of NT remote education services, the evidence of student disengagement reveals they have become less accessible. As also detailed in my Story and counter–Story, a key reason for this is because Aboriginal voices have not been privileged in the policies and the practice. Arguably, it has always been the ‘noise’ of ‘white’ bureaucrats, most of whom have little appreciation of the internal realities of Aboriginal
families, their daily realities of remote living and what this means when experiencing the multiple layers and compounding impacts of the NT’s political economy (Carson, 2011). The school enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM) represented the failed limits in responding to a problem within the Aboriginal domain (Horin, 2011; Taylor, 2010), but it also underscored just how out of touch policy actions have been in wider debates about the injection of social and education policy into the way the social dimensions of schools are problematised and formatted.

Sub-question 3: What are the policy approaches that give rise to an effective pathway from school to employment on Country and community development, particularly given most schools in the NT are in the Aboriginal domain, small and remote?

A significant finding in this study is the NT’s policy education environment targeting remote Aboriginal families has been focused on preparing children for a life that does not exist. This is not to suggest there has been no policy actions in this domain, but it is the broader paradigm that policies find their synchronisation with the contexts they are delivered. The fact that a majority of NT remote Aboriginal communities are situated within isolated contexts with small populations means that there is the opportunity to benefit from an Aboriginal-led regional economic agenda that feeds into remote outstation and small community development (Carson, 2011; Moodie, 2018). Chapter 8 reveals a drift to the larger communities, however the centrality of traditional homelands means outstations will need to be factored into the sociocultural domains of Aboriginality, as this flows through time and change. The reason for this is because traditional homelands are where NT remote Aboriginal existentialism has its deepest connections.

9.3 Key findings

Three key findings have arisen from this study, all of which are of the highest significance to the NT remote Aboriginal education policy arena, and represent an important contribution to the research literature on Aboriginal education in the NT. The first finding is the lack of social policy in education problematising and the impacts that this most acutely produces for NT remote Aboriginal schools. And while not the focus of this thesis, the case might be made that this lack of social policy may well have impacts for all schools in Australia. The second finding concerns the systemic sine-wave policy patterning of NT remote Aboriginal education, which highlights the need for a major paradigm shift in the policy architecture of NT remote Aboriginal education. The third finding is the resulting socially-constructed ‘wicked nature’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973) of education service provision for NT remote Aboriginal children, and its interlocking structures within capitalism. These three findings are all inter-related and reveal the dimensions and nature of progressive policy options.
9.3.1 **The centrality of social policy within a social institution**

As argued throughout this study, the Australian education system has, since the early 1990s, been predicated on a US-inspired Effective Schools modelling of accountability and competition, balanced upon the three policy bedrocks of decentralisation, corporate managerialism and standardisation (Robinson, 2015). At the core of this has been an intensified overlay of economic-rationalist doctrine across education policy, producing a polarised leaning toward technical-rational, positivist-backed research that has been masked as education policy (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; Vaught, 2011).

As social organisations, schools are fundamentally about human relationships and the psycho-social interplay in learning, and education policies need to reflect this design reality. The issues raised in this study, particularly in the philosophic foundations of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (NATSIES) 2015 (see page 218), reveals an education policy environment that is the voice of bureaucratic neoliberalists and neocolonialists; not that of school educators and not that of NT remote Aboriginal peoples. This needs to change if the architecture of education services for NT remote Aboriginal peoples is to be responsive, as I have outlined in my counter–Story in Chapter 8.

9.3.2 **The problematic sign-wave of NT remote Aboriginal education**

Since the 1980s, Australia’s national education policy environment has been focused on building the performance of schools through layers of specialisation in teacher and school leadership and a raft of front-end toolkits in teaching, curriculum, assessment and reporting. Alongside this have been increased funding commitments, overlayed by the three major structural shifts, as outlined in the previous section. At the core of this movement the lifting of school performance has been predicated on a view that school organisational spaces in disadvantaged contexts can be elevated above their demographic wrappings, and to then sustain this performance. As the data performance revealed in Chapter 4, this has not been achieved in the NT remote Aboriginal context, when comparisons are made on minimal benchmark achievement, and it also has not been achieved on a national majoritarian cultural level. In other words, Australia’s education system has functioned to reproduce class layering (Vaught, 2011) and NT remote Aboriginal children have experienced the deepened sine-wave of this design, as illustrated in Figure 28.

**Figure 28: The elongated sine-wave of NT remote Aboriginal education service provision**
As my Story and counter–Story have outlined, this polarised ideological intoxication has ignored the sociological condition of schools (Matthews, 2013) making it enormously difficult if not impossible for them to respond to the external forces of structural inequality that flow through their porous borders (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). Consequently, NT remote Aboriginal schools follow an elongated performance wave, where the gearing is toward decay, rather than progress (Figure 28). In remote contexts it takes enormous energy to build momentum, against a policy tide geared to performance decline. This is the case at a national level concerning the higher banding achievement performance and in both instances the stratification remains. Thus, the paradigm shift I have advocated for in Chapter 8 means: (i) more centrally-defined policy pillars related to Indigenous cultural inclusion; (ii) relevant and responsive schooling access models approaches; and (iii) a defined purpose of education in NT remote Aboriginal community contexts, as concerns pathways to employment and development on Country. For me, these policy pillars are non–negotiable if education reforms are to be relevant in a post-capitalist world of heightened inequality.

9.3.3 Furthering research into the interacting nature of capitalism, NT remote Aboriginal education inequality and social capitalism

In this way, NT remote Aboriginal resistance needs to be understood better in respect to how the threads of Indigeneity are a progressive alternative. In its broadest sense this study has been the pursuit of an education policy environment that is socially just for NT Aboriginal families and their communities, within the tensions of capitalism and its western political economy (Lloyd, 2008), all existing within a complex, social flux of ambiguity and uncertainty (Bell, 1998; Cliff & Nesbitt, 2005). Thus, in Chapters 1–2, several caveats were discussed, including my view that a static interpretation of Indigeneity was to be avoided, given this study concerned the interaction of identity within a fluid world, where Aboriginal member identities are not static, as discussed by Harris, Nakata and Carlson (2013). In navigating this challenge throughout my thesis, the counter–Story offered is what NT remote Aboriginal disengagement from education means for a future Australia that needs to shift from the debilitating trajectory of hyper-capitalism (Bone, 2012) and the increasing opaqueness this generates around education’s institutional role and purpose.

Finally, I have argued in this study for a NT remote Aboriginal identity interacting with a western and customary law that gravitates around a form of Aboriginal social capitalism. This was advocated because it offered explanation for the damage inflicted by a western political economy, as much as to offer insights to where solutions resided for NT remote Aboriginal education advancement. Therefore, social capitalism is not a romantic idea, despite its elusive definition and clarity within established western market contexts and majoritarian populations (Gamarnikow and Green, 2007). The form of social capitalism described in this study offered investigation around materialism and its associations with social networks and social capital in ways that reveal, through the utility of CRT counter–
narratives, that our human social reality can be reconstructed and reified where the social planks are situated as the foundation to reduced economic and social inequality. This means moving debate from the middle ground of the left and right dichotomy towards that advocated by the United Nations Human Development Report (2016), as discussed earlier in this thesis. To do this, NT remote Aboriginal families need to be understood as the solution to a ‘white’ problem in reconciling its own condition.

9.4 Implications for further research

The research approach in this thesis is unique in that it offers a strong counter–Story to colonising accounts of Aboriginal educational inequality, and additionally, it attacks the so-called ‘wickedness’ interlocking this dynamic and patterned outcome (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The repercussions of this work, I hope, may contribute to other scholars, particularly those Indigenous scholars, to interrogating the Australian Indigenous education policy environment. This is imperative to do because the ongoing evidence presented here is that it simply is not working anywhere near as well as it should. Hence, it is most worthwhile, for example, to investigate the ideological dichotomies that have been briefly described in the opening of this final chapter. These include:

- To investigate further the recent bribery attempt described above, in respect to its impacts for the NTDoE and NT remote Aboriginal families, and
- to investigate and bring to the foreground the powerful insights and voices of NT remote Aboriginal families and their children on what a functional education experience looks to them.

Through the scholarly lens of CRT, these two research topics offer opportunity to critically deconstruct and examine the dualistic worlds of privilege and marginalisation, the weaponizing of education behind this situation, and what sites such as Gunbalanya school (Gillan, Mellor & Krakouer, 2017) tell us about educational progression from an Aboriginal voice and lived experience.

9.5 Social imperatives

Education is really important in both worlds you know, and some people don’t understand that education is the key to doors. Education plays a big part to see the brighter side [and] it starts at home first; trying to teach the kids the right way. Yeah, it could change. (R11, Aboriginal school council)

This means for me a new way of imagining our reality is required; one which delivers a cost-benefit for everyone, beyond the disastrous and deleterious approaches to date. This study has described the systemic failure of successive government policies aimed at NT remote Aboriginal education advancement and their direct relationship with an ongoing backdrop of racism that has denied Aboriginal voices and expanded regional financial controls and governance over their lives (Bandias,
Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Langton, 2019). A new economic and governance paradigm, such as I have advocated in Chapter 8, is required, and it must be a form that avoids perpetuating a new version of inequality (Langton, 2019). It is why I have taken the view that debates over social and capital, which I raised in Chapter 8, situates precariously for Aboriginal families located within a broader environment of turbo-charged capitalist-driven societal decay and its impacts upon NT remote Aboriginal communities.

**Re-imagining interest convergence**

In the offered counter–Story, a key way to imagine this is to consider interest convergence in its converse form. That is, as a reified outcome of a strengthened NT remote Aboriginal political economy. This means a progressive set of economic and social interests for the whole NT community that derives from diversified human capital, rather than its exploitation. The NT’s economy has operated as a false economy as the benefits are offset by the excess costs of inequality (see Chapters 6–7) and a political economy that has limited investments in Aboriginal human capital (Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012; Beadman, 2010; Carson, 2011). In describing the NT’s economic system through the framework of a ‘staple thesis’, Carson (2011) explains that where the main economic base is in natural resource extraction, such limited economic diversity tends to lead toward a bloated public service and produces a repulsion away from remote settlement. As I have argued, this interest convergence is implicated in this base in natural resource extraction, as much as it is the key in developing remote hybrid economies tailored around Indigeneity.

As earlier discussed, it was within this narrowed economic approach that Moran (2010, p. 44) described a dichotomised NT economy, that: “remote Australia is paradoxically both a region of mass unemployment (in settlements) and mass labour shortages (reflected in high wages paid to mining and construction workers)”. It was in respect to this malaise between the social and capital that Carson (2011) further commented:

> Economic diversification requires both a fiscal approach (described by Gunton 2003) and a recognition that human capital (including the labour market) is more valuable as an economic input than the natural resources themselves. (p. 229)

To break from this interlocked and damaging dynamic, remote Aboriginal communities need to be understood as sites of capital and social wealth (Yosso, 2005), but to also recognise this growth is determined by the level of real controls over global budgets and a far-reaching set of Aboriginal governance structures over Aboriginal institutional domains. This requires a de-racialised understanding of human and social capital (Brayboy, 2005, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005; 45). A staple thesis concerns those economies that are largely dependent on the extraction of natural resources and agricultural products, and often accompanied by lowered political opposition and lowered investments in a broadened economic balance framed on human and social investments (Carson, 2011).
Yosso, 2005), and it is here that such architecture gives real power and autonomy, and as described in Chapter 8, one which provides the framework for this wealth to materialise and become reified within and through an Aboriginal political economy, complete with its failings and successes.

What if we don't change and put Aboriginal peoples and communities at the centre of their development?
A failure to change the NT’s economic and social policy trajectory will mean the educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) will continue, including the ideological decay behind its condition. While progressive ideas will continue to be promoted, these will likely not gain traction if the macro policy environment remains in place. There are examples where remote Aboriginal families are pushing back against the inflicted carnage from ‘white’ Australia, and each of these reflect elements of the key policy pillars advocated for in my thesis. For example, this has recently been expressed politically within the NT, where a remote Aboriginal vote changed the balance of government, being the first time this has happened (Raue, 2016). Other examples include several remote communities, such as on the Tiwi Islands (see Tiwi College) and Groote Eylandt (see Ngarnindilyakwa-langwa College) that have been on a trajectory of seizing control of their local education services.

Similarly, present government proposals to reducing the high attrition of non–Indigenous teachers working in remote schools, such as government’s proposal to wipe the costs of teacher training for those willing to work and remain long term in NT remote communities has some merit, though remain situated within competing broaden tensions. For example, this recent proposal targets graduate teachers that for the most part just started their careers and have little knowledge of NT remote contexts (Ashton, 2019; Jorgensen, et al., 2010).

The NT has long been a site that has the cross sections of embedded racism intersecting with classism, and where the savagery of government institutional hegemony (Macoun, 2011) has interlocked within a broader western political economy that has struggled at best to serve the interests of a ‘whitened’ majoritarian culture and been especially destructive for Aboriginal families (Langton, 2019; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). If this does not change, the problems in education policy dysfunction are likely to further compress, with costly socioeconomic flows in every conceivable direction. In that world, like the past and the present, Indigeneity remains a key foundation for patterned Northern Territory remote Aboriginal student achievement within a stratified western education system. A counter–Story of NT remote Aboriginal education has been shown to be possible and it is this narrative that needs to become the norm and not the exception for Aboriginal children and their communities in the NT.
References


Fry, G. (2012). What role(s) has the ideology behind education policies in the NT played in the failure of such policies to effectively challenge the disempowered status of the Indigenous population? *Deakin University, 1-44.*


## Appendix A

Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum benchmark, reading 2008–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<th>2013</th>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>95.3</td>
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(ACARA, 2014, p.2–194)
## Appendix B

Percentage of students achieving at or above national minimum benchmark, numeracy 2008–2014

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(ACARA, 2014, p. 46–238)
## Appendix C

Student performance year 3 and year 9 reading and numeracy, by parental qualification, Australia, 2008–2014

### Student performance year 3 reading and numeracy, by parental qualification, Australia, 2008–2014

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(ACARA, 2008–2014)

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(ACARA, 2008–2014)
Appendix D

Student performance year 3 & year 9 reading and numeracy, by parental occupation, Australia, 2008–2014

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</table>

(ACARA, 2008–2014)

### Student performance year 9 reading and numeracy, by parental occupation, Australia, 2008–2014

<table>
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(ACARA, 2008–2014)
Appendix E
Key Indigenous policy actions & shaping events 1967–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key actions</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National referendum</td>
<td>Indigenous peoples enter Australia’s electoral processes.</td>
<td>1967</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Labor government 1972–75</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racial discrimination Act</td>
<td>Discrimination based on ‘race’ made unlawful.</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Liberal government 1975–1983</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community development employment program (CDEP)</td>
<td>CDEP work for the dole introduced across Australia’s Indigenous</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>communities.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Labor government 1983–96</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blanchard report</td>
<td>Highlighted Indigenous education inequality, emphasised movement from</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>welfare to equity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miller report</td>
<td>Recommended how government training programs would be delivered;</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on Aboriginal economic development and independence.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal employment development policy</td>
<td>Equity in employment, income equity; equitable representation /</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participation in schooling sector, reduction of welfare dependency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTUDY</td>
<td>Funding for schools’ sector and tertiary students</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education equity program (HEEP)</td>
<td>Focused on developing Indigenous capacities of participating in</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>higher education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Aboriginal education policy (NAEP)</td>
<td>Focused on Indigenous involvement in education decision-</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>making, education access and involvement, and equitable outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programs included ASSPA, ATAS and VEGAS.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher education contribution Scheme</td>
<td>HECS focused on supporting Indigenous access to higher education</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
<td>ATSIC established to develop Indigenous community economic and</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultural advancement, via expanded regional and localised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>governance structures.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report of the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody</td>
<td>Addressing recommendations relating to teaching of Aboriginal</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial council for education, employment, training and youth affairs</td>
<td>MCEETYA undertook review of NATSIEP</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>established</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National review of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</td>
<td>Indigenous education inequality remained and called for</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peoples</td>
<td>governments to remain committed to their policies.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal education strategic initiatives program</td>
<td>AESIP provided supplementary funding to service providers.</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of six Indigenous higher education centres</td>
<td>Focus on improving Indigenous representation, participation and</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decision-making in higher education.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Event/Institution</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bringing them home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families</td>
<td>Highlighted the impacts of family separations on education performance. Included recommendations for Indigenous histories being taught in Australian curricula.</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batchelor institute of Indigenous tertiary education becomes independent of NT government</td>
<td>Focused on provision of tertiary education provision that maintained Indigenous-relevant structural modelling and delivery approaches. Included specific focus on remote Indigenous community members.</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage report</td>
<td>Productivity commission reports from 2003 focused on Indigenous progression across a broad range of social and economic areas.</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC abolished</td>
<td>Abolished on government views of failing to advance Indigenous advancement in key areas of health and education, despite being a supplementary funding body to mainstream institutions.</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory national emergency response (The Intervention)</td>
<td>Six hundred soldiers forcibly entered NT remote Aboriginal communities based on claims of rampant sex abuse against children, arising from NT’s publication Little Children are Sacred Report. Supported by both sides of Australian politics. No prosecutions ever made. Indigenous members given basic card; racial discrimination act 2007 suspended.</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley review: Review of Australian higher education</td>
<td>Reaffirmed low uptake/participation of Indigenous Australians in higher education. Identified low academic achievement flows from school sector</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Australian directions in Indigenous education 2005-08 undertaken by MCEETYA</td>
<td>Recommended a national Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander education action plan is introduced.</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School enrolment and attendance measure (SEAM)- NT</td>
<td>Focused on withholding welfare payments where parents fail to send their children to school on a regular basis. Ended in 2018</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>National education agreement</td>
<td>Implementation of funding framework that clarified funding roles between Commonwealth, State and Territory responsibilities in funding schools, included Indigenous targets.</td>
<td>2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education action plan (2010-14)</td>
<td>Included focus on student pathways to higher education and employment.</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stronger futures legislation enacted</td>
<td>Maintained discriminatory elements of the 2007 Intervention, NT remote Aboriginal peoples controlled by external government.</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Liberal/National coalition government 2013–2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander education strategy</td>
<td>Focused on strengthening attendance and engagement; transition points (including pathways to post-school options); early childhood transitions; workforce and the Australian curriculum.</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>