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Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Work Force

Career Advisers, health career pathways and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students

Michele T Knight

This thesis is presented for the Degree of Master of Applied Science of The University of Sydney

2007
Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature: __________________________

Date: 31st March 2007
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land. Though nations are now dispersed, ravaged by the impact of colonisation, there are those who hold true, who walk between two worlds, and whom advocate for their ancestors and all generations yet to be born.

I would like to offer my thanks to Mr Warren Losberg my Principal Supervisor and Dr Freidoon Khavarpour my Associate Supervisor. In doing so, I acknowledge their expertise, guidance, support, time and encouragement throughout my candidature with gratitude.

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Abstract

The current study consisted of two initiatives. The first initiative was to qualitatively explore the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students. The second initiative was to explore strategies for raising awareness and stimulating interest in health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.

Fifteen Career Advisers from fifteen secondary schools across metropolitan and regional New South Wales participated in the study. At three separate data collection sites, and at the express request of the participant, the school Aboriginal Education Assistant also contributed primary data to the study. It was the express wish of Career Advisers at these schools that an Indigenous perspective be included in the study. At one data collection site, the Deputy School Principal also expressed the wish to be included in the study. In total nineteen participants contributed toward the study.

Findings from the current study suggest that Career Advisers work within a challenging world-of-work context which is constantly changing in order to meet the demands of globalisation. Furthermore, it is evident that within this world-of-work context Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students face significant barriers and socioeconomic disadvantage. This disadvantage severely impacts upon and restricts these students’ access to career education within the schooling environment. Additionally, the opportunity to engage with and foster lifelong learning in conjunction with ongoing career development is also negatively impacted upon.
Other than with medicine and nursing, Career Advisers were found to have limited knowledge regarding both the diversity and range of allied health careers that are currently available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Career Advisers noted they work collaboratively with Aboriginal Education Assistants, who are a core component of the learning and teaching environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In spite of the critical role they play in holistically integrating the schooling environment and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, it was noted that of those schools that did employ Aboriginal Education Assistants, did so on a part-time or casual basis. It was also noted by some participants that despite the necessity for Aboriginal Education Assistants to be on staff in their school, and to be available to themselves and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there was no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person employed in that capacity.

Notwithstanding these significant challenges, research outcomes from the current study will recommend that Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants be supported in their roles. This is particularly important if they are to raise awareness and stimulate interest in health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Furthermore, it is recommended that additional research be conducted in order to determine how the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training can best provide this support.
Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used in the current study to define the range of activities which facilitate career education and career development. These terms are positioned within an Australian context of career development and are provided by the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 14):

**Career Counselling**

‘Career counselling is an intensive activity and is most often conducted in one-to-one or small-group settings. It is concerned with assisting individuals to identify, own and manage their personal career concerns’ (Patton & McMahon, 2001, p. 2). Career counselling focuses on the interaction between an individual or a small group and a professional career counsellor. It helps individuals to explore personal issues related to life and work decisions; it facilitates the integration and application of information and skills in developing individual life, learning and work plans; and assists in the management of transitions.

**Career Development**

Career development is the process of managing life, learning and work over the lifespan. ‘... career development involves one’s whole life, not just occupation ... It concerns the individual in the ever-changing contexts of his and her life ... self and circumstances – evolving, changing, unfolding in mutual interaction’ (Wolf & Kolb, cited in McMahon, Patton & Tatham, 2003, p. 4).
Career Development Practitioner

A career development practitioner is an overarching term for any direct service provider who plays a part in facilitating learning that fosters career development. The current study utilises the term Career Adviser to represent the activities of the school career development practitioner.

Career Education

Career education is one part of a comprehensive career development strategy. The Career Education Taskforce of MCEETYA defined career education as the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable effective participation in working life.

Career Guidance

Career guidance is an inclusive term that has been used to describe a range of interventions including career education and counselling, that help people to move from a general understanding of life and work to a specific understanding of the realistic life, learning and work options that are open to them.

Career Information

Career information refers to information (print, electronic, personal contacts and other resources) that assists the process of career development. Career information includes occupational and industry information, education and training information and social information related to the world-of-work.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the current study. The chapter presents the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force is defined. The chapter also introduces the relationship between access to the education system, career education and participation in the labour-market. The link between colonisation, current morbidity and mortality status, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners is also introduced.

Introduction

In the contemporary setting of the twenty-first century, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 2.4% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005, p. 3). In addition to constituting this small margin of the population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience marked socioeconomic disadvantage across all social indicators. Within the education system and schooling environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continue to be the most educationally disadvantaged student group in Australia (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2003, 6.1).

McLisky and Day (2004, p. 7) position this disadvantage within a broader historical context of colonisation. The authors noted that the profound educational disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
stems from a ‘wider societal and economic disadvantage’ in which as Day and Davison (2004, p. 481) argued, the ‘influence of welfare and health status is critical’.

This socioeconomic disadvantage manifests in stark contrast to the wider non-Indigenous community (Australian Bureau of Statistics & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005, xix-xxvi; Ring & Brown 2003, pp. 404-405; Royal Collage of Nursing 2003, p. 1). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status in particular has been defined as equalling that of communities in the fourth world (Reid & Trompf 1991, xxi).

This health status has been contrasted with the wider non-Indigenous community by the Australian Medical Association (2002) in their Public Report Card 2002. While the document acknowledged that improvements had been made, it stated that ‘… overall, little progress has been achieved’ (Australian Medical Association 2002, p. 3).

For example, in 2000 the Indigenous mortality rate (IMR) was 14 per 1,000 infants born (almost three times that of the total Australian infant mortality rate of 5.2). In 1965, the Indigenous IMR was about 138; by 1981 it had dropped to about 26. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Australian population had a rate of about 26. In summary, the rate dropped rapidly in the 1970s with gradual improvement since then, remaining about 2 ½ times that of the total Australian population (Australian Medical Association 2002, p. 2).

With regard to life expectancy, the Report Card 2002 noted that in 1997-1999 Indigenous Australians could expect to live approximately 20 years less than non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Medical Association 2002, p. 2), with standardised death rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Australians approximately 3 times that of the total Australian population (Australian Medical Association 2002, p. 2).

Furthermore, the Association noted that in order to address this disparity what was required was the provision of access to culturally appropriate primary health care. In conjunction with this access, the Association highlighted the fact that an appropriate and adequately resourced and skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force was a ‘key component’ of this provision of primary health care (Australian Medical Association 2002, p. 4).

Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals are available and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been identified as being a significant factor for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander morbidity and mortality. Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force which has both professional and cultural competence is therefore a necessity (Kowanko et. al. 2003, p. 42; Matthews 1997, p. 307; Schwab & Anderson 1999, p. 36).

The necessity for developing and expanding the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force has also been recognised and endorsed at a policy level. For example, the Bringing Them Home Report (1997), the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991), and a number of significant national strategies and reports including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework (2002), the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1996; 1998) and the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: Framework for Action by Governments (2003), have collectively argued the need for targeted support and government collaboration at
local levels. This collaboration is necessary if specific targets and identified health goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are to be met.

The need for a collaborative approach toward current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status was likewise highlighted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in their Social Justice Report 2005. Recommendation One from Chapter Two of the Report, Achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation – A human rights approach stated:

That the Governments of Australia commit to achieving equality of health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people within 25 years (2005, p. 69).

While the Commission clearly identified the importance of political endorsement and partnership to achieve ‘equality of health status and life expectancy’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, they also noted that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force was an ‘essential first step’ and that equitable distribution of primary health care, ‘... rests on a prior effort to increase the numbers of health professionals to provide the services’ (2005, p. 77).

Considering the often short-term and limited success of biomedical approaches to health care and service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is imperative that alternate long-term solutions be sought. It is important that these long-term solutions embrace the wider political and economy contexts of health as well as address the relevant underlying social and economic determinants.
The development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce is the primary focus of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce National Strategic Framework* (2002). This Framework has endorsed a 5-10 year reform agenda in order to build a competent health work force which will address the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Framework provides the structural context which delineates the responsibilities of stakeholders through the provision of primary health care service delivery by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care professionals to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. That being so, growing the health work force requires a long-term, strategic and holistic approach.

Within an overarching career development context, the starting point to future participation in the health work force is grounded in knowledge, awareness, exposure, interest and in many instances experience with morbidity and mortality. Embedding health career pathways and options into secondary school career education would facilitate students’ working toward health career pathways, possible post-compulsory learning, and provide a foundation for ongoing lifelong learning.

Embedding these health career pathways and options into secondary school career education would achieve two aims. Firstly, students would be encouraged to consider entering the health career work force. Secondly, participation in the health career workforce would have a positive impact on the current health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with a resultant improvement in the widespread socioeconomic
disadvantage experienced by the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

It is well within the scope of community and government instrumentalities to work toward achievable outcomes in developing the health work force and to grow mutually responsive collaborative partnerships between relevant stakeholders, organisations and peak bodies (New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2001, pp. 1-7, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group 2004, p. 8). As this thesis argues, a long-term, strategic and holistic approach is required to achieve these aims.

In addition to raising awareness of health career pathways and options for students, it is important that professional staff development, training and support be available and accessible to Career Advisers in their delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Curriculum Corporation 2003, pp. 10-11). Also required is government and industry acknowledgement, understanding and support of the critical role that Aboriginal Education Assistants play in achieving positive schooling and learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Curriculum Corporation 2003, pp. 12-13).

Clapham and Kinchela (2005, p. 12) have argued that solutions to the widespread health disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples involve changes at both policy and practice levels which address the underlying social and economic determinants of health. This thesis argues that it is not only health disadvantage which requires change at policy and practice levels, it is those combined elements which constitute the wider socioeconomic and socio-political spectrum impacting
upon and defining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life experiences, life experiences which collectively create a fourth world health status in a first world nation.

**Defining the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Work Force**

Within the context of the current study, this thesis defines the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force in conjunction with that provided by the Australian Medical Association (2004, p. 1). However, while the Australian Medical Association does not limit their definition by including non-Indigenous health professionals, the current study does. Thus, the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force used in the current study, encompasses and represents only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples employed in the health work force.

The health work force is further defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals providing services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, regardless of how or where those services are accessed, and either through mainstream services or through specialised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

**Current Study Context**

This thesis adopts an Australian definition of career education as identified in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development:

> Career education is one part of a comprehensive career development strategy. The Career Education Taskforce of MCEETYA defined career education as the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education and training settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their study and/or work options and enable effective participation in working life (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 14).
Career education programs aim to address issues that impact upon learning outcomes and entry into the labour-market for all secondary school students. One of these programs which specifically targeted the career aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was the *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program*. The *Aboriginal Career Aspirations Program* was piloted by the New South Wales Board of Studies (2001) in secondary schools across New South Wales in 2001. Following this, the Program was conducted in schools across 2002-2003, after which time it operated only if funded.

The Program provides the contextual framework into which the current study is positioned. The current study itself is structured so as to produce project-based outcomes. These outcomes may assist with future career education policy direction in New South Wales secondary schools.

The current study explores the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, primarily as a basis for future health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It does this through qualitative interpretation of the perceptions and attitudes of nineteen participants including fifteen Career Advisers, three Aboriginal Education Assistants and one Deputy School Principal from fifteen secondary schools across metropolitan and regional New South Wales.

The study draws primarily on two main sources of data:
Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Work Force

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- A review of relevant literature, including published papers and major reports such as policy documents, web-based information and unpublished reports.
- A series of qualitative interviews conducted with school Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants.

Thesis Outline

This thesis will examine a number of topic areas relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students and health career pathway choices and options. Two primary issues will be considered.

First, perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers regarding health careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be explored. Second, Career Advisers’ knowledge and awareness of the range and diversity of health careers that are currently available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be examined.

The review and critique of literature relevant to this area of inquiry will discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health career education in a secondary schooling context and health work force requirements.

Chapter One, Introduction, introduces the current study context, the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. Chapter Two, Background, presents the historical context for contemporary patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander morbidity and mortality status and introduces career education within the context of school-to-work transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.
Chapter Three, *Literature Review,* presents an overview of the literature relevant to national and international career education and career development, Australian secondary school career education, with a particular emphasis on career education for Aboriginal and Torres Islander secondary school students, and the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. Chapter Four, *Theoretical Framework,* will use a Systems Theory Framework to explore and understand how the current education system can improve and build upon existing secondary school career education.

Chapter Five, *Methodology,* discusses the methodology utilised to facilitate the aims of the current study, including the rationale for the research design, participants ethical considerations, the application of a Systems Theory Framework and the qualitative research paradigm employed. Chapter Six, *Findings,* presents findings from the primary data source (interviews) followed by an interpretative analysis presented as a discussion in Chapter Seven, *Discussion.* Chapter Eight, *Conclusions* reviews the current study and presents nine Recommendations for supporting Career Advisers, Aboriginal Education Assistants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students and for developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force.

**Relevance of the Current Study**

The outcomes of the current study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples include:

1. Capacity building for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community:
Community capacity building facilitates individuals and organisations within communities to either build upon existing inherent capacities or to gain those skills and tools necessary to achieve community goals. In addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students benefiting from health career pathway opportunities, so too will their families and communities. Especially when many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates choose to work within and support their communities at the local level.

2. Potential for the current study to address the political economy of health as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially regarding career education, health status and ongoing career development:

There is a direct correlation between levels and standards of education and income with quality of life, including spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Bulletin 1999). Increased health career-pathway opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may lead to participation in the health workforce, financial remuneration and economic independence and ongoing career development in the world-of-work.

3. Potential for the current study to address issues of access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, particularly exposure and access to health career pathway options and subsequent participation in the health workforce:
The positive relationship between culturally appropriate health care service delivery and the effective and efficient use of health care services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been highlighted in the literature (Armstrong 2004, pp. 16-19; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 190). Increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals and workers in the health work force has the potential to increase the level of access to health services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians by providing holistic and culturally appropriate health care.

4. Potential for the current study to increase career pathway options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, particularly health career pathway options:

The current study is an exploratory research project. Findings and recommendations will be published, which will provide a preliminary starting point from which empirical research into career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be conducted. Similarly, results from the current study could promote health career pathway options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, ultimately contributing toward and expanding the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force.

5. Potential for the current study to influence current career education practices in New South Wales Secondary High Schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

Published findings and recommendations from the current study will contribute toward two aims. First, the paucity of knowledge
and understanding of currently available allied health careers will be highlighted. Second, this paucity of knowledge and understanding can provide a preliminary starting point from which empirical research can be undertaken to further explore and revise current health career education practices utilised in career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

6. Knowledge and information obtained will contribute toward existing literature:

While research and literature relevant to school-to-work transition constitutes an available and growing resource base, it also provides a forum for dissemination of ideas and knowledge into the community. All knowledge and information obtained from conducting the current study will add to this resource base, contributing toward and expanding the current literature pool.

**Aims of the Current Study**

It is the aim of the current study to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Career education within the schooling environment addresses those issues relevant to career aspiration, career choice and eventual entry and successful participation in the labour-market for all secondary school students. Within this context, it is Career Advisers who assume the primary role in facilitating career education to all students.

With regard to the delivery of education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Lowe and Tassone (n.d.) state that the process is both a political and educational one. The authors argue that education has to be
delivered in a system that acknowledges the power of both individual and collective senses of identity and which stresses cultural difference over further assimilation.

The current study acknowledges this power difference. The purpose of the study is not to take away freedom of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in these early years. Nor is it designed to dictate or impose upon students an enforced learning pathway. The study explores those means by which a health career pathway can be made more readily available to students to pursue if they wish.

In addition to exploring the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the current study seeks to identify strategies for raising awareness and stimulating interest in health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.

In order to achieve its aim, the current study investigates the following four research questions:

1. What is the extent of awareness and attitude of Career Advisers regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? This question will seek to determine not only Career Adviser’s awareness of health career pathways but the current availability of health career information.

2. What is the nature of the relationships that have developed between Career Advisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? This question will seek to determine whether or not interpersonal
relations between Career Advisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has a bearing on access to career education, and subsequent exposure to health career pathways.

3. What is the extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student interest in health career pathways? This question will seek to clarify two factors. The first is to determine the level of current student interest in pursuing a health career pathway, with a view to supporting and further developing that interest. Second, if there is a lack of student interest in pursuing a health career pathway, to determine why.

4. What possible strategies would be necessary to raise awareness and interest in order for students to consider pursuing a health career? This question builds on question 3, in that if there is a lack of student interest in pursuing a health career pathway, what strategies would be required to stimulate interest.

Chapter Summary
This chapter has introduced the current study, the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. The juxtaposition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners with improvements in levels of morbidity and mortality currently being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been introduced. Finally, career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students has been introduced. The following chapter, Chapter Two, Background will present the background for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force.
Chapter Two

Background

Chapter Overview
This chapter presents the background to the current study. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force is defined and current health work force labour participation statistics within a context of developing the current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force are highlighted. The historical context for patterns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander morbidity and mortality will be examined from a social justice perspective. The relationship between career education and participation in the labour-market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be introduced and demographic statistics briefly examined. Finally, a number of key areas relevant to the growth and development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force are also introduced which are examined in greater detail in Chapter Three, Literature Review, including career education and the changing world-of-work.

Introduction
Authors Saggers and Gray argued in the early 1990s that the appalling health disparities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in comparison with the wider non-Indigenous population, were a ‘... stark reflection of their history as a conquered group’ (1991, p. 172). In an attempt to understand and clarify why these disparities exist, Reid and Trompf (1991, xxi) suggested that it was necessary to consider how colonisation had caused such disadvantage.
The impact of colonisation, referred to by Reid and Trompf as the ‘Aboriginal experience’ (1991, xxi) reflects an inheritance of loss and social upheaval which remains a central feature of the life experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities. In addition, Williams (1998, p. 12) argued that current policies have reinforced a state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dependency because they’ve failed to enshrine cultural difference in legal pluralism. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have become almost totally dependent on the non-Indigenous majority’s welfare state.

This dependence on the ‘welfare state’ raises the issue of how structural violence has impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly if, as Williams stressed, it was inherent in the social order (1998, p. 13). This being the case, then the obvious outcome would result in the dominant social order denying one collective access to the prerequisites of effective participation in a system developed and controlled by that body; in Australian society, powerful non-Indigenous interest groups.

In 2003, the key indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage were investigated by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. The Committee’s Report, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003 not only identified these indicators, it argued unequivocally that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience marked and widespread disadvantage ‘across all aspects of their lives’ (2003, p.1).
Historical Context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Health

In order to understand why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience such marked and widespread disadvantage, it is necessary to examine the historical context of how this disadvantage was generated.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' socioeconomic disadvantage and morbidity and mortality status has been discussed at length in the public domain (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2005; Eades 2000; Ring & Brown 2003). This discourse has led these authors to collectively identify and argue one major position which cuts across all societal indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; that poor societal indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a direct consequence of their dispossession and separation and removal from their homelands.

This dispossession effectively commenced from the initial point of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Europeans in 1788. As a result of this dispossession, and subsequent paternalistic government policies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander livelihoods and communities were forced into economic, political and ideological powerlessness. The ongoing affects of this powerlessness have cumulatively devastated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their communities creating the marked socioeconomic and sociopolitical disadvantage evident in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
Demographic Considerations

In the context of this discussion, it is important to highlight demographic comparisons between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider non-Indigenous population. In so doing, a number of significant differences between the two population groups are revealed.

According to figures tabled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, p. 3) in 2001, around 90% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were identified as being of Aboriginal origin, 6% as being of Torres Strait Islander origin and 4% as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. In comparison with the wider non-Indigenous population, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is relatively young, with a median age of 21 years compared with 36 years for the non-Indigenous population.

In 2001, 39% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population were under 15 years of age compared with 20% of non-Indigenous people. People aged 65 years or over comprised 3% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and 13% of the non-Indigenous population, which reflect higher rates of fertility and deaths occurring at younger ages among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 3).

At the national level, estimated life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at birth for the period 1996-2001 was 59 years for men and 65 years for women, 17 years below the 77 years and 82 years life expectancy for all men and women respectively for the 1998-2000 period. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples also experience disadvantage across a range of socioeconomic conditions that affect health outcomes,
such as income, employment and educational outcomes (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 91).

These statistics evidence a number of alarming comparisons. The majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is young. In addition, this young population experience both high fertility and death rates with an overall life expectancy being 17 years less that of the wider non-Indigenous population. In order to understand why such marked disparity exists, it is necessary to examine the social determinants of health.

**Social Determinants of Health**

The World Health Organization (2003, p. 1) has identified quality of life and living circumstances as ‘social determinants’. These determinants have a direct impact on the health and life expectancy of all people. The ten key determinants defined by the World Health Organization include the social gradient of health (social and economic circumstances), stress, effects of early life, social exclusion, stress at work, unemployment and job insecurity, social support, addiction, food and transport.

The Fred Hollows Foundation argued that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, these social determinants translate to:

- Approximately 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households (approximately 120,000 people) are in income poverty - a distinguishing feature is the depth of poverty across a range of welfare indicators.
• In 2001, 20% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were unemployed, approximately three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

• If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on ‘work for the dole’ schemes were included in unemployment figures, the rate of unemployment in 2001 was 43.4%.

• Of those classed as employed, 60% worked in low skill occupations and 18% earned their income through ‘work for the dole’ schemes.

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lower incomes. In 2001, the average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household income was $364 per week, 62% of the non-Indigenous Australian household income ($585) - this was a decline from 1996 when the figure was 64%.

• Only about 31% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples own (or are buying) their own homes, compared with 70% for other Australians. 63% are renting, compared with 26.6% of non-Indigenous Australians, while in very remote areas only 18.8% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are renting their own homes.

• Only 38% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children complete high school, compared with over 76% of non-Indigenous Australian children (Fact Sheet 4 2004, p. 1).

Considering the relatively small percentage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute within the total Australian population, it is clear that these statistics are cause for concern. Furthermore, these statistics not only highlight areas of socioeconomic need, they identify gaps in service provision and delivery across a range of sectors in the wider community.
Career Education and the Labour-market

The importance of effective career education and subsequent participation in the labour-market and nations’ economy has been discussed at the international level by the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Labour Organization (2002, pp. 53-54). The Organization reported that a critical challenge facing human society at the start of the twenty-first century was social inclusivity and the attainment of full employment and sustained economic growth in the global economy.

Furthermore, the Organization argued that human resources development and education and training contribute significantly toward promoting the interests of individuals, enterprise, economy and society. In making individuals employable and informed citizens therefore, they are able to gain access to the labour-market and escape poverty and marginalisation.

Within this context, McMahon and Tatham (2000, p. 16) highlighted the importance and value of career guidance, which helps individuals move from a general understanding of life and work to a specific understanding of the realistic life, learning and work options that are open to them (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 14). In addition, the authors argued that there is increasing recognition and acceptance of its social and economic importance to nations. This in turn has corresponded with an increasingly flexible labour-market and recognition that additional support strategies need to be made available for individuals.

In discussing the relationship between a skilled work force and the economy at large, Jarvis (1999, p. 1) argued that it was increasingly critical to a nations’ social and economic prosperity that its citizens are able to
manage their own work lives. This argument is similarly highlighted in the *Report of the Leaders in Careers Forum* (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, p. 3) which noted the importance of career education in schools and its relationship with the labour-market. Positioning their argument within a context of addressing industry skill shortages, the Forum argued that raising young people’s awareness of related occupations and their positive employment prospects upon completion of identified education and/or training requirements benefited both the individual and industry.

The Context of Career Education and the Changing World-of-work

Employment and job security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially within a context of school-to-work transition has become increasingly important. Schools now accept the responsibility of taking on the challenge of linking students’ education to employment-focused outcomes. This has led to the incorporation of a number of key competencies in mainstream curriculum with the intention of producing students who are ‘work ready’ (Board of Studies 2001, p. 6).

While this may be the case, ‘work ready’ requires a degree of malleability within the curriculum. This malleability was highlighted by Brubaker who argued that within the curriculum there is ambiguity and ‘the unknown’ (1982, p. 15) which must be acknowledged. While acknowledging this, Hooper indicated that the context of the curriculum changes to keep pace with the society in which the curriculum is devised, in particular, that changes in society bring about changes in the educational system (1972, p. 14).
An awareness of the important role that social justice plays in addressing issues of access and equity, discrimination and disadvantage is one such change which is providing the impetus for examination of the educational system. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this is particularly significant because of its impact on current education policy.

**Social Justice Perspectives**

In discussing the relationship between government policy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic and social empowerment, Saggers and Gray (1991, p. 172) argued that the perpetuation of poverty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples underlined the abyss between the ideologies and practice of successive Australian Governments. The authors highlighted the issue that the ability of a group of people to act autonomously must be matched with the material assistance that group requires to chart an independent course.

According to the authors, within the restrictions imposed by the wider non-Indigenous Australian society, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s attempts to act autonomously reveals that material assistance has not been adequate. Moreover, Local, State and Commonwealth Departments, ‘... continue to echo the ideological rhetoric of self-regulation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but are reluctant to cede any of their power in the process’ (Saggers & Gray 1991, p. 172).

Ten years after Saggers and Gray identified this lack of political will and governance, political activist Aden Ridgeway identified what he believed to be the continuing underlying issue:
Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are keen to embrace the rhetoric of reconciliation, so long as it doesn’t require them to take effective action to share the country’s abundant resources and political power. Most are not prepared to make any significant adjustments in how they live their lives or how they see their future. Few are prepared to really look within themselves to challenge their beliefs and values, for fear of what they might find and for fear of what they think they might lose (2001).

Ridgeway clearly articulated a distinction between the rhetoric and reality of reconciliation. His comments highlight the fact that the relationship of Government instrumentalities toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples indicates that they are not free, nor contributing, agents in the developing social framework of Australia.

This lack of inclusion was identified by Pollard (1998) who in discussing the early works of Elkin, argued that white attitudes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples underlay the determination of respective government policy. These attitudes were further contextualised by Kevin Gilbert, the famed Aboriginal political activist and author:

Their view of Aborigines as the most miserable people on earth was seared into Aboriginal thinking because they now controlled the provisions that allowed blacks to continue to exist at all. Independence from them was not possible (cited in Pollard 1988, p. 50).

The need for the development of co-ordinated intersectorial strategies at local and national levels to address this situation has a significant impact regarding equity of access issues. This need has been highlighted by the World Health Organization, in particular the Ottawa Charter, as being one of the major pre-requisites for health.
The Charter highlighted the fact that the prerequisites for good health cannot be ensured by the health sector alone. In particular, a co-ordinated response is required by governments, health and other social and economic sectors, by non-government and voluntary organisations, local authorities, industry and media (1986, p.2).

The link between social justice and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was recently highlighted by the NSW Department of Education and Training and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (2004, p. 12) stated that the poor outcomes that continue to disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Australian schools have been too narrowly defined and without sufficient regard for the broader social justice contexts within which the relevant issues need to be viewed.

The call for wider social justice measures to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has also been highlighted by the Australian Medical Association (2002; 2003; 2004). Similarly, a Report produced by Access Economics (2004, p. 8) argued that equity of access to health care cannot guarantee that health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will equal that of non-Indigenous Australians. Furthermore, the Report argued that what are needed are comprehensive solutions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander socioeconomic disadvantage. This thesis supports the social justice position taken by the Australian Medical Association and Access Economics.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has discussed the background to the research context for the current study. The historical context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander morbidity and mortality has been introduced together with a brief discussion highlighting demographic comparisons between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider non-Indigenous population. The relationship between social justice perspectives and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health and wellbeing has been introduced. The context of career education and the changing nature of the world-of-work have been introduced, and will be comprehensively explored in the following chapter, Chapter Three, *Literature Review*. 


Chapter Three

Literature Review

Chapter Overview

This chapter will discuss the history and contemporary setting of career education and career development from both international and national perspectives. The relationship between career education and the labour-market will be positioned within an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school context, with particular relevance to the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

Introduction

At both national and international levels, the world-of-work is increasingly being delineated by an accelerating complexity (McMahon, Patton & Tatham 2003, p. 4; MCEETYA Taskforce on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2001, p. 4; United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Labour Organization 2002, p. 2). Within this continually changing and complex social, political and economic environment, work is no longer being characterised by a set of tasks which are mastered once, nor is a career contextualised or defined by a vertical process of advancement within the one organisation.

Globalisation, the rapid spread of information and communications technology and significant demographic shifts have necessitated that alternate approaches to determining career decisions and formulating career pathways (Haines, Scott & Lincoln 2003, p. 9) be sought in order to keep pace with the restructuring work force (United National Educational,
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Scientific and Cultural Organization 2002, p. 3). This restructuring is not without its difficulties. While Stead and Harrington (2000, p. 323) acknowledge that the world is fast becoming a ‘global village’, they noted that in conjunction with this expansion the problems surrounding work in one country often becoming issues in other countries, further adding to the complexity of change.

In order to adapt, accommodate and keep pace with these changes, individuals need to develop their knowledge and skills on a continual basis in order to live and work meaningfully in the knowledge society (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Labour Organization 2002, p. 2). Thus the inter-relationship between the individual and the world at large becomes a meaningful dialogue, especially since the ‘knowledge economy is changing the way people interact with the world-of-work’ (Jarvis 2003, p. 1).

Within this complex and demanding environment, investment in education and training for the individual is an investment in both the development and growth of the individual and their community. Education and training lay the foundation for future social and economic development, because knowledge and skills comprise the ‘engine of a nation’s economic growth and social development’ (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Labour Organization 2002, p. 2).

Interest in career development has become a global phenomenon due to governments’ recognising and acknowledging the valuable contribution of a skilled work force to economic and social prosperity and development. The important relationship between career development and economic
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development has been acknowledged at the national level by Peter Tatham, President of the Career Industry Council of Australia. In highlighting this relationship, Tatham argued that in a knowledge economy, the future of Australia is dependent on the development of its human capital. A component of this development of human capital is career development, which is an ‘essential building block to achieve that goal’ (2006, ii).

The *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 9) noted that definitions of career and career development have changed in order to accommodate the changing nature of work and to encompass the ‘… broad range of services, programs and resources that assist people to manage their lives, their learning and their work. Career development has also been recognised and acknowledged as an activity which constitutes a lifelong process (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2002, p. 4), one that crosses the life span (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 14) and one that similarly incorporates career development learning, with an emphasis on the notion of career as being defined within the individual as learner (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. xv).

**Contextualising Career, Career Development and the Role of Career Advisers**

Career development has become a process which is both complex and unique (Haines, Scott & Lincoln 2003, p. 9). Not only is the process complex and unique, it is one which encompasses the individual’s lifelong progression in learning and work (Watts 2001, p. 211). Similarly, as a result of incorporating the impact of globalisation into the world-of-work and the shifting and redefining perceptions and understandings of reality which occur, associated concepts such as ‘career’, ‘career development’
and ‘Career Adviser’ have altered over time to accommodate this changing nature of life, learning and work (Curriculum Corporation 2003, p. 5).

The Careers Advisers Association of New South Wales (2005, p. 4) defined work as a set of activities with an intended set of outcomes from which it is hoped that a person derives personal satisfaction. In conjunction with these activities, work encompasses additional meaningful and satisfying activities through which an individual’s career develops, such as for example, parenting or volunteering.

Within this work environment, the concept of career has likewise adapted and changed. McMahon, Patton and Tatham argued that the concept of career and career development currently incorporates:

• A holistic view of paid employment as one facet of an individual’s life.
• A dynamic interaction between individuals, paid employment and life.
• A constantly changing world-of-work.
• The necessity for individuals to be proactive life/career managers (2003, p. 4).

The individual, positioned within this interactive environment is also impacted upon by such factors as culture, family, community, geographical, economic and political experiences, age, gender, and ability/disability. Understanding and navigating this complexity calls for individuals to be both adaptable and flexible in thought and action toward the development of their career, their lifelong learning and their engagement with the world-of-work in general.
McMahon, Patton and Tatham (2003, p. 4) conceptualised career and career development as being reflective of a proactive, individual-centred, life span, life career management process. Within this context the individual responds and adapts to change through creating, constructing, designing and identifying paid employment and life and learning opportunities which will enable them to create satisfying lives.

This response incorporates a significant engagement from the individual with relevant career information sources and key careers personnel. While this may be the case, there appears to be an anomaly between the rhetoric and reality of current career education in the schooling system in Australia.

The secondary schooling sector is a primary conduit for exposure to career development learning. The Report of the Leaders in Careers Forum (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2003, p. 3) noted that within this context, while there have been increasing efforts by all school jurisdictions to improve the extent and quality of career education and career information available to students, there remain concerns and criticism that the delivery of career education in Australian schools is often of an ‘ad hoc’ nature and largely dependent on the enthusiasm, commitment and skills of the relevant individuals.

Patton (2002, p. 59) also raised this issue, highlighting the fact that one of the problems with the existing provision of career services is that providers tended to come from a diverse range of professions and professional backgrounds. This diversity not only brings with it a variety of qualifications and perspectives, it also fosters ambiguity and a lack of
congruity regarding activities, definitions and associated terminology (Patton & McMahon 1999, pp. 3-4; Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 4).

As a result of this diversity of professions and professional backgrounds, there are in fact relatively few individuals who have specific qualifications in career education. In addition, within the secondary school system the primary facilitator for career education is the school Career Adviser, whose many areas of responsibility are often interwoven and interrelated (Careers Advisers Association 2005, p. 7).

In an attempt to promote a unifying career development culture in the Australian community, the Career Industry Council of Australia, in conjunction with the national Standards and Accreditation of Career Practitioners project commissioned through the Career Industry Council of Australia by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, have recently prepared the Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners (Career Industry Council of Australia, 2006).

The Career Industry Council of Australia represents the combined collaboration of Australian career development practitioner associations. It is the national representative body of career development practitioner organisations within Australia (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006, pp. 34-35). The Standards refer to the systems and procedures developed by career development practitioners and stakeholders in the career industry that:

- Define the career industry, its membership and its services.
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Recognise and specify the diverse skills and knowledge of career development practitioners.

Guide practitioner entry into the industry.

Provide a foundation for designing career development practitioner training.

Provide quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders in the industry.

Create an agreed terminology for the industry (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006, p. 3).

Hence, the term career development practitioner is an ‘overarching’ (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 14) or ‘umbrella’ (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006, p. 5) term referring to any direct service provider in the career development field.

As a result of changes in the philosophy of career development, Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 186) argued that career development practitioners are being urged to rethink their roles. Clients are viewed as ‘lifelong learners, they themselves as facilitators of learning, and their joint interaction as a learning system’. Meyers (2000, p. 33) argued that the challenge for career development practitioners is to ‘venture beyond the bounds of traditional career counsellors’, while Krumboltz (1996, p. 75) posited that career development practitioners will need to ‘generate learning experiences for their clients that involve a wide array of personal as well as career issues’.

It is clear that changes within the national and international world-of-work are impacting on society as a whole. The effect of this impact is that all individuals, including career development practitioners, are being required to adapt to change. Within this changing world-of-work context,
the presence and importance of the Career Adviser cannot be overstated. This is particularly so within the schooling environment, as Career Advisers need to adapt and incorporate new ways of learning into their provision and facilitation of career education to students.

**Australian Career Education Initiatives**

Career development within Australia and the importance of career education in assisting young people make a successful transition from school to further education, training and employment has been on the national agenda since the mid 1970s (Careers Advisers Association 2006, p. 2). Responsibility for government funding of career guidance services in Australia is currently divided between the Federal Government and the States and Territories. The States and Territories have constitutional responsibility for education, the Federal Government responsibility for employment services, and the States major funding responsibility in schools (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004, p. 169).

In an attempt to formulate an Australian national career development framework, a draft prototype of career development, the *Australian Blueprint for Career Development* (Miles Morgan 2003) was developed. The *Blueprint* was adapted from the *Canadian Blueprint for Life/Work Designs*, which in turn had its roots in the *National Career Development Guidelines*, a National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee initiative launched in the United States in 1987 (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 3).

The *Blueprint* provided guidelines for helping to integrate and strengthen career development learning in a wide variety of settings. These included primary schools, secondary schools and post-secondary education
institutions including TAFEs and Universities. In conjunction with this, the *Blueprint* also supported the career development activities of transition advisers, public employment service providers and public and private sector business organisations (Miles Morgan 2003, p. 10).

While the *Blueprint* has multiple goals, its primary aim was to have users work with a national framework of career competencies. It was intended that these competencies create comprehensive, effective and measurable career development programs which will assist Australians to better manage their lives, learning and work.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training report into vocational education in schools identified a number of key components for effective school career guidance and provision. The Report concluded:

- Career education be a mandatory part of the core curriculum of the compulsory years of secondary schooling, clearly defined and distinct from VET programs.
- All secondary schools have at least one full-time professional Careers Adviser, with appropriate specialist training, who can provide a dedicated career service.
- The professional development needs of career educators be better met through appropriate training and resources for professional development.

In its commitment to support career development for young Australians and incorporate these key components into school career education and
development, the Australian Government has worked at a national level to produce a number of initiatives including:

- A national curriculum blueprint – *Australian Blueprint for Career Development*.
- The *Careers Education Quality Framework*.
- Professional development at three levels – *Australian Career Development Studies*.
- Recurrent funding to 2009 to support the transition of young people from 13-19 years of age through school and from school to further education, training and work – the Australian Network of Industry Careers Advisers (Farmer 2006, pp. 20-25).

In conjunction with Australian Government career initiatives, has been the establishment of a national Australian peak body, the Career Industry Council of Australia. The Career Industry Council of Australia represents the combined collaboration of Australian career development practitioner associations and is the national representative body of career development practitioner organisations within Australia (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006, pp. 34-35).

The Career Industry Council of Australia acknowledges that career development practitioners work in a range of occupations and settings providing a wide variety of services to diverse client groups (2006, p. 1). These settings include, among others, Universities, TAFEs and schools. Career development services provided in these settings may include,
among others, career counselling, career education, career coaching, mentoring and co-ordinating work experience or internships.

During 2005, the Career Industry Council of Australia developed the *Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners*. It is anticipated that these standards will be regarded as the minimum required by Australian career development practitioners from 1 January 2012. Once implemented, the standards will provide the framework with which to meet emerging national priorities related to work force development, social equity and lifelong learning (Career Industry Council of Australia 2006, ii).

Prior to the development of the *Standards* and the establishment of the Career Industry Council of Australia, the Department of Education, Science and Training produced the *Careers Education Quality Framework* (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1999).

The Framework was developed with input from industry, education systems in all States and Territories in Australia and the Australian Quality Council. It completes work begun in 1996 with a meeting jointly convened by the CEAV and the Dusseldorp Skills Forum. Two reports were produced from this forum, *Career Education and Guidance for the Next Millennium* and *Linking Career Education and School Workplace Learning Pathways* (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1999, i).

These two Reports provided an overview of the context and delivery of career education and vocational learning in Australian secondary schools. The Framework incorporates this overview, and provides career
development practitioners and key stakeholders within the school and the community with a practical tool for self-assessing career education and developing action plans for improvement. The Framework acts as a guide and is ‘designed as a way of improving career education in the whole school’ (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1999, p. 2).

Schools utilising the Framework demonstrate to the community that a ‘quality approach’ (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1999, p. 2) is being adopted by the school. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who need specific and targeted support and advocacy in order for their educational outcomes to match those of the wider non-Indigenous student body.

**Career Education within the New South Wales Secondary Schooling Context**

School education in Australia is administered under a Federal system of government. Within this Federal system of government, State and Territory Governments maintain primary responsibility for school education and vocational education and training while the Commonwealth maintains a role in providing leadership in areas of national priority (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, p. 50).

The main co-ordinating mechanism for career information and guidance services in Australia is the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs. State and Territory education departments play a significant role in funding, developing and managing career
services in schools while the Commonwealth largely funds career information resources (Miles Morgan 2002, p. 5).

Within the broader educational curriculum in New South Wales secondary schools, career education has been conceptualised as one of the components of a comprehensive career guidance strategy (Curriculum Corporation 2003, p. 5). As has been previously highlighted in this discussion, it is important to note that within the schooling context, career education definitions have changed over time to encompass various meanings and applications. Not only has this led to some ambiguity of the term and contributed toward a lack of definition of the role and activities of career development practitioners, it has highlighted the important need for clarification.

Cooksey (1979, p. 7) associated career education with the development of those skills, attitudes and understanding which help students live and work in the adult world. Curriculum Corporation (2003, p. 5) take a broader approach, defining career education as comprising one part of a comprehensive career guidance strategy. This strategy encompasses a range of teaching and learning activities by which individuals learn to plan, prepare, develop skills and acquire knowledge to assist in post-school career options, and to maximise their effective participation in working life.

Career education within Australia has achieved notable recognition at a national level. For example, the Australian Education Council developed national career education curriculum guidelines and defined career education as:
Career education in Australian schools is concerned with the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences which will assist students to make informed decisions about school and post-school options and enable effective participation in working life (1992, p. 6).

Subsequent to these guidelines, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (Department of Education, Science and Training 1999) highlighted the relationship between employment related skills and future career pathways. The Declaration stated that when students leave school, they should have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment and related career options and pathways.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (1999, p. 6) defined career education as ‘planned programs of career guidance learning experiences delivered through the school system’. Career education is also a process which ensures that students are made aware of decision-making styles and which enables them to become skilled in the use of the strategies involved (Board of Studies 1996, p. 41).

Within New South Wales schools, the syllabus provides the framework for learning that is relevant and lifelong, and which is to be articulated into career and life skills for the future. Furthermore, the syllabus provides an opportunity to develop a new approach to career advisory and transition support services for students for the future, while continuing to provide access to suitably qualified people to support these students to make key decisions about jobs, courses and career paths, including access to information systems and careers advice which is informed by current

Patton (2005, p. 21) argued that while much career education in schools has focused on preparing young people for transitions within school and from school to work, traditionally very little attention has been paid to the large number of influences on career development. These influences have been identified in more recent theoretical formulations such as for example the Development-Contextual approach (Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg 1986), and the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon 1999).

In further examining current career education and development practices, Patton (2005, p. 24) argued that curriculum and learning and teaching methods need to be developed in order to foster individuals learning how to intentionally act in environments of change, drawing on an understanding of the individual as a self-organising active system. In arguing for this change, Patton highlighted the important point that in acknowledgement of this shift in the career development process, schools also need to redefine their role in the process of career education for their students.

Additionally, Patton also suggested (2005, p. 25) that as part of a broader set of career guidance activities, it is important that career education be viewed as performing an integral role in preparing young people for the future. Within this context, schools need to be viewed as ‘learning communities’ wherein all aspects of their functioning are designed to develop active learners and connections are made continually between learning in school and the broader community.
Recent Health Career Education Initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary School Students within the New South Wales Secondary Schooling Context

On 1 January 1995, the *Australian Qualifications Framework* (Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board Secretariat 2002) was introduced Australia-wide by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, with plans for full implementation over a five year period by the year 2000. The Framework was developed under instruction from State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

The Framework, a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training (TAFEs and private providers) and the higher education sector (mainly Universities) maintains key industry links across the Australian work force sector. Within the Framework, training packages have been developed by industry by national Industry Skills Councils or by enterprises to meet the identified training need of specific industries or industry sectors (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2005).

In January 2005 there were eighty-one endorsed Training Packages. Nine of these were enterprise Training Packages, developed by enterprises for their own unique needs. Training Packages have a set date for review, which ensures that they remain current to meet industry needs and to allow issues arising during their implementation to be addressed. In January 2005, forty Training Packages had completed the review process
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and been re-endorsed (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2005).

The Industry Skills Councils have two key roles:

1. Provide accurate industry intelligence to the VET sector regarding current and future skill needs and training requirements.
2. Support the development, implementation and continuous improvement of quality nationally recognised training products and services, including Training Packages (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 2005).

The Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council is the recognised peak national body providing advice on the training and skills development needs of the community services and health work force to government and industry. In September 2005 the Council was funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training to develop information resources aimed at improving participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in apprenticeships in the community services and health industries. Within the context of this discussion, it is important to note that data collection for the current study (which occurred May-June 2005 inclusive) took place prior to the development and distribution of these resources.

As a result of this research, a number of resources aimed at attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the Community Services and Health Industries sector, via Australian apprenticeships, were developed. The resources have been packaged into an Information Pack
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entitled, *What’s the Job?* The resources include materials promoting eight entry level job roles in the Community Services and Health Industries:

- Environmental Health.
- Child Care.
- Community Work.
- Drug and Alcohol Work.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Work.
- Youth Work.
- Mental Health.
- Population Health (Community Services and Health Industries Skills Council 2005).

These initiatives are currently being implemented and the current study complements their aims in support the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Access to Education**

There is great diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in terms of academic achievement, geographical location, cultural knowledge and family structure (New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group & New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2004, p. 69). Moreover, to add to the complexity of this diversity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students face numerous barriers that many non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not.

These barriers include socioeconomic deprivation (such as financial constraints and health issues), dysfunctional communities, low academic self-concept, absenteeism and attention and retention issues. The
combination of these factors, together with prejudices, racism and
discrimination within the employment sector has a profound impact on
students, their families and in the long-term their communities.

The Community Services and Industry Skills Council highlighted the
alarming fact that despite there being relevant programs in place to
improve outcomes in some educational areas, the majority of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander students continue to engage in education and
training at lower rates of participation. As well as this low rate of
participation, students achieve lower levels of educational attainment in
comparison to ‘all other Australian students’ (2006, p. 26).

This unacceptably low level of engagement and academic achievement
mirrors the vital role that education plays in overcoming and improving
social and economic disadvantage, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples. This situation has been raised in the Report of the
Review of Aboriginal Education (NSW Department of Education and
69) which noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a
number of school leaders and school staff highlighted the fact that the
impact of educational disadvantage on Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students is made more complex by dispossession,
disempowerment and racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander communities both within and outside the schooling education
system.

The impact of these factors on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
students has been discussed by Craven et. al. (2005, pp. 23-24) in their
landmark report investigating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
students’ aspirations. The Report pointed out that while non-Indigenous students were able to visualise and, in the minority of cases actually experience some barriers to achieving their aspirations, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experienced multiple barriers on a daily basis. This situation served to entrench a ‘fatalistic attitude’ that contributed toward them not achieving or attempting to achieve their goals.

The impact of this interconnective relationship between education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the ability to generate independent income and effect change in standards of living has been highlighted in the literature (Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee 2000; Department of Education, Science & Training 2002, p. 1).

For example, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1994, p. 16) argued that lack of access to the schooling education system and subsequent labour-market participation and income generation were effective agents in minimising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participating and contributing toward the national economy. Furthermore, the Council highlighted the fact that it was not only the national economy that was impacted upon, but the socioeconomic situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities as well.

This important relationship between access to education, income generation and socioeconomic improvement has also been highlighted at an international level. Dr David Satcher (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Bulletin 1999) the United States General-Surgeon raised this issue during a visit to Nganampa Health Council in the remote north of
South Australia. Dr Satcher clearly articulated the connection between education and health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, arguing that this was in fact the ‘key’ to better social and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The (Australian) National Centre for Vocational Education Research also drew attention to this relationship in their report, *At a glance: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in vocational education and training*. The Report argued that education in general is recognised as being a ‘key factor in empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and breaking entrenched cycles of disadvantage’ (2002, p. 2).

The importance of the relationship between education and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was also highlighted by political activist Aden Ridgeway in the opening address of the University of Sydney College Of Health Sciences Education Health Conference:

> Creating opportunities in education and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not about ‘affirmative action’ or other labels that only alienate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the broader community. It is about recognising the unique skills and potential benefits that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people bring to service delivery that concerns the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. And this is a message that needs to be delivered to the wider community through the education process (2003).

Ridgeway highlighted the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples possess unique skills and potential benefits which can be brought to service delivery via the education system which, theoretically, should facilitate this very process. Preparation for a positive future for young people thus depends on successful completion of the compulsory years of
schooling and also post-compulsory education and training (Curriculum Corporation 2003, p. 1). This is especially so since the school environment is a significant conduit for career advice, development and guidance.

As early as the 1990s, the Schools Council (1993, p. 32) in their review of the compulsory years of schooling, *The Compulsory Years. Five to Fifteen: Reviewing the ‘Compulsory’ Years of Schooling*, argued that the impact of educational disadvantage on students during the early years of schooling manifests in various ways. These included learning difficulties, constant experience of failure, alienation from teachers and peers, dropping out of school and difficulty attaining higher education and gaining employment.

It is clear that the importance of access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is a crucial factor in facilitating access to the labour-market, subsequent long-term labour-market participation and socioeconomic improvement. This was an issue taken up by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2003, 6.1) who stressed the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children commencing formal learning as early as possible in a safe and healthy environment and one which has the support of family and community and which encourages attendance and retention.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, p. 17) reported that while participation in education by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continues to slowly increase across the school, university and vocational education and training sectors, educational participation and attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains below that of other Australians. This is due in part to the high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who experience chronic health problems
(such as middle ear infection and nutritional deficiencies) which negatively affect their school attendance and learning outcomes in their early years.

Despite this somewhat bleak picture, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, pp. 17-18) reported that between 1996 and 2004 there were increases in every Australian State and Territory, with Australia-wide enrolments reaching 130,400 in 2004. The proportion of all full-time students who were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin also rose from 3% in 1996 to 4% in 2004.

A major focus of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education initiatives has been to encourage students to continue their education beyond the compulsory years of schooling. It is intended that these initiatives will increase students’ future employment prospects and opportunities for non-school education. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, p. 18) reported that in the 2004 National Schools Statistics Collection apparent retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full-time students Years 7-10 was 86%, and to Year 12 was 40%. Student retention to Year 10 and beyond steadily increased between 1996 and 2004.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention rates remain considerably lower than those for non-Indigenous students, the gaps between the two groups are slowly closing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported (2005, p. 18) that in Year 11, the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students closed by nine percentage points between 1996 and 2004. While the Year 12 gap closed by six percentage points over the same time period, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were still around half as likely as non-Indigenous students to progress to the final year of schooling in 2004.
These statistics highlight two issues. The first is the range of educational disparity (and disadvantage) between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students. The second is that some improvement has occurred. Retention levels beyond the post-compulsory schooling years are increasing, as are enrolments into the schooling system. Despite these improvements, it is clear that there is still along way to go before Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ statistics match those of the wider non-Indigenous student body.

**The Relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Education and Labour-market Participation**

The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s education and labour-market participation is fraught with complex issues. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey* (cited in Long, Frigo & Batten 1999, p. 5) argued that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander youth, level of education was the biggest predictor for gaining employment. Hunter (1996, p. 12) also argued that education is the largest single factor associated with poor outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment.

Furthermore, Hunter and Schwab (1998, p. 1) contended that on almost all factors in employment opportunity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face a disadvantage. Similarly, Long, Frigo and Batten (1999, xiii) argued ‘that at nearly every stage’, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth experience ‘substantial disadvantage in terms of their participation in education, their attainment of educational qualifications and their participation in the labour-market’. The authors concluded by stating that in most instances, the disadvantage experienced by these youth was substantial.
While it is acknowledged that post-compulsory schooling can lead to societal improvements, there are still many barriers confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and adolescents within the wider non-Indigenous community.

Lester (2000, p. 44) highlighted a significant and important aspect relevant to the further development of careers programs within schools. This involved ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are prepared not only emotionally, but intellectually, with skills and knowledge to counter the racism that they will confront either within their education and training or in the labour-market itself.

Moreover, Lester (2000, p. 16) argued definitively that schools also need to develop stronger links with labour-markets. These stronger links will ensure that current school students are market-ready and that schools provide comprehensive preparation for a life of work and continuing and lifelong education. In addition to calling for schools to develop stronger links with labour-markets, Lester stressed the importance of creating opportunities for transition to work in an attempt to reduce future disadvantage likely to be experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the education system and subsequent participation within the labour-market is one which is not clear-cut. Socio-economic statistics indicate that while increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are entering the labour-market, when compared with labour-market participation by non-Indigenous Australians, the gap is not closing quickly enough.
Career Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary School Students

School-to-work transition for Australian secondary schools, including enterprise and career education, has become an area with a growing focus of attention. This is primarily because current national and state education policy directions support the view that prior to leaving school, students should be equipped with information and knowledge related to the world-of-work. This includes employment related skills, an understanding of the work environment, relevant career options and pathways to further education, training, employment and lifelong learning (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2003, p. 3).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, school-to-work transition is an area of significant importance because of its relationship between education and the labour-market. This importance was recognised in 1987 by the Commonwealth Government which established the *Aboriginal Employment Development Policy* in response to high levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment and economic disadvantage (Long, Frigo & Batten, 1999, p. 10).

A review of the policy was subsequently undertaken by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1994, xv). The Review concluded that while there had been significant improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education, equality in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was ‘... unlikely to be achieved in this century’. As an interim measure, the Review suggested that strategies including training and school-to-work transition arrangements would need to play an important role in bridging the gap.
The need and importance for greater attention to school-to-work transition issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was highlighted by the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs in their *National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002*. Key outcomes for the listed priorities included:

- Improved articulation of learning pathways between school and post-compulsory education and training.
- Increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the full range of subjects in senior secondary schooling, higher level award studies and employment-focused courses.
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students successfully complete Year 12 or equivalent and gain employment after participation in education and training (1995, pp. 4-5).

These key outcomes have since been incorporated into *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (Department of Education, Science and Training 1999, pp. 2-3). The Declaration elucidated the important role that education plays in developing an understanding of the relationship between education and employment in the labour-market (1.1.5). In relation to the curriculum, the Declaration stated that students should participate in programs and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future (2.2.3).

The Declaration also stated that students should be provided with a school environment that is socially just, so that outcomes are free from the
negative effects of discrimination in its varied forms. This will facilitate the understanding and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture by all students. It will also ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equitable access to and opportunities in schooling, particularly to ensure their learning outcomes improve, and over time match those of other students (3.3.3).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, school-to-work transition (including enterprise and career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students) has become increasingly important. Schools now accept the responsibility of taking on the challenge of linking student’s education to employment-focused outcomes. This has led to the incorporation of a number of key competencies in mainstream curriculum with the intention of producing students who are ‘work ready’ (Board of Studies 2001, p. 6).

In order to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ awareness of career options and pathways, and to ensure that students are ‘work ready’ most Australian States have developed individual career aspiration programs. With regard to the New South Wales context, Lester provided a thorough and meticulous analysis in his report *Evaluative Research Into the Office of the Board of Studies*, *Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program for Aboriginal Students in NSW High Schools* (Board of Studies 2000).

While career education programs in all Australian states have aimed to address issues that impact upon learning outcomes and entry into the labour-market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students Craven et. al. have argued that there is a fundamental need to
improve overall career education in the secondary school sector. The authors argue that serious consideration needs to be given by education systems toward enhancing the ethos, status, place and quality of career education, particularly in the secondary school context. In order to achieve this, a number of strategies are suggested:

- Enhancing the place of career education in the schooling curriculum.
- Devoting adequate levels of staff to improve career education.
- Developing appropriate curriculum and resources to support teachers.
- Strengthening the curriculum (2005, pp. 31-33).

The authors emphasised that, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a whole-of-school career education program would provide additional encouragement to students, assisting them to set their aspirations in order to reach their full potential. This additional support would guide and assist these students in making informed decisions regarding their career pathways and post-compulsory learning options.

When considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the need is greater and more pressing, especially when taking into account the systemic and social barriers which pose additional and significant challenges to achieve academically. For this reason, it is important that schools adopt an inclusive approach in ensuring that career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is facilitated in an environment that is culturally safe and which takes into account varying levels of English language literacy, academic self-concept and individual aspiration.
Career Development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary School Students

The importance of career development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students has, until only relatively recently, been largely ignored. This fact has been corroborated by a paucity of research on the subject in the literature.

Notwithstanding the current situation, and in stark contrast to it, the importance of assisting students choose education, training and work that serves both their needs and those of the evolving work force has been well articulated and argued at local, national and international levels (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, ix-x; Jarvis 2003, p. 2; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2004, p. 3).

The Australia Country Note of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2002, p. 9) review of career education argued that effective strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students needed to be grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Furthermore, these strategies also needed to incorporate the active involvement of parents and families. In conjunction with this there needs to be an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with guidance training available to take part in such programs.

The Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, p. 149; pp. 232-233) noted the importance of culturally appropriate career services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Inquiry emphasised the fact that this was an important component of a targeted approach
necessary to address low school retention rates and the high unemployment and social disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Similarly, Craven (2003, p. 11) in an evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student’s aspirations argued that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were not receiving quality career information. Craven found that in general, students primarily sought advice from family and friends. This was cause for concern, especially considering the adverse historical relationship that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have experienced with the education system and the labour-market in general.

The need for appropriate career information had also been highlighted by Lester. During the data collection phase of his research into the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program, he noted:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have much more limited expectations of career opportunities than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (especially in remote communities).
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wanted additional career resources available to enhance both the schools’ and parents’ capacity to provide informed advice (2000, pp. 27-29).

According to Lester, the data indicated that an enormous role and responsibility was placed upon parents and extended family and community members to provide career information, with parents being the most important source of advice for students. While parents often underplayed their role in providing career information, they recognised
two important factors. First, there was the need for additional support and career information for children, especially from Career Advisers at school. Second, there was the need for a collaborative working partnership between themselves and the school Career Adviser.

Career education largely occurs for youth within the schooling environment. Within this situation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are significantly challenged by such issues as low academic self-concept, attendance, absenteeism, suspension and retention beyond the post-compulsory schooling years. These issues, and the fact that students generally seek career information from no doubt well-meaning family and friends, collectively exert a limitation on the opportunity of exposure to quality career information and relevant activities for students.

The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. 2004 p. 149) noted that in field trips, submissions and research conducted within the context of career education, the quality of career counselling emerged as a major issue. This highlighted the relevance of interpersonal relationships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous Career Advisers, particularly as career counselling is ‘… an intensive activity and is most often conducted in one-to-one or small-group settings’ (Patton & McMahon 2001, p. 2).

Many submissions in the Report called for focused quality career counselling rather than career information, with an important distinction being made between the two. The counselling context focuses on the individual, linking the skills and interests of the individual with a career path that matches the potential of the student with their aspiration.
Moreover, students are individually guided in subject-selection, goal-setting, work-experience, work-placement and career pathway planning.

In a report examining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ aspirations (Craven et. al., 2005, p. 90) the authors noted that these students experienced a number of disadvantages in comparison to non-Indigenous students. Greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (both rural and urban) found career information unhelpful and not useful. Considering the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise roughly 2.4% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 3), yet in comparison experience greater disadvantage overall, is cause for concern.

Craven et. al. (2005, pp. 90-92) clearly reveal disparities in a number of important areas. It is clear that these disparities substantiate the importance and necessity for a much more comprehensive, relevant and appropriate approach toward career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It is important that all students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, grow into the fullness of their inherent capacities as adults, and be in a position whereby they can contribute toward not only their own economic security but to that of the wider national economy. It is therefore imperative that they, in conjunction with the rest of the community, be provided with equity of access to those institutions, services and key career development personnel which will enable them to do so.

Within the context of this section of the literature review, there is another element which has a significant bearing on the nature of career advice that
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive from Career Advisers: low academic expectation.

The *Taskforce on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education* (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2001, p. 15) reported that though much work had been done in trying to eliminate the perception and acceptance that educational inequality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was normal, the attempts to do so has been very difficult.

Low academic expectation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has likewise been highlighted and argued by Craven et. al. (2005, pp. 134-136). The authors noted that as a result of their research into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ aspirations, teacher and industry expectations had a significant influence and impact on the nature and quality of career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They concluded that raising teacher expectations of students was a necessity.

The AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education report also highlighted this issue. The Report argued that historically, the policies and practices of Australian Governments were predicated on the supposed inferiority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Consequently, there has been a tendency for systems and schools to ‘... devalue the educational potential of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and to overlook the cultural, linguistic and social capital they bring to the classroom’ (2005, p. 5).
The Report acknowledged that while this ‘deficit’ view is now contested, the perception that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are to blame for their poor educational outcomes lingers on. In effect, disparity in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students has come to be viewed as ‘normal’ and ‘incremental change’ seen as acceptable (2005, p. 5).

As has been argued in this literature review, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities experience widespread disadvantage across a range of socioeconomic indicators. Equitable access to education and participation within the schooling system is an effective means by which these students and their families and communities can work toward financial, economic and social independence and security. It is clear that career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students provides one of a number of crucial links between education and participation within the wider labour-market.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a comprehensive discussion of the changing nature of the world-of-work and the impact of globalisation on career trajectories. Australian Government career initiatives have been examined, including policy development at a national level. The relationship between Career Advisers, career education and the labour-market has been contextualised within a New South Wales Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary schooling context in juxtaposition with the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. The following chapter, Chapter Four, *Theoretical Framework*, will present the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon 1999).
Chapter Four

Theoretical Framework

Chapter Overview
This chapter will discuss the theoretical framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school career development and education. The Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon 1999) will be presented, and its relevancy and applicability to career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students discussed.

Introduction
Globalisation has impacted upon the world’s nations and its communities in various ways and to varying degrees, especially within a career development context (McMahon et. al. 2003; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 2001; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & International Labour Organization 2002). A number of authors have highlighted the fact that career theory, while providing the contextual framework and ideological base for defining and delineating career development, has not been without its critics as it too has struggled to adapt, accommodate and keep pace with these changes.

For example, Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 103) argued that career theory has paid little attention to the career development of groups other than a white middle-class socioeconomic milieu. Herr (2001, p. 209) argued that in the face of the acceleration of the worldwide availability of career guidance and counselling, global nations need to develop their own
indigenous models and practices of career development rather than adopting those models and practices that have originated in North America or Europe.

In addition, Watson argued that the most fundamental challenge that career psychology faces is the construction of a new identity that will challenge existant career theories. Furthermore, as part of that challenge, career practitioners and career educators ‘... need to address the critical question of what constitutes a good narrative for career practice at the present time’ (2006, p. 47).

Patton and McMahon, in a vein not dissimilar to Watson, have argued that the field of career development theory is not only ‘dynamic’, but one which is ‘undergoing change’ (1999, p. 131) and that despite a significant historical development, theory ‘remains disparate and segmented’ (1999, p. 132). As a result of this ‘variable and complex theoretical base’ (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 153), career theories need to be ‘appropriate for the complexity of individuals living in a complex world’ (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 156).

**Career Theory Overview**

Career development is underpinned by a richly diverse theoretical base which has its roots in developmental psychology and learning theory (McMahon & Tatham 2000, p. 4). The following table identifies the primary theoreticians contributing toward the body of career development theory:
Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Work Force

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretician</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parsons (1909)</td>
<td>Trait and Factor Theory</td>
<td>Identifies key elements in career choice; knowledge of self and the world-of-work and the relationship between these knowings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland (1966)</td>
<td>Occupational Choice Theory</td>
<td>A personality-based theory of career typology which suggests that individuals are attracted to a particular occupation that meets their personal needs and provides them with satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super (1954)</td>
<td>Life Span Vocational Choice Theory</td>
<td>A vocational choice theory which has six life and career development stages, and emphasises the role and impact of self-concept development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lent, Brown and Hackett (1996)</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Career Theory</td>
<td>Based on the earlier work of Bandura (1986) examining social cognition; attempts to address issues of culture, gender, genetic endowment, social context and unexpected life events that may interact with and supersede the effects of career related choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savickas (2003)</td>
<td>Constructivist Theory</td>
<td>Views career as a socially constructed process reflecting both individual actions and the persons’ interactions with others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted: Cherednichenko et al 2005, p. 23.

These theories can be grouped to include content theories in the manner of those developed by Parsons (Trait and Factor Theory 1909) and Holland (Occupational Choice Theory 1966), process theories developed by Super (Life Span Vocational Choice Theory 1954) and both content and process theories developed by Krumboltz (Social Learning Theory 1976), and Lent, Brown and Hackett (Social Cognitive Theory 1996).

McMahon and Tatham (2000, p. 4) argued that theories of content, derived from the trait and factor tradition, have been instrumental in elaborating influences on career development. These have included for example ability, personality, interests and values (however some content influences
such as socioeconomic status and geographic location have received little attention).

In essence, the ‘trait and factor’ approach asserted that occupational choice can be made through a logical, objective and rational process of matching self-knowledge with occupational knowledge. This approach has been most typified by Holland (1973) who focussed on vocational type and a career assessment instrument the *Self-Directed Search* (McMahon & Tatham 2000, p. 4).

In general, theories of process have been described as developmental theories, one of the major exponents of which has been Super (1992). Super was the first to acknowledge that career development does not conclude in early adulthood but rather continues throughout the life span of an individual (McMahon & Tatham 2000, p. 4).

Supers’ work has also been characterised by the ‘concept of self’ because it is in the self that the processing of life span, life space information occurs. Theorists whose approaches encompassed both theory and process include the work of Krumboltz (1979), and Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg (1983; 1986) which focused on the process of interaction between content variables (McMahon & Tatham 2000, p. 5).

The majority of the established career theories either have their foundation in or are strongly influenced by a positivistic world view. Within a positivistic world view, behaviour is generally identified by a scientific and logical match between a person’s traits and the demands of the work approach. Established career theories such as Holland’s (1997) personality type theory and Dawis and Lofquist’s (1984) theory of work adjustment
are key representatives of the positivist school of thinking (Chen 2003, p. 204).

McMahon & Tatham (2000, p. 6) have argued that central to the challenge to extant career theory has been the emerging constructivist worldview with its focus on holism and interconnection. As a result, career development of individuals ‘may only be understood in relation to their environments’ (2000, p. 6). Chen argued that the social constructivist perspective views career as a ‘socially constructed process’ reflecting both individual actions and the person’s interactions with others. Rather than objectively measuring and assessing a person’s traits, career development is viewed as a ‘complex, dynamic and ever-evolving process’ (2003, p. 204).

The constructivist school of thinking is the foundation of emerging theoretical models in career development and counselling and include Young et. al. (1996) contextual explanation of career, Cochran’s (1990; 1997) narrative approach and Savickas’s (1997) constructive approach. Other emerging models (cited in Chen 2003, p. 204), such as Brown’s (1996b) value-based holistic model, Lent, Brown and Hackett’s (1969) social cognitive framework, Betz’s (2001) self-efficacy model and Patton and McMahon’s (1999) Systems Theory approach are connected with and reflect features of social constructivist philosophy.

**Systems Theory**

Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 134) argued that the emergence of Systems Theory has essentially been a reaction to the traditional classical, analytic or positivist worldview which assumes that all action is related to a carefully balanced and interdependent model of linear cause and effect. In
contrast to this, the systems theory worldview ‘... values the whole, a system that is more than the sum of individual parts’ (1999, p. 135).

Systems Theory is characterised by a number of interrelated principles including wholes and parts, patterns and rules, acausality, dynamic interaction, discontinuous change, open and closed systems, and stories (Patton 1997, p. 5). It provides the foundation of an overarching framework within which commonalities and relationships in existing career theories can be highlighted (Patton 1997, p. 5). In addition to being ‘broadly based’, Systems Theory is able to account for the diversity and complexity of not only the influences on career development but of career development itself (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 9).

Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 135) argued that due to its complexity, simple definitions of Systems Theory are in fact difficult to construct. In their work on Systems Theory and career development, the authors provide the following definition of Systems Theory by Plas which reflects the interconnecting concepts that underpin the theory:

This newer thinking is much more concerned with patterns of functioning. Searching for the causes of human activity ceases to be important. Inductive and deductive logic make room for other types of rationality, such as reasoning by analogy. Understanding human language patterns is critical. Everything is viewed as dynamic rather than static. Spontaneous change can be expected under certain circumstances. Working with wholes instead of pieces of the whole is fundamental (Plas 1986, p. 3).

As Patton and McMahon pointed out in response, the human system, itself a ‘complexity of interrelated subsystems which interacts with other systems and subsystems, both living and non-living’ is one which is thus
viewed as ‘purposive, ever-changing, and evolving toward equilibrium’ (1999, p. 135).

Patton (1997, p. 7) concurred, articulating that a fundamental belief in systems thinking is ‘a focus on the unity of the system’, whereby ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. Therefore, parts are not isolated phenomena, but rather ‘interrelated functions of the total system’ (1997, p. 7). In terms of career development then, the individual and their context is regarded as a ‘whole’ with the reciprocity between that individual and their context regarded as the ‘interdependence of its parts’ (Patton 1997, p. 7).

The emphasis in Systems Theory is on the recursiveness, or ongoing relationship, between elements or subsystems of the system and the changes that occur over time as a result of these continual interactions (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 9); rather than focusing on cause and effect between parts, it views a pattern of interrelationship as more important (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 135).

In examining critiques of Systems Theory, Berman argued that traditional critiques of Systems Theory emphasised a tendency to ignore crucial social and historical contexts, as well as individual differences and aspirations, unreflective thinking and a potentially authoritarian outlook (1996, p. 28). That being so, Brown has identified four assumptions underlying a convergence toward constructivist approaches in career guidance:

- All aspects of the universe are interconnected. It is impossible to separate figure from ground, subject from object, people from their environments.
• There are no absolutes. Human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred.

• Human behaviour can only be understood in the context in which it occurs.

• The subjective frame of reference of human beings is the only legitimate source of knowledge. Events occur outside human beings. As individuals understand their environments and participate in these events, they define themselves and their environments (cited in Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 161).

According to Patton and McMahon these assumptions align with the elements of the Systems Theory Framework primarily because of the emphasis on the interconnectedness and importance of wholes rather than parts. Consequently the individual:

... cannot be separated from their context, and behaviour cannot be accounted for in a linear way. Knowledge is constructed within the individual in relation to their experience and cannot be taught, and theory cannot be applied to individuals because they construct their own personal theory (2006, p. 161).

The current study draws on a Systems Theory Framework of career development to understand career education and its relevance to health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students. It does so because the Framework provides the means by which interrelated and broader contextual issues (Sarra 1977, p. 55) including social and cultural factors impacting on career education, and the actual and perceived barriers, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be understood.
The Systems Theory Framework

The Systems Theory Framework was developed by Patton and McMahon (1999) as an overview of important influences on career development (1999, p. 155). While it accounts for the multitude of influences on individuals’ career development which have been identified by theorists, researchers and practitioners (McMahon, Patton & Watson 2005, p. 8) it also accommodates the perspectives of traditional predictive theories, and more recent constructivist approaches as well.

The Framework represents an attempt to ‘address the criticisms of career theory and suggests a way of unifying theory and practice through a focus on individuals and their system of influences’ (McMahon & Tatham 2000, p. 6). Additionally, while acknowledging that the individual is central to the Framework, it may itself be customised to accommodate individuals whose career development occurs within either individualistic or collectivist cultures (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 211). As Sarra noted:

"The systems theory framework allows us to account for the many variables we are likely to encounter when dealing with Aboriginal clients. In addition, it provides a mechanism for examining the interrelatedness of issues such as Aboriginal history, self-determination, the employment market, education and a range of social and political factors which provide the backdrop for Aboriginal career decision making (1997, p. 47)."

Patton and McMahon highlighted a number of advantages in the Systems Theory Framework approach to integrating career theories and career theory and practice:
• The emphasis in career development is placed on the individual and not on theory. Therefore Systems Theory can be applicable at a macro level of theory analysis, as well as at a micro level of individual analysis.

• A Systems Theory perspective enables practitioners to choose from the theory that is most relevant to the needs and situation of the individual.

• Systems Theory offers a perspective that underlies the philosophy reflected in the move from positivist approaches to constructivist approaches (1999, pp. 166-168).

The Systems Theory Framework encapsulates two broad components of career theory; content and process (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 155) and has been developed to illustrate the content and process of career development (Patton & McMahon 1997, p. 16). Content influences in the Systems Theory Framework include the individual and the elements of the context, while process influences are the reciprocal interaction between the individual and their context; chance, and change over time (Patton & McMahon 1997, p. 16).

Patton and McMahon identified a range of intra-personal influences on career development which are connected with influences which comprise the individual’s social system, as well as the broader environmental/societal system. As a result, career development is seen as a process which is dynamic because of a ‘unifying and connecting inter-relationship which produces an overall pattern’ (2006, p. 154). Central to this dynamic process is the individual (who constitutes the individual system), whom they argue, does not live in isolation precisely because they are connected with these wider influences.
While individuals are systems, they also exist within broader systems, which also have an influence of the life of the individual. These include for example, the social system with variables such as education institutions, the workplace, lifestyle, the schooling environment, family and peers, and the environmental-societal system. The environmental-social system includes such variables as socioeconomic status, political decisions, historical trends, geographic location, labour-market and globalisation (Patton & McMahon 1999, pp. 159-162). Metaphorically, the systems could be thought of as ‘worlds within worlds’, which constantly interact with one another, interpenetrating one another to produce an end-effect or outcome in some way, shape or form.

The process of interaction between influences and all systems is defined by Patton and McMahon (1999, pp. 162-163) as *recursiveness*. As each system is open, it is therefore permeable to influence. *Recursiveness* describes the process of interaction, focusing on the multi-directionality of influence and the relationships between all systems. As a result of *recursiveness*, change over time (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 163) occurs within the systems and career development becomes a pathway of constant evolution (which may incorporate forward and backward movements).

Due to the nature of *recursiveness*, in that a change in one part of the system will result in a change in another part of the system, the relationship between the Career Adviser and the student can become a dynamic interaction and a realm of possibility. This is due to the fact that at any given point in time the Career Adviser can enter the system of influence of the individual (Arthur & McMahon 2005, p. 211).
This has important implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students especially with regard to the delivery and effectiveness of multicultural career education within the schooling environment. Not only would viewing career education from a Systems Theory perspective open the way for the use of a greater range of teaching processes than those used in traditional programs based on career information (McMahon 1997, p. 140) it could be used to review career education programs (McMahon 1997, p. 140) in order to make them more inclusive of cultural diversity.

According to Arthur and McMahon (2005, p. 213), the influence of culture resides both within the individual and between the individual and the broader contextual systems. Rather than representing culture as a system that can be separately identified in the Systems Theory Framework, it is an influence that pervades each of the systems and subsystems through the process of recursiveness. Central to the Systems Theory Framework is the role of the individual, who is a system in his or her own right. Due to its permeability, the Framework can be customised to accommodate clients whose career development occurs within either individualistic or collectivist cultures (Arthur & McMahon 2005, p. 209). Consequently, the Systems Theory Framework has cross-cultural applicability.

This has been noted by Sarra (1997, p. 47) who highlighted the difficulty of career development for Aboriginal Australians, particularly because of the differences between contemporary Aboriginal culture and the culture of the dominant society in which Aboriginal Australians live. The applicability of the Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s career development is that it provides for the many variables likely to be encountered when dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait
It also provides a mechanism for examining the interrelatedness of issues such as Aboriginal history, self-determination, self-identity, and the ‘range of social and political factors which provide the backdrop for ‘Aboriginal career decision making’ (Sarra 1997, p. 47).

The Application of the Systems Theory Framework to Schools

Patton and McMahon locate career development learning and career development practitioners as a subsystem within the larger system of the school (1999, p. 208). The school itself is a subsystem of a much larger system, the result of recursive interaction between the school system and other systems such as social and environmental-societal systems.

These systems have been identified by Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 208) as, for example work experience programs, school/industry partnerships and community-based learning activities. Within the school system, the Career Adviser is the primary facilitator of career information and career education to students. Both the school and the Career Adviser are systems themselves which interact with one another, establishing recursive links (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 215). As a result, the Career Adviser becomes an element of the system of influences on the career education of the student, and the student becomes an element of the system of influences on the Career Adviser.

According to Patton and McMahon (2006, p. 154) the boundaries of each system (the Career Adviser and the student) must be permeable enough to allow a new relationship to develop. Yet each system must be impermeable enough for both parties to maintain their individuality. As the relationship between the Career Adviser and the student develops,
then the boundary between the two will change, with the possibility that the boundary limits may between the two become less clear.

Career Advisers who lose sight of this may be at risk of imposing their own values on students, may manipulate them, or alternatively, may themselves be manipulated by the student. In order to safeguard against this, the Career Adviser needs a clear understanding of their own stories formed through the interaction of their own system of influences, past, present and future before they can facilitate exploration of their student’s life narratives, including the meaning of career and work in their lives.

This ideology has implications for Career Advisers in their career education work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Career Advisers’ self awareness of their own backgrounds would facilitate their understanding of students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Not only this, but Career Advisers could be more flexible and adaptable in their career education tasks and activities.

The Application of the Systems Theory Framework to Career Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary School Students

Patton and McMahon (2006, p. 161) have argued that the individual cannot be separated from their context, and that knowledge cannot be taught because it is constructed within individuals in relation to their experience. Also, theory cannot be applied to individuals because they construct their own personal theory. A number of studies examining the schooling and career education context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Lester 2000; Craven et. al. 2005) have highlighted weaknesses within the current delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander students, which could be addressed through the application of a Systems Theory Framework.

According to the Systems Theory Framework, individuals are systems which when they interact with other systems and variables and influences generate new systems. Within the context of career education, the Career Adviser and the student, whom are individual systems in their own right, engage in career education activities. This interaction or recursiveness between the Career Adviser and student/s produces a subsystem within the school system.

It appears that the application of a Systems Theory Framework to the delivery of career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students suggests that current approaches may either be inadequate or irrelevant. This is because these approaches are not positioned within a context of colonisation and do not take into account the broader ‘sociopolitical, socioeconomic, sociopsychological and sociocultural realities of cross-cultural individuals’ (Leong & Brown 1995, p. 146).

The difficulty of cross-cultural career development and the fact that it marginalises the minority was highlighted over twenty years ago by Osipow, who suggested then that through the application of Systems Theory:

... elements of the social, personal, and economic situation within which individuals operate may be more explicitly analysed, and the relationships of the larger systems to one another may be more clearly understood than in the traditional approaches to behaviour, which tend to emphasise only one major segment of the individual or the environment (1983, p. 320).
Similarly, Patton and McMahon argued that the assumption that the sociopolitical environment enables all individuals equal access to choose according to their interests and abilities is ‘fallacious and misleading’ (1999, p. 103). This would seem to suggest that the current ‘one size fits all’ approach to career education and development is not only exclusive, but discriminatory.

In exploring the context of cross-cultural career development, Osipow and Littlejohn (cited in Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 106) raised a number of unanswered questions: What is the relationship between minority identity development and career choice? Are there correlations between world view or ethnic identity and career achievement? How does level of acculturation influence career development?

These questions are echoed in Patton and McMahon’s argument that career theory has given little attention to cultural groups because important contextual career determinants have been excluded. The authors highlighted the perspective that options and choices available to individuals without some form of social discrimination operating to distort individual characteristics is, ‘… violated with respect to cultural group members’ (1999, p. 102).

In addition, Cook, Heppner and O’Brien highlighted the notion of occupational success being ‘largely attributable to individual merit’ (2002, p. 294) was not applicable to everyone. The authors stated categorically that the assumption that success was directly attributable to individual merit was the result of pervasive and powerful contextual barriers, such as racial and gender discrimination and income disparities.
In reviewing literature related to the career behaviour of Hispanics, Arbona (1990, p. 301) found that overall the literature was fragmentary and lacking a theoretical foundation. Furthermore, major theories of career development not only concentrated on small samples of white middle-class males they did not explore culturally diverse populations. Arbona drew attention to the fact that there was a need for awareness and acknowledgement of the differences and similarities among the various Hispanic sub-groups and that sensitivity by college counsellors was required when considering socio-economic and regional variations within clients from the same sub-group (1990, p. 317).

In discussing career education for African American students, Cheatham argued that there was little evidence to suggest that the African American experience had been incorporated into the public school career education curricula (1999, p. 338). Cheatham concluded that ‘nearly two decades after the proclamation of career education African Americans are not apparently faring better regarding occupational status and employment opportunities. Part of that failing is integral to the assumptions [in the model] that the educational system and its guardians were prepared or could prepare to meet the specific needs of African Americans’ (1990, p. 338).

The cause of this failing was the lack of culturally inclusive theoretical models of career development, current career development models which were Eurocentric in that they asserted cultural homogeneity, and dualistic or cultural differences. In effect, these factors have collectively obscured ‘African Americans’ unique characteristics’ (1990, p. 335).
This cultural dualism was raised by Peavy in the early 1990s. In discussing career counselling for First Nations youth Peavy concluded that one of the most ‘sobering’ realisations (at the time) was that almost no research had been conducted in First Nations career development, and ‘… we do not even know to what extent the term ‘career’ is culturally sensible to Native people’ (1995, p. 2).

Furthermore, Patton and McMahon (1999, p. 7) agreed, acknowledging that theorising about career development of racial and ethnic groups is at a particularly early stage of development. An important issue highlighted by Peavy was the fact that personal and cultural identity is a critical issue for Native youth, who are often caught ‘between two cultural worlds’ and that ‘bi-cultural personhood is hard to come by for many, and rejected by others’ (1995, p. 2).

Earlier research conducted by Peavy (1994) gave rise to a number of working formulations concerning the concept of career with First Nations clients. This included the fact that the life and career path of many First Nation individuals is unbelievably chaotic and unpredictable, especially for ‘transitional’ individuals, and that family deterioration, deculturation and racial discrimination produce extremely turbulent lives with little trace of a career path.

Peavy also argued that the need for healing, identity authentication and self-esteem building is ‘so pressing’ for some First Nations clients, that career and educational counselling must be part of, ‘an integrated approach which encounters the whole person’ (1995, p. 2) and that psychometrically oriented approaches to career counselling are inappropriate for many First Nations clients.
Arthur (2005) argued recently that within and across nations, there continue to be social and political forces that limit career development of individuals. In addition, there are inequities in terms of who can access career-related resources. Arthur (2005) also highlighted that while there will always be a need for interventions with individuals, more focus needs to be placed on the organisations and systems that interface with the career issues of individuals.

Vera and Speight (2003, p. 258) agreed, arguing that an over-focus on individual factors often excludes assisting clients to understand broader social influences on their career development. Also, there is a risk that career development practitioners perpetuate the status quo through focusing on the individual, and ignoring those social forces which act as systemic barriers to the growth and development of the individual.

In keeping with the holistic and cultural applicability of the Systems Theory Framework, which is positioned within a constructivist context, Patton & McMahon (2006, p. 157) contend that career counsellors can work collaboratively with individuals and focus on holistic approaches to life career. In this role they may become advocates for clients with particular needs such as individuals of low socioeconomic status or low minority status. The current study has identified that this advocacy role is highly individualistic, unregulated and unsystematic in New South Wales Career Advisors and these are discussed in Chapter Five, Findings.

Patton and McMahon (2006, p. 160) argued that a Systems Theory Framework encourages interventions at levels of the system other than that of the individual, which in effect raises the potential for Career Advisers to be more proactive at a broader systems level. This is
particular so because an intervention in one part of the system may result in better outcomes for the individual in another part of the system.

Because a system is, ‘a whole which functions as a whole by virtue of the interdependence of its parts’ (Kraus 1989, p. 6), applying a Systems Theory Framework to a career development context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would be particularly beneficial. Why this would be so is that, ‘We are much more likely to view individuals as parts of ongoing interpersonal contexts than as discrete organisms seeking need fulfilment from the environment’ (Kraus 1989, p. 6).

The application of this principle to career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has particular significance for how career education is taught and what methods and resources are utilised in the conveying of career information to students. It also highlights the issue of effectiveness and appropriateness of current methods of career education within the schooling context, which, as has been defined by Patton and McMahon, is a, ‘subsystem of the system of interconnected influences on each individual student’ (1999, p. 208).

Patton and McMahon’s Systems Theory Framework highlight two important aspects of current career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The first is the difficulty in managing the complexity of the current career education model, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The second is that the application of a Systems Theory Framework to current career education for these students, by Career Advisers, could ameliorate significant difficulties, challenges and barriers experienced by both.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of the theoretical framework of Systems Theory and its relevance and applicability to career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students. The cross cultural applicability of the Systems Theory Framework has also been discussed. The following chapter, Chapter Five, Methodology, will present the methodology utilised by the current study.
Chapter Five
Methodology

Chapter Overview
This chapter presents the methodology utilised by the current study. The chapter will discuss the rationale for the research design which is based on the theoretical concepts of the Systems Theory Framework discussed in Chapter Four, *Theoretical Framework*. Participants, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations including constraints and scope are also discussed.

Introduction
Amongst researchers there is much diversity with regard to the definitions which form the parameters for qualitative research (Grbich 1999, p. 5). Schwandt (1994, p. 118) argued that the goal of qualitative research is to provide a research methodology for ‘understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live in it’. This is similar to Yates (2004, p. 156), who argued that qualitative research centres upon the perspective of the participant because ‘it is how they understand the social world and the meaning things have for them that is under study’. The qualitative approach therefore is unstructured which allows for theories and concepts to emerge.

Bailey (1997, p. 18) highlighted the fact that quite frequently qualitative research is simultaneously referred to as natural inquiry, interpretive research, hermeneutical research, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. An important distinction is made however, that while these ‘labels’ or terms are often utilised generically when discussing
qualitative methodologies, their historical roots can be identified in the
development of the paradigm itself.

Minichiello et al (1995, p. 10) defined qualitative research as an approach
which attempts to uncover the thoughts, perceptions and feelings
experienced by participants. Guba (1996, x) agreed, articulating that
inquirers do not ‘discover’ knowledge from behind a thick one-way mirror
because it is literally created by the action of the inquirers with the ‘object’
(construct) inquired into. In effect, qualitative research focuses on
description and ‘seeing through the eyes’ of those being studied (Walliman

Research questions for the current study were conceptualised in order to
explore the career development context relevant to developing the
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. Questions were
positioned within a Systems Theory Framework and were primarily
directed toward secondary school Career Advisers.
Specific concepts relevant to each of the six interview questions posed to
participants framed the audio-taped discussion. Four primary thematic
categories emerged from the data which in turn gave rise to twenty-six
secondary sub-categories. These sub-categories yielded additional
material considered to be of relevance to the participants.

In obtaining data for the current study the researcher stepped into the
sociogeographical, emotional and mental space of the participants. In
audio-taping (with permission) verbal descriptions of phenomena that
occurred within this space or naturalistic setting (Creswell 2003, p. 181),
the researcher was able to see through the eyes of the participants and
understand their experiences through the sharing of their thoughts, feelings, opinions and attitudes.

This engagement between the researcher and the reality and experience of the participants generated a dialogue embedded with meaning. This produced a rich and diverse set of themes which subsequently emerged during sequential and continuous (Walliman 2001, p. 262) analysis of data derived from participant responses, researcher field notes, and researcher observation and personal reflection.

A central principle of qualitative analysis is to ensure that the participant’s story is told and not the researcher’s (Browne 2004, p. 628). That being so, and in order to ensure that the data is truly representative of the respondents’ participation in the study, the voice of the participants is rendered in print and presented in the following chapter, Chapter Six, Findings, as direct quotations. These quotations reveal not only the personal story of the participants, but the theme or sub-category that their story relates to. This chapter discusses the methodology utilised by the current study to gain access to these stories which were then thematically grouped in categories and sub-categories.

Theoretical Perspective
Grbich (1999, pp. 26-27) argued that all research must have a framework which has been derived from an identifiable theoretical standpoint and that the absence of which draws criticism that the researcher is confirming his/her own unexplained biases. Creswell (2003, pp. 120-121) stated that theories develop when researchers test a prediction numerous times with the emerging theory being given a name. This then serves as an
explanation for the development and advancement of knowledge in a particular field.

Kerlinger (1979, p. 64) identified theory as a set of interrelated constructs (variables), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena. It achieves this by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena. Walliman (2001, p. 82) argued that theory provides a useful platform from which to launch a quest for information and discoveries.

According to Walliman, theory formulation leads to the identification of important areas which require further research, point out where information is missing, and make it possible for a researcher to propose the existence of hitherto unidentified phenomena. Silverman (1998, p. 103) cautioned however, that because theories instruct researchers to consider phenomena from particular perspectives they are self-confirming, meaning they can never be disproved (as in natural science), but only found to be more or less useful.

Paralleling Silverman, Llobera (1998, p. 74) argued that many social theories are presented as if the generalisations they embody are valid for all times and places, when in fact they were arrived at on the basis of limited contemporary Western experience. Morse (1994, p. 32) also cautioned that theory is only a ‘tool to guide investigation’ and that the greatest trap in research is to mistake conjecture for fact by treating theory as fact and forgetting that a theory was created as nothing more than a ‘best guess’ (Morse 1994, p. 260).
Gerber and Moyle (2004, pp. 36-37) argued that the components of theory, such as the relationship between subject, object and context, positivist versus constructivist approaches, the question of objectivity, and inductive versus deductive approaches to theorising are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When pieced together they collectively offer insights into an overall picture that constitutes the puzzle itself.

In essence, a theory is a basic framework or set of ideas that enables a researcher to approach and explain an issue. This provides a theoretical underpinning which facilitates the identification of relationships between concepts (Grbich 1999, p. 27). Not only are theories subject to change, they vary in status and quality depending on the type of discipline or subject area being considered and are strongly influenced by the level of maturity of a particular specialisation (Walliman 2001, p. 83).

**Research Design**

The current study draws its design from the Grounded Theory research tradition and takes an interpretive approach. Developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, Grounded Theory is a form of ethnographic inquiry which ensures that theory building is an inductive process which emerges from the data based on observation, as opposed to an alternate information source (Crotty 1998, p. 78).

Creswell (2003, p. 14) defined Grounded Theory as a strategy in which the researcher ‘gains understanding or insight into phenomena that is directly grounded in the views of participants in a study’ and that general patterns of understanding emerge as initial coding of the data develops into broad themes which then ‘coalesce into a grounded theory or broad interpretation’ (p. 182).
Yates (2004, p. 157) described this process as an attempt to ‘see through the eyes of the person being studied’, and that from this position, the key question (which positions and drives the research) is: What is the participant’s life-world like for them? Through utilising an interpretive approach, the researcher learns how individuals experience and interact with their social world, and gains a rich and descriptive insight into the phenomena being studied (Merriam 2002, p. 4).

In utilising a Grounded Theory strategy of inquiry, the current study ensures that the primary data obtained is representative and reflective of the knowledge and experience of the participants. This provides insight and meaning relevant to their roles. The current study also incorporated large amounts of text from the data to verify and consolidate these participants ‘constructions of reality’ (Merriam 1998, p. 203).

Developed on the premises of Symbolic Interactionism (Browne 2004, p. 630), which identifies multiple human realities, Grounded Theory operates within the context that social reality is best known and understood by those who are actually experiencing the social reality. Language and interaction with significant others enable individuals to undertake a lifelong process of viewing their behaviour from others’ positions, as well as in terms of their society’s norms and values (Grbich 1999, p. 172).

Symbolic Interactionism locates the phenomenon of human experience within the world of social interaction (Grbich, 1999, p. 172). Symbolic interactionists argue that experiences take on meaning as they become symbolically significant through shared interaction (Rice & Ezzy, 1999, p. 18). Through the processes of social interaction individual perception and understanding of meaning continually changes. Hence, as Berger argued,
'The self is [not] a solid given entity that moves from one situation to another. It is rather a process, continuously created and recreated in each social situation that one enters …’ (1975, p. 124).

As insight and meaning emerged through preliminary and ongoing analysis of the primary data, the current study identified themes, categories and working hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 202). These in turn informed data collection through the refinement of research questions which further opened the field of inquiry.

For example, the current study identified the importance of interpersonal interaction between Career Advisers and their students and the impact of that interaction on career education and development efficacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Ongoing analysis and reflection also pointed to a wider historical-political influence, indicating that evaluation of learning in terms of a culturally responsive pedagogy must be approached as a political endeavour (Nieto 2002, p. 14).

Research Methods

The research methods utilised for the current study are delineated by a qualitative constructivist approach. This approach is defined by Richardson (2003, p. 1623) as a theory of learning or meaning-making whereby, ‘individuals create their own new understandings on the basis of an interaction between what they already know and believe, and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact through the roles they assume in social interaction’.

Creswell concurred (1998, p. 15) describing qualitative research as an ‘inquiry process of understanding’ which is based on distinct
methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Within this tradition Creswell asserts, the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. Knowledge-claims are generated based primarily on constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspectives (Creswell 2003, p. 18).

Glesne (1999, p. 5) argued that qualitative methods reveal a socially constructed, complex world that is constantly changing. In interacting and talking with participants about their perceptions, qualitative researchers resultanty seek out a variety of perspectives and do not try to reduce the multiple interpretations to a ‘norm’.

**Participants**

The research design for the current study selected participants by purposively recruiting secondary school Career Advisers. Career Advisers were selected because of the vital function they undertake in disseminating career information to students in sign-posting them toward directional career learning pathways.

Patton argued that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting ‘information-rich cases for in depth study’ (1990, p. 169). Information-rich cases comprising those from which ‘one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research’. In addition to their role in disseminating career information, Career Advisers were selected because of the context in which career information is made available to students; the wider education and schooling system which incorporates career education.
On three occasions, when the researcher arrived at the data collection site to undertake primary data collection, the participant specifically requested that the school’s Aboriginal Education Assistant be present during interviewing.

The rationale for this was that the Career Adviser wanted to ensure that specific Indigenous perspectives relevant to career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were made known to the researcher. This was of paramount concern to these participants, who articulated their understanding of the broader contextual issues impacting upon these students and the disproportionate disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

In addition to the inclusion of these three Aboriginal Education Assistants, one Deputy Principal also approached the researcher and insisted on being present during the interview.

These instances were spontaneous and had not been anticipated or accounted for by the researcher when ethical clearance for the study had originally been sought and obtained. Notwithstanding that fact, the researcher made the decision to honour the participant’s request. This ‘on-the-spot decision’ enabled the researcher to take advantage of the opportunity which had presented itself (Patton, 2002, p. 240) especially because it was anticipated by the researcher that the additional data may enrich the study.

On these occasions, a *Participant Information Sheet* and a *Participant Consent Form* were provided to the three Aboriginal Education Assistants for reading and signing. The Deputy Principal had previously sighted both
forms as they had been sent to him for consideration when the researcher made initial contact with the school. All four participants signed their respective Participant Consent Form. Time was set aside by the researcher prior to audio-taping of the interview in order to explain all aspects of the study and to answer any additional questions and address any concerns.

All participants, without exception, insisted upon complete anonymity in the final writing up and presentation of research findings. The researcher was instructed by all participants that on no occasion were there to be any written reference made to their gender, age or ethnicity, and in particular, to the name of the school and its geographic location. While all participants willingly engaged with the research process, they nonetheless were concerned that some of their comments may evoke institutional or departmental concern.

In compliance with this directive, and with respect, the current study, other than broadly alluding to metropolitan and regional clusters of schools as data collection sites, does not identify any school, nor does it identify the gender, age or ethnicity of any participant. This is evidenced in Chapter Six, Findings, in which quotations are identified simply as relating to ‘Participant A’ or ‘Participant E’, etc.

**Research Instrumentation**

The research instrument utilised by the current study consisted of a semi-structured open-ended face-to-face interview. Face-to-face interviewing allows for data to be obtained in a variety of situations and locations from a diverse range of participants (Walliman 2001, pp. 238-239). Its flexibility allows for exploration not only of participant’s subjective meanings, but of
the complexity, ambiguity, and specific detailed processes taking place in a social context (Yates 2004, p. 165).

The meaning of the word ‘interview’ literally means to develop a shared perspective and understanding (a view) between (inter) two or more people (Yates 2004, pp. 157-158). The result of this interaction is that both the researcher and the participant develop a shared understanding of the topic under discussion, which is grounded in the views of the participant.

Walliman (2001, p. 239) agreed, arguing that face-to-face interviewing also positions the researcher so as to be able to ‘assess the quality of participant’s responses, to notice if a question has not been properly understood, and to reassure and encourage the participant to be ‘full’ in his/her answers’. While highlighting a number of advantages of interviewing, Creswell (2003, p. 186) also cautioned however that interviews provide ‘indirect’ information which is filtered through the views of the interviewees and that information is obtained in a designated place rather than in the natural-field setting.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with eighteen participants. Due to ill-health, one participant provided a written response to the questions listed on the question schedule. This increased the total participant number to nineteen.

Prior to interviews commencing, all issues of concern were discussed via telephone and then again in person at the data collection site before audio-taping began. All interviews were audio-taped with permission, except for one occasion where due to illness, the participant cancelled the interview but forwarded to the researcher a hand-written response to the interview
questions. This ensured transparency. Participants were advised that they could withdraw at any time if they were uncomfortable with the way the interview was being conducted. Participants were also advised that the audio-taping of interviews was entirely dependent upon their permission.

The researcher adopted an informal protocol for interviewing specifically so as to create a relaxed atmosphere of openness and amiability. Pleasantries and icebreakers are important in interviews, which allow time for participants to ‘warm up’ in a relaxed atmosphere (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 92), hence general chit-chat set a tone of relaxed informality prior to audio-taping commencing. This was usually accompanied by a beverage (mineral water, tea) and provided an opportunity for the researcher to present a ‘human side’ to the participant. Topics of discussion varied between male and female participants and ranged from the organisational culture of the school, District Office support, the general state of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, the researcher’s involvement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, career education, research outcomes, and mutual parental concern for children.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 101-109) posited that a co-operative and interactive relationship between researcher and participant plays an essential role in obtaining data via naturalistic methods of inquiry. As a result of human research being ‘inherently dialectical’, obtaining participants’ full understanding and co-operation ensures that the researcher is able to obtain the best possible information. This was demonstrated during data collection by both Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants by their positive attitudes toward the topic area under discussion, and their willingness and eagerness to participate and contribute toward the research process.
For example, one participant who could not attend an interview provided a written response to the question schedule. On another occasion, as well as participating in an interview, the participant provided additional handwritten notes. On six occasions, verbal invitations were extended to the researcher to return to the school to present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health information sessions to the student body. Information relevant to health career entrance pathways into tertiary study from the University housing the researcher was requested from all participants, and on one occasion the researcher was asked to locate the Yooroang Garang: School of Indigenous Studies website on the participant’s computer.

Prior to interviewing and data collection being undertaken, it was stipulated by the researcher that their data would only consist of an audio-taped interview. At no time was additional data requested by the researcher from participants. Notwithstanding this fact, one participant did provide additional handwritten notes. This was separate and in addition to the participant who provide a written response to the interview questions, as has previously been discussed. Unfortunately due to ineligibility of the participant’s handwriting, this data was could not be included in data analysis and writing up of research findings.

Questions were semi-structured and open-ended and commenced with a focus on the nature of the role of the Career Adviser and the relationship experienced with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The question schedule was in the main followed, however the question protocol varied at times when the discourse focused on a specific aspect or issue of interest to either the researcher or the participant/s. This conforms with Bernard (1988, p. 204) who argued that while in the semi-
structured interview an interview guide with a list of questions and topics is adhered to, the interviewer still holds the discretion to follow leads.

The current study was designed to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways within the career education context of the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program (Board of Studies 2001). The Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program was a career education program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students. This Program provided the contextual framework in which the current study was positioned.

Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher had been advised by the Aboriginal Programs Unit-Equity Programs Division at the NSW Board of Studies, that the program was at the time being delivered in secondary schools across metropolitan and regional New South Wales. Accordingly, based on this information, fifteen schools were purposively selected as data collection sites.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 202) argued that purposive sampling is based on informational as opposed to statistical considerations, and that its purpose is to maximise information, not facilitate generalisation. Thus the criterion for selection utilised by the current study consisted of:

1. All schools were currently utilising the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program in their career education curriculum.
2. All schools had utilised the program within a previous twelve month period.
3. All schools, irrespective of Indigenous to non-Indigenous student ratio numbers, had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students constituting the student cohort.

Upon making contact with school Principals, the researcher found that contrary to information previously provided by the Aboriginal Programs Unit-Equity Programs Division at the NSW Board of Studies, the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program had been a one year (2002-2003) trial program only, and was not embedded into career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

In order to accommodate this fact, it was decided to shift the focus of the current study from one which specifically explored health career pathways within the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program, to one which explored health career pathways within career education.

Questions for participants had initially been structured so as to explore health related career pathways in the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program and to evaluate how those pathways stimulated either an interest in a future health career or helped raise awareness of health careers. These initial questions included:

1. In your opinion what impact has the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program had on addressing school-to-work transition issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students in NSW?
2. In your opinion what impact has the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program had on facilitating career awareness and education of a future
health and/or health-related career pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary school students in NSW?

3. In your opinion do you think it would be useful to include health and/or health-related career curricula in the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program, and if so, what do you think would be the best way to stimulate an interest and raise awareness of a health and/or health-related career pathway?

4. In your opinion how effective do you feel your role is as a Career Adviser in promoting and facilitating career education?

These questions were subsequently rewritten in order to accommodate the necessary realignment of emphasis of the current study from a specific focus of the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program to a focus on health career pathways within the wider career education curriculum.

Career Advisers and their students exist within a broader system, that of society or the environment (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 161). As with the other systems defined by the Systems Theory Framework, there are a myriad of influences which impact on the individual from this environment-societal system in diverse ways. The reciprocal interaction or recursiveness (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 161) of these influences, which constitute the Career Adviser and society, can lead to a proactive engagement and advocacy on behalf of marginalised groups.

Exploring the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales Secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is the principal aim of the current study. In order for this concept to be explored and to ascertain to what
degree Career Advisers themselves are aware of health career information, the following question was asked:

1. Can you tell me, if health career information is incorporated into career education, and whether or not that material is specifically relevant to health career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

Career development learning occurs within the schooling context and is required to meet the needs of particular groups of learners. How well the school system meets their needs has important implications at sociopolitical levels (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 222). As has been discussed in the current study, this is particularly significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families and communities. This concept was explored through the following two questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the health-related information currently incorporated into career awareness education at your school?

2. In your opinion, how effective do you feel that your role as a Career Adviser is, specifically in relating to promoting and facilitating the career education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

Recursiveness between the Career Adviser and the social system of the school has the potential to enhance the career development learning outcomes for young people (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 222). The question exploring this concept was designed to ascertain in what ways
the school system is responsive to the needs of the local community system, which in the context of the current study is represented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This concept was explored through the following question:

1. In the classroom, and as a consequence of your teaching in areas of career education, do you feel that students are interested in pursuing a career in health?

The *Therapeutic System* is generated through the interaction of the Career Adviser and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student. The key to the Career Adviser working effectively within this system is for them to have a clear understanding of their own life experiences as well as those of their students. This understanding acknowledges the diversity of influences which have impacted upon both, which in turn have been formed through the interaction of the Career Adviser and the student with their own system of influences, past, present and future (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 160). This concept was explored through the following question:

1. In your opinion, how would you describe the nature of your role as a Career Adviser and the teaching and learning relationship you experience specifically with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participating in career education at your school?

Systems Theory encourages interventions at levels of the system other than that of the individual (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 160). This provides the means by which Career Advisers can interact with other elements of the broader systems level to bring about change. This concept was explored
through the following question, which sought to identify appropriate strategies to promote health career pathways:

1. In your opinion, what do you think would be an effective way to specifically stimulate interest and raise awareness of health careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

**Data Collection**

Data collection was divided into two phases consisting of field trips to seven secondary schools in metropolitan New South Wales, and seven secondary schools in regional New South Wales. Phase One targeted metropolitan secondary school data collection with Phase Two targeting regional secondary school data collection.

Utilising information from the Board of Studies NSW, seven metropolitan and eight regional secondary schools across New South Wales were purposefully selected.

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 202) argued that purposive sampling is based on informational as opposed to statistical considerations, and that its purpose is to maximise information, not facilitate generalisation.

All schools were contacted by telephone in order to determine the name of the school Principal and to confirm correct address details. A letter of introduction and request to conduct research activities was then forwarded to each school Principal (see Appendix 1) together with the following additional enclosures (see Appendix 5):

- Copy of Referee Report submitted to the NSW Department of Education and Training.
• Participant Information Form.

All school Principals were contacted again by telephone to confirm receipt of the previously sent information, to schedule a meeting in order to discuss the current study in greater detail, and to obtain the name and contact details for the school Career Adviser, pending approval from the Principal. All preliminary meetings were conducted with school Principals during school terms, at a time convenient for their work schedule, and on school grounds. Duration of these preliminary meetings with school Principals varied from between one-half to approximately one hour. The contribution of Career Advisers as participants in the study was subject to the approval and directive of each school Principal.

The following information was also provided to school Principals and discussed in detail during the meeting (see Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5, 6):

• Copy of Permission to conduct research in NSW Metropolitan and Regional Secondary Schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training.
• Copy of Permission to conduct human research from the Human Research Ethics Committee, the University of Sydney.
• Participant Consent Form.
• Participant Information Form.
• Interview Question Schedule.

After these initial meetings with the school Principal, each school Career Adviser was contacted by telephone to discuss the project, and to schedule an appointment for an interview. A letter confirming the interview date was then forwarded to the Career Adviser together with the following information (see Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5, 6):
Copy of Permission to conduct research in NSW Metropolitan and Regional Secondary Schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training.

Copy of Permission to conduct human research from the Human Research Ethics Committee, the University of Sydney.

Participant Consent Form.

Participant Information Form.

Interview Question Schedule.

After all interviews were completed, a letter of thanks was forwarded to all participants (see Appendix 7).

The aforementioned procedure deviated slightly for schools in regional New South Wales due to geographical limitations. In this instance, when regional school Principals were contacted to confirm receipt of previously forwarded information, a lengthy discussion was had during which the current study was discussed in detail and the name and contact details for the school Career Adviser obtained.

Following this discussion, the school Career Adviser was contacted by telephone to discuss the current study, elicit their participation and confirm an interview date. As was the case with metropolitan schools, a letter confirming the interview date and time was subsequently forwarded to the Career Adviser with relevant information (see Appendix 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Once the interview was concluded, a letter of thanks (see Appendix 7) was forwarded to participants.

Data collection was divided into two phases consisting of field trips to seven secondary schools in metropolitan New South Wales, and seven secondary schools in regional New South Wales. Phase One targeted
metropolitan secondary school data collection, while Phase Two targeted regional secondary school data collection.

Scheduling interviews presented a significant challenge because of time constraints, busy work loads and conflicting priorities and responsibilities of Career Advisers. In order to accommodate these requirements, interviews were scheduled during school hours, during school terms and were conducted on school grounds.

**Phase One Field Visit: Metropolitan school data collection**

Preliminary meetings with Principals from seven secondary schools, averaging one hour in length, were conducted on consecutive days May 2-5, 2005. Interviews with school Career Advisers from six schools, averaging one to one and one-half hours in length were subsequently conducted on consecutive days May 10-25, 2005. As the result of unexpected illness one interview was cancelled. However due to the Career Advisers willingness to participate in the current study, a written response to the interview questions was forwarded to the researcher.

**Phase Two Field Visit: Regional school data collection**

Due to geographical limitations, preliminary meetings with school Principals were not conducted. Interviews with school Career Advisers from seven secondary schools on consecutive days, averaging one to one and one-half hours in length were conducted June 14-22, 2005.

Prior to interviews during the two data collection phases commencing, all participants were afforded another opportunity to discuss any additional questions or concerns which may have arisen since first being contacted by the researcher. This included issues of anonymity, confidentiality,
researcher accountability and publication and dissemination of study outcomes.

Verbal permission and written consent was sought from all participants regarding audio-taping interviews. To ensure transparency, all participants were asked whether or not they would like a transcribed record of their interview for review and a final copy of the published thesis upon completion of the project. All participants answered in the affirmative to receiving both items. During and after each interview, descriptive and reflective notes were written by the researcher so as to record personal feelings, thoughts and perceptions.

When transcriptions of the audio-taped interview were available, these were also forwarded to participants to ensure accuracy of reporting and to provide participants with the opportunity to provide feedback or additional comments on the transcript. Of fourteen transcripts forwarded to participants for review, six were returned, two from metropolitan schools and four from regional schools. Amendments on only three of the returned transcripts were minor and included grammatical corrections and clarification of a number of acronyms.

**Data Analysis**

Grounded analysis techniques were utilised in the current study to sort and categorise phenomena emerging from the lived experiences of the participants. Data analysis was conducted in several stages utilising a derivation of the constant comparative method of category construction. In comparing one segment of data with another, the goal was to discern conceptual similarities, refine the discriminative power of categories and to discover patterns (Tesch 1990, p. 96).
In order to prepare the data for analysis the audio-taped primary data were transcribed in preparation for identification categorising. Once categories had been assigned to the data, emerging themes were coded with assistance provided by the QSR NVivo computer program.

In order to search for meaningful patterns (Patton 1990, p. 411), the data were first conceptualised into categories, a ‘crucial element’ in the process of analysis (Dey 1993, p. 112). Inductive analysis ensures that patterns, themes and categories emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis (Patton 1990, p. 390). Coding is the process of organising the data into chunks prior to bringing meaning to those chunks (Rossman & Rallis 1998, p. 171).

In order to expose social processes within the data, observations, sentences, paragraphs, discrete incidents, ideas or events were given a name which stands for or represents a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 63). While the codes allocated units of meaning to the collected data, they also opened up the inquiry (Walliman 2001, p. 262), grounding the data in order to expose concepts and their relationships (Strauss 1987, p. 45).

Prior to categorising and coding the primary data, and in order to obtain a general sense (Creswell 2003, p. 191) of the data and to reflect on its overall meaning, refamiliarised herself with all information associated with the data collection process. This included reading through field notes, research diary entries and a range of literature collected from the research sites (school newsletters, career information pamphlets, annual reports). The intention of this preliminary activity was to develop sensitivity to the
primary data (Bouma & Ling 2005, p. 183), through metaphorically revisiting the field.

Once the data were coded, emerging patterns and themes were extrapolated to form a number of core categories. These categories generated a theoretical model through identifying relationships in the data and provided a basis with which to formulate analytical conclusions (Strauss 1987, p. 28). A discussion and interpretation of the data positioned within a context of ‘lessons learned’ (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 362) is presented in Chapter Seven, Discussion.

Data Storage

All data collected during the study will be stored in the Chief Investigator/Supervisor’s Office at Yooroang Garang: School of Indigenous Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, the University of Sydney. The material will only be accessed by the Chief Investigator and the co-researcher. After a period of 7 years, all data collected during the study will be disposed of in accordance with national Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans protocol.

Ethical Considerations

Erlandson et. al. (1993, p. 155) argued that while conventional research views a code of ethics as a series of safeguards to protect subjects from the research, the naturalistic researcher provides these safeguards for his or her respondents in ways which transcend those envisioned under the prevailing paradigm.

For example, ‘harm’ is made more inclusive in order to proactively protect respondents. ‘Privacy’ and ‘confidentiality’ relate to dissemination of information and personal space of the researcher. ‘Deception’ is never
justified because it directly contravenes transparency between stakeholders, participants and the researcher. Finally, ‘informed consent’ is openly negotiated between researcher and participant (Erlandson et. al. 1993, p. 155).

With regard to interviewing, Erlandson et. al. (1993, p. 89) identified a number of ethical issues relevant to interviewing. These included the researcher’s motives and intentions, the study’s purpose, the protection of respondents through the use of pseudonyms, establishing beforehand who has the final say over the current study’s content, and sensitivity to time and the number of interviewees involved in the study. Further, the authors cautioned that it would be well ‘for the researcher to remember that in a naturalistic study the respondent should be considered a full partner in the study’.

Permission to conduct research activities for the current study was obtained by the researcher from the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (see Appendix 2), the University of Sydney Ethics Committee for Human Research (see Appendix 3) and the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales (see Appendix 8).

Protocol for research activities as stipulated in the New South Wales Department of Education and Training Guidelines for external agencies to conduct research in NSW Government Schools was strictly complied with in the following manner. A detailed Participant Information Form and Participant Consent Form were forwarded to all participants clearly stating the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved with the current study. Prior to attendance at interviews, lengthy telephone discussions were conducted with all participants. This provided participants the
opportunity to address issues of confidentiality, informed consent, emotional safety, ownership of the research and reciprocity.

Prior to commencement of interviews, all participants were provided with another opportunity to further discuss and clarify any aspect whatsoever of the current study which they were unsure of. The researcher also made it quite clear that if at any time during the interview participants wished to withdraw they could do so. At no time during the audio-taping of interviews or in subsequent correspondence did any participant withdraw from the current study.

Ethical approval from the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales was obtained after the commencement of the data collection phase of the current study. This delay was the result of an unfortunate and unforeseen event which caused a serious backlog of work for the Council in their administrative department and for which the Council were sincerely apologetic.

The decision to commence data collection was made on the following basis:

- Ethical clearance had been sought and gained from the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (see Appendix 2).
- Ethical clearance had been sought and gained from the University of Sydney Ethics Committee for Human Research (see Appendix 3).
- Repeated attempts to contact the Council in order to elicit ethical clearance had been unsuccessful.
- It was necessary to accommodate participant’s school term schedules.
• It was necessary to accommodate the time frame for completion of the study.

In telephone discussions which eventually took place between the researcher and the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales after data collection commencing, the Council articulated their understanding of that action by the researcher, and wholeheartedly supported the researcher’s decision to undertake data collection prior to the Council’s provision of ethical clearance.

The Council also highlighted the fact that ethical clearance obtained from two primary bodies, the University of Sydney Ethics Committee for Human Research and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, validated and supported the study. The Chief Investigator and the researcher would like to acknowledge the support, validation and approval of the current study provided by the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) argued that the aim of trustworthiness in inquiries carried out within a qualitative paradigm utilising a naturalistic approach is to support the argument: how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? Consequently, trustworthiness is established in a naturalistic enquiry by the use of techniques that provide ‘truth-value through credibility, applicability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability’ (Erlandson et. al. 1993, p. 132).
In addressing credibility issues, the current study utilised peer debriefing, member checks and triangulation. Peer debriefing is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308) as a process of ‘exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind’.

The researcher conferred on a regular basis with two senior researchers, an Aboriginal doctoral candidate and a non-Indigenous doctoral researcher, in both formal (monthly, fortnightly scheduled meetings) and informal settings (e-mail, face-to-face conversations). During these meetings both peer debriefers received regular progress reports of the project, and posed questions regarding the research questions, methodology, theoretical framework and other research issues.

Additionally, colleagues and collaborators provided formative input, clarification and verification of specific aspects of the current study via scheduled semi-formal research seminars (conducted on an annual quarterly basis) during which the current study was presented by the researcher, at various stages of the process, for discussion and review. Toward the latter stages of the current study, the researcher also participated in monthly round-table sessions with other post-graduate students which provided additional opportunity for refinement and development of relevant issues.

All contributing peer debriefer observations, comments and questions that have been posed throughout the process of conducting the current study have been incorporated into and have updated the research process and the current study.
Member checking is defined by Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 239) as a process of ‘testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories and interpretation with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the original constructions were collected’. In order to increase dependability of findings, upon completion of the transcribed audio-taped interviews, a copy of each relevant transcription was sent to participants to ensure accuracy of reporting, transparency and to provide participants with the opportunity to provide feedback or additional comments.

Of fourteen transcripts forwarded to participants for review, six were returned, two from metropolitan schools and four from regional schools. Amendments were minor and included grammatical correction and clarification of a number of acronyms. The documents used in the member checking process are on file and are available upon request.

In order to ensure greater data reliability, the current study utilised triangulation techniques to obtain supplementary data from different sources including relevant documentation obtained from school Career Advisers, informal discussions with key stakeholders, researcher observations, researcher intuition or ‘gut feeling’ and researcher field notes and a personal reflection journal.

In order to address issues of transferability the current study utilised purposeful sampling to target secondary school Career Advisers. This ensured that data obtained was representative. Opportunistic data were also obtained through the participation of three Aboriginal Education Assistants who wished to be included in the current study. Opportunistic sampling allows for following new leads during fieldwork, taking
advantage of the unexpected, and flexibility (Patton, cited in Erlandson et. al. 1993, p. 83).

**Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) argued that an inquiry is judged in terms of the degree to which its findings are the product of its inquiry and not the biases of the researcher. Confirmability recognises that complete objectivity is not possible in social research. In addition, confirmability demonstrates that the researcher has acted in ‘good faith’ (Bryman, 2004, p. 276) and has not allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and the findings derived from it.

The researcher walks a fine line between self-interest and participant and community advocacy, a situation in which self-awareness and integrity play a key role. Indeed Merriam (2002, p. 5) argued that rather than trying to eliminate personal biases it is important to identify and monitor them in order to ascertain how and to what degree they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. The novice researcher was acutely aware of this inter-relationship of self, research and the researched throughout the duration of the current study.

Erlandson et. al. (1993, p. 34) argued that the traditional researcher attempts to establish objectivity. This is guaranteed by methodology which is explicated, open to public scrutiny and replicable and which insulates observations from the biases of the researcher. The authors also cautioned that while the ‘dangers of bias and reactivity are great’ the danger of being insulated from relevant data ‘are far greater’ (p. 15).
Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) also challenged the naturalistic researcher in questioning how one establishes the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (participants) and conditions of enquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests or perspectives of the inquirer (researcher). Lightfoot (1983, p. 370) argued that investigators should be aware of the biases that ‘plague their perceptions’ and that they should try to counter those by ‘the pursuit of contrary evidence’. The author also stated that the researcher needs to ‘listen and accept but is not controlled, enhanced or diminished by others perceptions or judgements’ (p. 377).

In order to address researcher bias during data collection, interview questions, though designed to be semi-structured were open-ended and as neutral as possible. At all times the researcher was conscious not to ‘lead’ the conversation. Clarification and expansion of key terms or phrases made by participants were requested by the researcher to identify possible emergent themes which may possibly yield richer data relevant to the topic area under exploration.

During three separate interviews, participants made pointed remarks (and on occasion imbued their responses with thinly veiled sarcasm), concerning the educational institution housing the current study, the distribution of career resource material to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the career aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Though the researcher experienced intense emotional reactions to these comments, at no time did these emotions translate into outwardly manifested behaviour toward the participant. The researcher remained calm and objective, and was not influenced by the ‘perceptions or judgements’ of the participants (Lightfoot 1983, p. 377).
**Dependability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) argued that an inquiry must meet the criterion of consistency, the intention being that a study can be replicated. The assumption therefore, is that repeated application of the same or equivalent instruments to the same subjects under the same conditions will yield similar measurements (Erlandson et. al., 1993, p. 34). Consistency is conceived in terms of ‘dependability’ a concept that embraces both the stability implied by ‘reliability’ and the ‘trackability’ required by explainable changes (Guba, 1981, p. 81).

Erlandson et. al. (1993, p. 34) argued that in order to provide for a check on dependability, the researcher must make it possible for an external check to be conducted on the processes by which the study was conducted through the provision of an audit trail. The audit trail includes documentation which records and pertains to critical incidents, interview notes, and a running account of the research process itself such as the researcher’s daily journal. The audit trail needs to be accessible to peers who perform the role of ‘auditor’ (Bryman, 2004, p. 275), in order to establish how far proper procedures are being and have been followed.

The current study addressed dependability issues through peer debriefing. The researcher met on a regular basis while conducting the study with two senior researchers, an Aboriginal doctoral candidate and a non-Indigenous doctoral researcher. During these meetings, all documentation relevant to the audit trail was openly discussed and available for review and comment. The only exception to this was the transcribed interview data, which ensured participant privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity.
Constraints and Scope

A weakness of the research design in the current study is that data was obtained cross-sectionally, at one point in time, rather than longitudinally or at several points in time (Sim & Wright, 2000, p. 32). Ruspini (2000) argued that in the social sciences while cross-sectional observations are the form of data most commonly utilised for assessing behavioural determinants, because information is obtained at one point in time, the design is not suited for a study of social change.

This is a weakness in the research design of the study because a longitudinal approach would reveal changes over time, facilitate a more detailed analysis of data and yield greater insight and understanding regarding the issues associated with career education and health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.

Menard (2002, p. 2) defined cross-sectional research measurement as occurring once for each participant, with the measurement of each item, concept or variable applying to a single time interval or period. From the sample which represents the population of interest at the time, ‘safe generalisations of the findings can be deduced’ (Pinsonneault & Kraemer 1992, p. 10).

In contrast to this, longitudinal data (Menard 2002, p. 2) are collected at two or more distinct time periods, for those periods, and on the same set of cases or variables in each period. Longitudinal data allow for the analysis of duration, permit the measurement of differences or change in a variable from one period to another. That is the description of patterns of change.
over time, and can be used to locate the causes of social phenomena and connections between events separated by time (Menard 1991, p. 5).

Pinsonneault and Kraemer (2002, p. 10) argued that longitudinal designs provide greater confidence for causal inferences than cross-sectional designs because they establish temporal priority more easily. In support of this, Menard (2002, p. 29) argued that principal limitations of cross-sectional design are its inappropriateness for studying development patterns within cohorts and its inability to resolve issues of casual order. It is clear that a longitudinal research design would have provided a much deeper insight into the causal factors and underlying issues of the themes which emerged during data analysis.

The current study was also limited by a number of sample characteristics, including size and limited availability of participants due to timetabling and work constraints. A larger sample may have yielded more in-depth comparisons between regional and metropolitan school Career Advisers. Also, time constraints, frequently the result of conflicting teaching and administrative priorities and responsibilities, prevented deeper exploration of raised issues. Researcher inexperience, demonstrated by lack of follow-up to further explore these issues once interviews were completed, also impacted the data.

The generalisability of the current study, defined as the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalised from the sample to the entire population (Polit & Hungler 1991, p. 645) were limited because they were generated by means of an exploratory qualitative inquiry. However, the current study was an exploratory qualitative inquiry and sought to obtain depth and richness in data, making no pretensions to generalisability.
Furthermore, the grounded theory generated from the current study enabled a more inductive understanding of the results.

Another weakness of the current study is that it is a one shot qualitative descriptive study which is not founded on a systematic body of research in the field. This lack of empirical research has been noted by Bin-Sallik et. al. in their review and analysis of literature relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (1994) and Craven et. al. (2005), in their study examining Indigenous students’ aspirations.

The Aboriginal Programs Unit-Equity Programs Division (within the New South Wales Department of Education and Training) acknowledged the value of the current study but stipulated that the participant group be broadened to include Aboriginal Education Assistants, Aboriginal students, their families, and their communities.

The researcher, keen to expand the project and wishing to incorporate the Departments suggestions, subsequently approached the Department requesting collaboration and support in carrying the project forward. Unfortunately, due to time constraints and limited resources available from the Department, this further development of the current study did not eventuate. Notwithstanding this, the researcher would like to acknowledge the Department’s interest and support.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the methodology utilised by the current study. The rationale for the research design, methods and data collection and analysis has been discussed. Constraints and scope of the current study as they impact the research have been discussed together with the suitability
of grounded theory and its inter-relationship with naturalistic enquiry. Findings from the current study will be presented in the following chapter, Chapter Six, *Findings*.
Chapter Six

Findings

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents findings from an interpretive analysis of the raw data obtained from participants. The data yielded four primary thematic categories which were then coded into sub-categories utilising the constant-comparative method:

- Career education and development context.
- Knowledge and awareness of health career pathways.
- Interest in health career pathways.
- Strategies to raise awareness of health career pathways.

From these four primary thematic categories there emerged twenty-six sub-categories.

Introduction

The Findings chapter presents the results of the current study. These findings are constructed as primary thematic categories and secondary sub-categories consisting of material considered of relevant to participants.

Career Education and Development Context

Participants were asked two open-ended questions. The first question explored the nature of their role as Career Advisers and the learning and teaching relationship they experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The second question explored how effective they felt their role as a Career Adviser was, specifically in promoting and
facilitating career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Responses to the first question from participants revealed a diverse range of activities. These comprise the Career Advisers role and daily schedule, and frame resultant relationships. These relationships include interaction with students and their families and communities, colleagues within their school, and associated external professional bodies and industry representatives.

**Duties and Responsibilities of Career Advisers**

Participants highlighted a range of duties relevant to their role and the career education and development context in which they work. This included ensuring students understood and were prepared for the world-of-work:

> Probably the main role [in High School xxxx] is to expand student's awareness of careers so that they can make a more informed choice of what they can do later on in life because there are so few jobs available [in xxxx]. Mainly to get them prepared to actually apply for jobs and to give them practice at interviews, and also help them get into tertiary institutions, Universities, TAFES, and private colleges.  

> Participant M

> I think my role has four parts. The first part of my role is to help students to become aware of the world-of-work, and to know what's involved. So to know the employer's expectations, what time to be there, that sort of thing, what the world-of-work involves, the logistics of it, the one-to-one between the employer and the employee, things like harassment and what to do about it, occupational health and safety, how to check whether your wages are right, what are normal instructions for a person, what are abnormal. The second thing I see as very important for them is making sense of your decisions. A lot of them don't make very sensible decisions, so I help them with decision making itself, of weighing one thing against another.  

> Participant H
Your career aspirations are not static, they are not always the same, it can change depending on your experiences and how you think that you fit into that picture. Providing them [students] with a lot of exposure to different career areas is very important. Getting them to see careers expos and then visiting different work sites, even hospitals, showing them all these things and then getting inspirational speakers to talk about their experiences. It depends on how they see themselves fitting in the picture. Career is a lifelong experience where you are constantly reinventing yourself.  

Participant C

This preparedness is achieved through a comprehensive career development approach:

Firstly, I do some teaching. I look after the work education subjects in the school which is a school certificate elective subject, and we only run it in Year 10, even though it can be offered in Year 9. I'm also involved in interviewing seniors, Years 11 and 12, mainly Year 12, in terms of what their aspirations are for the future and what they are currently needing and what sort of pathways they want to take, so that I've got an idea about how to direct information that is coming into the school.

Participant K

The nature of my role as a Career Adviser is probably that I try to take a holistic approach. The kids are welcome in here at any time they have a problem, and if they wish to talk to me about anything. I remind myself, if I need to, that they are the reason that I am here, so as I teach here as well as am the Career Adviser, it is sometimes tempting to put the lessons to one side while I concentrate on the careers.

Participant A

My role as Career Adviser in this school is many and varied. I co-ordinate 18 students who are studying subjects through xxxx xxxx of Distance Education – supervising lessons and distributing relevant material. I co-ordinate 25 students who are studying TVET courses through xxxx TAFE. I have all Year 10, 3 classes, for work education once every two weeks, much of this is preparation for work experience in term 2, week 10 ... Students have an interview with me if they choose to drop a subject and I follow up the paperwork.

Participant O

Appropriate interpersonal skills which enable Career Advisers to see the ‘big picture’ concerning the needs of their students was also evident:
My role as Career Adviser is very broad in terms of [not just] giving information, guiding students and trying to help them to develop their decision making skills in terms of their study and work options. Most specially, I think, I have to go beyond that and look at the individual needs in terms of what are the barriers, why is this particular student not able to access the opportunities that are on offer at the school, and outside as well?  

Participant C

Yes, some of our Indigenous students leave because they haven't developed, or haven't got as well a developed work ethic, particularly with school work. They have this cop out, and it's a fault of ours, because I don't think that we help them enough in that respect. They have five assignments due at assessment time, and they cop out and leave, whereas I think that what we should do is go and get them and say, 'No, you're not leaving, come on, we'll sit down and do these assignments'.  

Participant H

It [career advice] is a very fundamental role in the students' life. I can shape positions. I want them to create their own goals, not their parent's goal for them, not my goal for them. It has to be their own, something of their interest, and realistic. I give them access to the career radar. I tell them work is not your life, it is just one aspect of it. The most important thing is the kind of satisfaction you will get from it, the reward. Their first question is always, 'How much money will I earn?' but if I get them to look at job security, then they look at it differently.  

Participant F

Participants also highlighted the complexity of their role in which they need to balance competing learning and teaching requirements and commitments. One participant noted the influence of the school Principal:

My role is not as straight forward as it was many years ago. In any school, the role's dictated by the Principal, that's the first thing. The Principal decides what you do as a Career Adviser. My roles are varied. I am also the Head Teacher of Administration in the school, and I am responsible for the organisation and implementation of a range of other activities besides the careers work.  

Participant L

Another identified a strategic approach as being necessary:
I have to be strategic in my approach. For example I have a lot of students in Year 10, I have a lot of students in Year 9 who need guidance, and I have a lot of students in Years 11 and 12 as well that I look after, and I have to be very strategic in my approach so that I will be able to tap into all the students. So in terms of access to all the students, targeting specific students with problems, being able to address the student’s needs in terms of their awareness of the careers information that is available or the study options even while they are at school, the subject selection as well, and guidance in terms of their interests and trying to pinpoint specific interests in terms of their career paths, which is very complicated.

Participant C

While another participant highlighted time constraints as having a negative impact on the delivery of career education to students:

There is one other person that I know of in this district that is a Career Adviser and a head teacher Admin. We ring each other up and just complain like crazy. The proportion of time, whatever it is, it is not enough. If I can grab ¾ of an hour a day, then I’m doing well. I’ve done two Year 12 interviews today that have come in on demand, and I just stop whatever it is I’m doing and do what they want to do.

Participant L

Extra-curricular Career Development

One participant in particular demonstrated a commitment to students in providing career development support after students had completed their schooling:

As well as trying to get those students that I am able to help, and now even though they have left High School xxxx in Year 12, I still have contact with them, and at the beginning of the year I was able to help them with their TAFE applications even though it was too late, and now, this one who is doing the Certificate 3 in Aged Care, I am still giving her that guidance as to how she can further that and still be able to do a career in nursing, even though she has only done Aged Care through the RN.

Participant C
Commencement of Career Education

Participants expressed varying opinions regarding when career education should commence for students. This is of particular importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially in light of attendance and retention issues which impacts on their exposure to career education.

Some participants reported that career education should commence in Years 8 and 9:

> Each school is different. Because we’ve had some upheaval in careers over the years, we’re targeting Years 10, 11 and 12, however a lot of the excursions that I run for the Indigenous students involve Years 8 and 9 students to show them the opportunities available and in an attempt to increase retention rates at the end of Year 10. *Participant A*

> Our school approaches career education from a holistic point of view, so we have a careers program that starts off as early as Year 8 and becomes more concentrated as we go through Years 9, 10 and into Years 11 and 12. *Participant F*

> I think Year 9 is probably the best place to start. They’re still just hanging in with their mates and they’re not really thinking about a career, but Year 9, I find that the students at School X, the Koori kids here, that’s when they start to have an interest and start thinking about what they want to do. I think Year 9 is when they start playing with their thoughts and where they are going to go. Year 8, they are still too young. *Participant E*

While other participants considered Year 10 to be appropriate:

> Year 10 is the major focus. Sometimes we have a little bit of a program in Year 9 at the very end of the year we have an introduction, we have done that in the past. But the main problem is that if we start too far out, we are finding the kids don’t see the relevance, unfortunately. *Participant D*
Pretty much in Year 10. We have introductory lessons for the juniors just to make them aware of the fact that we have a Career Adviser, if you are interested in finding out about careers. Basically the three books that we make them familiar with are the Job Guide, the TAFE handbook and UAC. In Year 10 they are probably a little bit more concerned with Job Guide because they are still trying to formulate decisions about what they are going to do, and it is a great tool where they can look at it in print, and they get a copy to keep, to take home.  

Participant G

One participant highlighted the issue of timing of exposure to career education:

If you give them information too early then they are not in focus, so you give it to them a little bit later, not too late so that it conflicts with their study. The timing is pretty important, even if the information comes out early I let them know about it and have a look at it and think about it, then later on if something else comes out to say this is just a reminder, you might like to remind your students that applications might need to be in at this time. It is not as important to them earlier, but they can be thinking about it.  

Participant G

**Attendance and Retention**

Participants highlighted the fact that attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students beyond the post-compulsory schooling years significantly decreased in comparison with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

We have a lot that leave before the School Certificate.  

Participant K

Yes, and I think there is only 17% in Year 12.  

Participant H

They all leave, especially the boys.  

Participant I

Participants also highlighted parental and family environment as an influencing factor in general schooling attendance and support:

It is usually to do with their family structure. Part of their family might be in xxxx, part of the family might be in xxxx. Some of the uncles and aunts are here in xxxx. There can be
situations that can push them out of the school because of tribal or traditional disagreements, and you often find that sort of thing will flare up on a Monday, it will happen over the weekend.  

Participant K

We have a very strong group of students, whose parents are very supportive of the school, and those students, in the main, do well. They have strong aspirations. A lot of them have been involved in Winter School at University xxx.

Participant J

Two participants highlighted the fact that parents didn’t know how to support their children’s educational needs:

A lot of them [students] haven’t experienced it at all in any capacity, so for a child to go through it that’s the hard thing, because they feel there’s not really that support from the home. It’s not that the parents don’t want to give it, it’s just that they don’t know how.  

Participant C

In the senior school students are given the opportunity with uni information of Aboriginal careers in the health related field but not many take up the challenge. This is also to do with the fact that many Aboriginal families are not well educated themselves and don’t encourage uni as an option for their children.  

Participant O

Career Education Efficacy

Regarding efficacy of career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Career Advisers are pivotal agents in supporting their students:

All Indigenous students that I helped in terms of their applications for tertiary institutions have been accepted. One of them got a scholarship from the Teach NSW program, and she was able to gain a placement [for University xxx] in primary education, and I have another student who is preparing now for her HSC but I am really giving her special attention because she wants to do something in terms of health and science.  

Participant C

Whoever finds out about it, the Career Adviser or whoever, they are the gatekeeper, and if they don’t think it is important. Whereas here, everyone knows, we always get told, we all
have ownership of finding careers for kids, because you have a high social capital.

Participant H

School Support

The schooling environment is largely the domain for the delivery of career education and development to students. Many participants highlighted the important pro-active role played by their school in providing a supportive educational environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students:

We had a girl a few years ago, an Aboriginal girl in Year 12 who had a baby in April. The school was extremely supportive of her and she continued on, got her HSC, had great support from her parents. She always wanted to become a nurse, went to University xxxx, and her Mum looked after xxxx, and partly through the first year, the Information and Commonwealth Health Scholarships came out, and she applied for that, and she picked up a $10,000 scholarship and she is now out nursing.  

Participant J

A lot of our Aboriginal students, their parents don’t come, but the Year Co-ordinator is there, or the Aboriginal Liaison Officer is there so that they don’t feel that they don’t have a representative.

Participant H

I honestly believe that the relationship that we have or that I have, or the school has with the manager of the Hostel, if it is a good relationship with the hostel, the managers, then that translates to the boys, and if the boys are happy I think that that permeates across the whole population.

Participant K

The involvement is according to the family, and as you would imagine, we have families who are quite involved, and educated themselves, and on the other hand we have students who are living in care facilities, students who have very little contact with their families, so there you have the two extremes. So that is why the school is quite important to them – the support that the school provides to them.

Participant A
One participant highlighted the negative impact of funding cuts on educational support for students:

Also, we have a strong ATSIC committee at the school. Unfortunately it stopped this year, and over the past number of years we have run a homework centre for our Aboriginal students. It has been held up as a model and a pilot for other schools to copy, but unfortunately the funding for it has been axed.  

Participant J

While another participant highlighted school and community involvement at a ‘grass-roots’ level:

We also organise our own careers fair for the local Indigenous families, and get people like Universities, but more ground based support services that are available - courses that the parents can do, courses that students who have left school and are unemployed can do. We run that in our hall and we get a good hundred people. The school is quite an integral part of the Indigenous community.  

Participant A

Aboriginal Career Aspiration Program

Of the schools which had run the Program, participants reported mixed responses:

It's good. They like the role models, they like talking about people that they admire in their community and that sort of thing. I'd say that is very good, it does work fairly well, and the goal setting and all that … It [ACAP] is pitched at a top Year 10 class level, so some of these kids can't read or write. It is there, but they just don't use it.  

Participant I

By speaking to those teachers, I've found out that a lot of students have been approaching them and asking them when the [ACAP] program would be starting again. But that is dependent on funding.  

Participant J

District Office Support

Participants highlighted both positive and negative interaction with their relevant District Office, particularly with regard to staff and student support:
We do have regular contact with them [District Office]. Support comes from District Office if we want it and if we are having trouble with attendance and those sorts of things. There are Aboriginal Home School Liaison officers that we can make use of.  

Participant B

Well, I find very strongly, that our Koori kids are neglected a bit. District Office makes a lot of the decisions. They get all the excursions based there, and we miss out on a lot. In Sydney it doesn't matter, you can travel there easily on the train. We don't get as much as we should I think.

Participant I

That is the first and only time I heard from them [District Office]. There are so many of our kids who leave school in Year 10 who would jump at that opportunity to get trained out of the uni. They could be learning stuff all the time, and be trained on the job. But like I said, I had to attend that [District Office] meeting to find that out.

Participant E

Relationship with Community

Participants identified a connection with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as a positive adjunct for working effectively with students:

I guess I am luckier than a lot of other Career Advisers when it comes to Indigenous students because I have a connection. I live in the same area that the kids do, I am married to an Aboriginal man, so I am part of the community as well, and it definitely helps because it gives me the opportunity to speak to parents at football games, things like that.

Participant F

You have to be involved in the community and create the network of people that will help you, they don't come to you, you have to go out. You have to be able to model their confidence.

Participant A

Usually if I can't get a job for these kids, I get xxxx or xxxx [Aboriginal Education Assistants] to help me, and they get on the phone and ring people, and because they have been brought up in the community, they know more people than me.

Participant H
Aboriginal Education Assistants

The role of Aboriginal Education Assistants in career education and development was highlighted by participants as a central connection point between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the schooling system:

[Yes and that is why] I have to work closely with the AEA here, because I don't have information about their [student] family background. I need to know what this kid is sensitive of, what the issues are at home, what are the parents like, what are their associations in the community.

Participant C

This is where I work hand in hand with xxxx, because I've [Aboriginal Education Assistant] been able to build up a rapport on a different level than what xxxx would see the kids, so the kids are more likely to come to me and tell me whether they are thinking about leaving school, which often happens. It's the kind of thing where they give me an idea of, a feel of with what they want to do, or what opportunities are available and that's when I go to xxxx, and he fills me in on certain things or paths that the kids can take, so we work with each other in that kind of way.

Participant D

Well, with the Year 10 work experience, I had about twelve kids who hadn't organised their work experience about a week before they were due to go out, and so I just went down and said 'I can't cope with this', and the AEA, who was casual, she was actually one of my ex-students, and she said that she would organise them, and she did and got a lot of jobs for them too.

Participant H

In the absence of a school Aboriginal Education Assistant, one participant noted the valuable ‘grass roots’ contribution which had been provided:

We had an AEA for a while and then we lost them. When we had an AEA, that person made regular contact with the parents of the children. If we had truancy, lateness to class, that person actually rang up and spoke to the parents on a regular basis, and it was a first name basis. So if we had an AEA that's the sort of grassroots support we would have.

Participant B
Emotional and Psychological Needs of Students

Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants work within a challenging careers context which is subject to the impact of globalisation and constant change. This necessitates their being very aware of the emotional and psychological needs and requirements of many of their students:

With a lot of Koori kids and Koori people, there is no confidence there, and I think it would only take one person to say ‘You won’t be able to do that’ and we would just go, ‘Oh, no, okay then’.  

Participant L

I’m trying to make our kids more independent, more responsible for themselves. Initially, when I first came here a few years ago, a lot of kids were victims of circumstances, ‘It’s not my fault, it’s so and so’s fault’, and I don’t hear that nearly as much now, and that’s one of the things we have aimed at trying to fix at this school, that you are responsible for yourself and there’s a lot you can do about your circumstances.  

Participant H

But I can see that if we could make them [career perceptions] realistic, then possibly we could get them [students] some really good career paths. See, the problem with it is this, with the value system that they [students] have got, they discard education. If you’re going to play NRL, you don’t need any schoolwork, right?  

Participant I

Knowledge and Awareness of Health Career Pathways

Participants were asked two open-ended questions regarding the nature and extent of health-related career curricula being delivered in career education at their school and if any material was specifically relevant to health career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Responses highlighted a diverse range of experiences relevant to the context of health career development. This included exposure to health career information, access to health career information and usefulness of health career information. Lack of awareness of the diversity of health
career became apparent. Also, the ongoing need for interagency networking between relevant service providers in the wider community and Career Advisers was highlighted.

**University Engagement**

Participants frequently mentioned the active role taken by Universities to promote health careers for students. This included guest speakers coming to schools:

In addition to that, we have guest speakers coming into the school on quite a regular basis. We've had four visits last year from University xxxx and one already this year.  
*Participant A*

I have had the local nurse come and talk to students in the past, and she was actually lecturing at University xxxx at the time.  
*Participant M*

Last year for the second year in a row, we had xxxx from the Aboriginal Unit at University xxxx. The second year that he came, he worked with the Aboriginal students in the morning and then did a motivational presentation to all of Years 11 and 12 as a discrete group.  
*Participant J*

And wider institutional promotion:

So far this year [2005], I would have had about seven visits, from different Universities and groups. I have had two university road shows, where all the Universities get together, they are like expos.  
*Participant H*

We have University xxxx come out regularly, at least on two visits during the year to introduce themselves, and the second visit is to give more information regarding programs.  
*Participant B*
Hospital, Area Health Services and Aboriginal Medical Services Engagement

To a lesser extent the need to engage a number of other service providers including Hospitals, Area Health Services and Aboriginal Medical Services was also evident. Regarding information coming from these services, participants responded:

They [Area Health Service] haven't approached us that I am aware of ... We need someone to talk to.  

Participant M

No, I've never had that.  

Participant J

Not that I know of.  

Participant G

Health Career Information

Of the health career material received, participants were asked if any of the material was specifically relevant to health career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. While participants reported positive interactions with educational institutions providing health career information, responses also highlighted issues of availability and appropriateness of health career information:

But it is my job to help them to get the transitions right, once I've taught them the decision making, it's my job to get them making plans, but that job is made all the much harder by the fact that the transition information that is available is not designed for the way students think, or their parents. It is designed for professional people, and how they think. It's not in a format that the kids understand.  

Participant H

There is no specific health related career curricula in career education. This is merely information that comes through from other sources, whether it be TAFE, or the Universities. There is not really much specific information related to health careers that is available.  

Participant A
Participants also felt overwhelmed at the volume of information they received:

I get so much [information]. I've got three boxes here, there'll be UAC applications coming in soon, and I'll sort them out later … look I can't remember.  

Participant J

I get stuff from all of the Universities, all the time. Basically we get the whole range, the problem with that is, it's just too big, they should have it in booklets, you know, like the health industry because that is the way that students think, but it is not like that. They're glossing over, sending out so much stuff, but it's not the way students think. Students think in terms of a job, Universities think in terms of courses.  

Participant H

**Awareness of Health Career Diversity**

With regard to being aware of the diversity of health career pathways and options for students, knowledge and exposure appeared limited. However this did not apply to nursing and medicine:

There was quite a comprehensive mail out on nursing recently, but I haven't noticed anything highlighting careers for, or trying to recruit Indigenous students into that particular career in the brochure.  

Participant E

I went up there but it was just all about nursing, and the nursing facility at the uni.  

Participant H

The people interested in medicine at this school are, in my experience, white girls, extremely motivated and focused.  

Participant I

I think when you talk to the kids they think either a doctor or a nurse. That's all you can do. If you ask an Aboriginal kid if they want to get into health, they think either a nurse or a doctor. 'I'm not going to be a nurse, only girls are nurses', that's what these guys are like. That's where I think they come from.  

Participant L
UAI Requirements

Knowledge and understanding of UAI requirements and entrance pathways into tertiary study varied between participants and their students. Some participants had extensive knowledge, some had very little understanding:

I pointed out to her Orthoptics, which is offered at University xxxx, and she was so surprised at the UAI requirements. For Aboriginal students it is lower and there are programs where you can have a different entry gate, so she is thinking of doing it now. I think it is more about their exposure.  
Participant C

It is not an area that they have expressed to me a great interest in. I don’t think there is even any who are interested in nursing at the moment. Of those Year 12s, and I’ve seen them all recently, none of them have expressed an interest in a health career, and it could be that they feel it is out of their possibility to do that because of UAI constraints.  
Participant A

The issue is as much political and practical as it is anything else. If you look at the situation in health training, this is regarded as an elite profession ... In recent times there is only one university which has taken a non-academic, no, a lesser academic stand for medicine, and that is University xxxx. I wonder whether out of all of this, if you don’t have a mindset and with all respects to your Alma Mater, University xxxx and other Universities have an elitist attitude or approach and while ever that exists, you are not getting Koori kids or less academic white kids into health careers. If you want to get Koori kids into health careers that attitude has to change.  
Participant E

Interest in Health Career Pathways

Participants were asked one open-ended question regarding whether or not they felt that students were interested in pursuing a career in health. Responses included student interest in health careers and careers in general, factors stimulating those interests, students’ awareness of the diversity of health careers, the impact of career expos in raising awareness
of health career pathways and options, and parental or family involvement in the health care area.

**Student Interest in Health Careers**

Regarding whether or not students had an interest in pursuing a health career pathway, participants identified varying degrees of student interest:

*I haven't had them verbalise it in that way, but I've had students that have had interests around that area, so if their interests lie in anything to do with community - and I guess you could extend the fact that a couple of them had been interested in things around the area of education and social work - so yes, you could probably speak to those kids about broadening their vision to incorporate some of the other areas in health because some of them, I think, have been on a tangent to it even though I haven't had anyone express a direct interest specifically as in, 'Geez, I'd like to get involved in some aspect of health'.*  
*Participant D*

*I think they [students] can see there is a huge need, and it is also a worthwhile career. It has got respect, and a lot of the kids like the idea of helping somebody, it's a job that is supporting other people. That's pretty powerful feedback that you get if you are in that kind of job where you are helping people. I've found that health jobs always get a response. There is always some kid in the class who puts their hand up for that area, particularly the females.*  
*Participant F*

*No, not many of the local people here are role models for health related careers. Our local students have grown up here or moved from other small, isolated, rural communities where career aspirations are not a priority. If there is any Aboriginal career of interest it is usually that of an AEA because that is who students see on a regular basis and it is easy to identify with them. It is a common choice for work experience in Year 10 to suggest being an AEA rather than with health care careers.*  
*Participant O*

**Career Markets, Expos and Seminar Days**

Participants highlighted their involvement in co-ordinating career markets, expos and seminar days and the impact of those in raising awareness of
health careers for students and in encouraging them to consider post-schooling educational options:

I think that the ones that we take to these career expos understand it [health careers].

Participant M

I think that even if we look at the jobs market, there were speakers there, for example, I think that it is fairly powerful when you have people recounting first hand experiences, it is always great if you have someone that these kids can relate to who is fairly close to their age and definitely if you had ex-students.

Participant D

Now there is an Indigenous Job Market, which is specifically tailored. They've got a number of jobs available within departments there, and services where kids are able to go and get a sound out and even actually apply for on the day, or put their name down on a list there. Then there is the Inaugural Careers Market which is out in the South West Region, where all the schools participate and you have a number of Government agencies like Sydney Water last year, and all the TAFEs in the area, and the Universities. They talk to the kids about what is available at uni and what services are provided.

Participant A

Family Environment

Participants highlighted the family environment of the student as a possible influencing factor in deciding whether or not to pursue a health career pathway:

I reckon a lot of the time it is coming from the home, someone of the family has been involved or something like that. Some of the mothers are working in the health care environment, and they look at a caring type role that is similar to nursing, so they look at nursing as an option. It is still very much a local thing, where they see it locally and think that it's an interest.

Participant M

I think they [students] have some family influence from home. Some have family members who are working for xxxx which is the AMS in town. Quite a lot of the xxxx families are in the AMS working. One that I know of is the whole AMS Co-ordinator. And there is the
youth worker, she works for the Youth Centre, so I think xxxx has quite a lot of influence in all those jobs, because he goes there every day because it is all family orientated.

*Participant H*

Some of the mothers are working in the health care environment, and they look at a caring type role that is similar to nursing, so they look at nursing as an option.  

*Participant N*

**Student Awareness of Health Career Diversity**

With regard to students being aware of the diversity of health career pathways, participants generally felt that most students did not have an understanding or awareness of health career pathways and options:

Most of communities out in the bush they have got medical centres, and I don't think the boys or the girls would have even thought 'I could go home and work in that and look after them'.

*Participant M*

A lot of Indigenous people have diabetes. If we incorporated that or put that perspective into a health class, and compared that with the non-Indigenous community they would see that more Aboriginal people were needed to be trained up and employed in such a way that they could go back into those communities who will feel comfortable having them around them. But they don't know what is going on out there, because they don't know anything about it.  

*Participant E*

No, not to me, and I think the reason is that they don't know. Anything to do with sport and the boys are there, and the same for the girls with childcare. That's pretty much what they want to do. So then you say to them, 'What do you want to do with childcare?' 'I don't know just look after kids'. 'Where do you want to look after kids, sick kids in the hospital?' 'Just with kids'. A lot of people just don't know.  

*Participant H*

With regard to students gaining exposure to health careers through Vocation Education and Training, this option was limited:
We do the T-VET courses, which is the TAFE. You can choose the TAFE course. The only one that I [Career Adviser] pick is a community services welfare one. It is the only one that would even remotely touch that [health].

Participant N

We have a lot of VET students. Nearly every student in our school does a VET subject. So we have hospitality, we do metals, we do retail, information technology.

[Interviewer: Anything related to health, with regard to VET?]

No, I don't think there is one related to health. Hospitality is a little bit, it might cover health issues in that, but basically that's about it.

Participant H

Career Advisers Awareness of Current Health Career Diversity

Responses from participants highlighted a lack of awareness of the diversity of health career pathways available to students:

Now as far as any other non-university health courses that are available, I don't know about them ... How to stimulate interest in health careers, well, if I knew a lot about the health careers that were available to the students then I would provide the information for them.

Participant A

Now if you wanted someone to talk about health related careers, I've no doubt that there are many health related careers that I never think of, let alone the students. Participant B

Career Development Support

In considering how to identify whether or not a student was interested in a health career pathway but hadn't articulated the interest, participants highlighted effective career development support designed to clarify options and facilitate understanding:

A lot of the Year 9 career work for example is focused on getting the students to make decisions on what they want to do and I try and get four or five possible jobs for each student and that is kept on file, and if a match comes in for a particular area, I can track down those students and give them the information.

Participant B
We are trying to show them that what they are good at and interested in is valuable and worth recording and presenting down the track to an employer as relevant. What are your aspirations, goals and abilities. It was a bit of a start, and the students thought it was great, and they wanted to tell me all the things that they were good at.  

Participant J

Part of that is helping them make a decision, rather than pick a career, so they are looking at actually choosing a career that suits them. I get them to look at their interests, their attitudes, what jobs involve. If they’ve got that world-of-work first, then they can pick jobs that do suit what their inner selves are saying are better for them.  

Participant H

Strategies to Raise Awareness of Health Career Pathways

Participants were asked one open-ended question regarding what they thought would be an effective means of stimulating interest and raising awareness of health as a career pathway.

Participants discussed a variety of strategies which they felt constituted practical and appropriate interventions. This included embedding a careers aspect into and across the current PDHPE curriculum, having motivational speakers and ex-students share their journeys of school-to-work (particularly if they work in the health care sector), having regular face-to-face involvement with post-compulsory educational institutions (rather than just receiving bulk written information) utilising role-models, and ensuring that work experience facilitated student’s interest in health.

Curriculum Development

In regard to curriculum development, participants highlighted a relationship between careers and classroom lessons:

Now I believe that if you are genuine about getting kids to think about careers and make an informed decision, careers should be all part of that. Therefore you need to introduce careers through normal classroom lessons. In your case, in Indigenous health, looking at health lessons in school is a fairly critical place to start.  

Participant E
Health is a mandatory part of students course in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. Students get two lessons a cycle - we have a fortnightly cycle. There is a prescribed syllabus from the department, which deals with all aspects of health, and if you look at Indigenous health in that area, and you extend that to looking at careers in Indigenous health, in a subtle way, I think you have a much better chance of influencing student’s long-term choices than you do at just any point of time saying, ‘I now want you to think about careers’.

Participant M

Participants also highlighted interest in sport as a medium to raise awareness of associated health career pathways:

However, there is no question that the majority of Koori students have a fundamental interest in sport, and I think that there is a very good vehicle for us there to interest them in health by drawing the nexus between sport and health. Then we could say “If you want to succeed at sport, then there are certain health aspects that need to be looked at and in terms of looking at these health aspects, there are careers that automatically follow as well and which can be mixed.

Participant I

I think if you want Koori kids to get into Aboriginal health, they need to know. They see every single day, blackfellas playing footy, and they are their role models, but they also, through their health classes, if we had a broader approach on Aboriginal health, then they could sympathise and feel that they could be valuable in this as a career.

Participant E

Role Models

Participants highlighted the importance of role models both within the community and the family environment as a source of motivation and encouragement for students:

They [Aboriginal Medical Centres] come and give health promotion presentations at school. I think the Chlamydia ladies may be part of that. So they came up and spoke to all our students from about Year 7 onwards. So the students see those people in those roles, doing things in our school and that’s very positive.

Participant H
So a role model in a family or an acquaintance or in some cases mentors, because a number of our Indigenous students do have mentors, through Aboriginal support groups. They have meetings, clubs, organised outings, and this is for that purpose to have a role model, the purpose is to encourage the students to keep on the right track.  

Participant A

There was one quite successful time, a few years ago for Years 7 and 8, where we had rotating guest speakers day, where the kids rotate from group to group and listen to an Indigenous person talk about their career path and one of the most successful speakers was a midwife who works at RPA. She is quite famous locally and has delivered most of the kids that she was talking to.  

Participant F

One participant highlighted the relationship between education and role modelling:

More than half our students in the junior school are Indigenous, and I don't keep them much beyond Year 10 and 11, and we need more Indigenous people to stay in our community and be successful, because if we don't have successful Indigenous people in our community, we don't have the role models, and what we end up with is the riff raff element of Indigenous people which is what we have too many of at the moment, and they're very unhappy, and as a group they are very unhappy. We need to get them more successful, and education, to me, for a lot of them is the only way of getting out of that rut and that horrible cycle that some of them are in.  

Participant H

Work Experience

Participants highlighted work experience as a useful strategy to expose students to the work environment:

I'd have to say so far, work experience has been the most effective way to get kids in touch with ... I've got a pretty good relationship with a fellow over at RPA, who every year for the past three or four years has taken two of our kids and put them in a different ward at the hospital ... And one student, because of this exposure, she was at the front desk, she was exposed to a lot of different jobs at the hospital, and she loved it, and still wants to go into health - you can't go past that.  

Participant F
Work experience is good, it gives them hands-on and it also lets them see on the workers' side what the job is like.  

Participant E

Yes, and it's not fair to them. If someone rocks up and they are dark skinned, society immediately puts the kybosh on them. One of the things we are trying to do with work experience and that is to get them out there, get employers realising what great kids they are, and that's why, when you look at our post school destinations, we have been highly successful, because we are pumping them into TAFE, and courses.  

Participant H

Career Development Support

Participants highlighted the value of a face-to-face approach in career development support:

If they see things first hand, that experience you're learning is most powerful. It's great to talk to someone about it, but they need to be able to get a real sense of it. So if the talk can make them feel that they are involved enough so that they can get a sense of what does actually happen, that is one of the biggest problems, because they really don't have a sense of, one, the options that are out there and, two, what's actually involved in the type of job.  

Participant D

I would much prefer people to come into the school and talk to the students rather than me stand up there, because I'm like a parent to them. Kids don't listen to their parents.  

Participant M

I think the only way that you can provide that sort of stimulus is through expert information, so really you need a guest speaker. I figure, a captive audience, telling them [students] about health related type careers would be a better approach.  

Participant B

One participant highlighted the need for effective follow-up:

There was a similar thing around the schools with motivational speakers, and many of them got on the band wagon and tore around. A fellow I had here, I thought, well, that's
okay but there’s no follow up to it, and I think that a lot of companies now are avoiding it for the same thing. It really doesn’t work.  

Participant N

Another participant suggested face-to-face promotion of health traineeships would be of use:

Well certainly in this area [health], I think it is the only way to go. As well as getting information, I think it is the way to give it high profile. They talk about a skill shortage in Australia, they should be getting people to come around and talk about it, and give some traineeships. Another face, same information, it’s still different. That would be a much better approach.  

Participant N

Participants also highlighted a seminar approach as being of use:

Probably by running a day seminar, but at this school.  

Participant D

I was thinking, that area there, what would be the best way to get that information across, and I really think having maybe a morning, a day, whatever, and saying ‘Look, this is what is available, and this is where it can lead you’, would be by far, the best approach. It has to be a seminar to raise awareness.  

Participant N

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented findings as they have emerged from interviews with participants. Four primary thematic categories were uncovered and coded into twenty-six sub-categories. The following chapter, Chapter Seven, Discussion, will examine these sub-categories in detail in order to formulate specific recommendations relevant to growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force, which are presented in Chapter Eight, Conclusions.
Chapter Seven
Discussion

Chapter Overview
This chapter presents a discussion of each of the categories of data which were presented in Chapter Six, Findings, and their application to the research questions that guided the current study. Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data, and their implication for policy, practice and further research are presented in the following chapter, Chapter Eight, Conclusions.

Introduction
The current study explores the secondary school career education and development context for developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. This was assessed through a qualitative interpretation of the perceptions and attitudes of fifteen Career Advisers, and opportunistically, three Aboriginal Education Assistants. Participants for the current study were selected from fifteen secondary schools across metropolitan and regional New South Wales.

The findings of the current study suggest that Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants work within a challenging world-of-work context. As a result, both Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants are often required to manage competing and diverse curriculum requirements.

In addition the delivery of health career education and development to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is further challenged by a
number of factors. These factors include poor schooling attendance, retention and academic self-concept issues, limited exposure, access to culturally appropriate career education and development and finally, institutional racism and discrimination.

Many of the findings highlighted in the interviews are beyond the scope of the current study to explore. However they are specifically mentioned for further examination in the recommendations provided in Chapter Eight, Conclusions.

**Career Education and Development Context**

Within an overall career education and development context, Career Advisers explored the effectiveness of their roles and the nature of the learning and teaching relationship they experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They discussed a range of issues which revealed the complexity of their role at both professional and personal levels.

Very few Career Advisers are employed to fulfil the responsibilities and requirements designated solely by that role. In many instances, responsibility for the delivery of career education by the Career Adviser is coupled with additional teaching and learning requirements outside the career education curriculum. This factor imposes a time constraint on the availability and delivery of career education to students which may reduce the quality and comprehensiveness of career education delivered to students.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1998, p. 49) argued that many teachers are ‘ill-equipped’ for the careers guidance role. In stating this, the Committee also
acknowledged that this was a systemic problem, and not the fault of individual teachers who, without any specific training, ‘find themselves the careers teacher simply because their teaching load allows time for it’.

This situation contrasts sharply with Recommendation 30 from the report of the Enquiry into Vocational Education in Schools which recommends that:

... all secondary schools have at least one fulltime professional Career Adviser with appropriate specialist training who can provide a dedicated career education service within the school and who can work with the Vocational Education and Training co-ordinator (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, xxxii).

Career Advisers also highlighted that fact that informal career advice is often provided to students outside the classroom in informal settings. This can vary from students attending the Career Advisers office during school hours, to encounters occurring outside the schooling environment in social settings, such as local sports events or out-of-hours school events.

In the schooling environment, an ‘open door policy’ enabling students to ‘drop in for a chat’ was cited as a highly effective means of facilitating career education, and providing advice and guidance. However, it was clear that the combined role and responsibilities of Career Adviser and Teacher effectively reduced the time and opportunity available to students to access their Career Adviser both within the schooling environment and outside it.

This factor resides at the opposite end of the spectrum in comparison to the personal ethos, drive and commitment of many Career Advisers. Career Advisers are well aware of the importance of their role and the impact of
their teaching in facilitating career education and delivering effective
career education outcomes for their students. This was demonstrated by
some Career Advisers indicating that there was a need to ‘go above and
beyond the call of duty’ in ensuring that, in particular, Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander students achieve positive career development
outcomes within the schooling environment. This was evidenced by their
understanding of structural and cultural barriers faced by these students,
and their attempts to confront and overcome them.

The Report of the Leaders in Careers Forum (Commonwealth Department of
Education, Science and Training 2003, p. 3) highlighted the issue that
delivery of career education in Australian schools is often of an ‘ad hoc’
nature and largely dependent upon the enthusiasm, commitment and
skills of relevant individuals. This fact was clearly reflected in the data
obtained from participants and was evidenced by the diverse range of
individual attitudes and behaviour of Career Advisers toward Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander students.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Training (1998, p. 59) highlighted this issue in their report,
Today’s training, Tomorrow’s skills. The Report argued that careers guidance
in schools should be, ‘… better resourced to enable properly qualified and
equipped counsellors to provide comprehensive advice to students’. The
Report was quite clear in stating, ‘Careers guidance must be regarded as a
legitimate need and right for all secondary students’.

Some Career Advisers are very supportive of their student’s career
aspirations. They demonstrate a deep engagement with career education
and take a personal interest in the needs of their students and in a sensitive
and empathetic manner try to understand how those needs can best be met. One Career Adviser contacts parents after each school year commences to offer on-going support and guidance to school leavers should they require it. Another Career Adviser was able to assist post school leavers with TAFE applications and offer on-going mentorship.

In contrast to this, some Career Advisers appeared to adopt a surface approach toward career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This was demonstrated by a somewhat ambivalent and in some cases discriminatory attitude toward their students, and a preference for adopting a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach in the delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

For those Career Advisers going ‘above and beyond the call of duty’, it can also be argued that this course of action increases the demands of an already heavy workload and restricts or limits access to teacher in-service training and professional staff development opportunities. Suffice to say, Career Advisers are not only overworked, they experience the impact of time constraints which in turn may impact on how ably they can support their students.

This situation also highlights the issue of responsibility for the delivery of career education, and the allocation of time for career education within schools. Is it the school Principal who determines this at the local level, or is the requirement set at the institutional level by government policy? While it is clear that the delivery of career education is certainly of an ‘ad hoc’ nature, the question to be asked is: what can be done about it?
It can be argued that the adoption and implementation of a whole-of-school approach toward the Careers Education Quality Framework (Department of Education, Science and Training 1999) would be an effective means of addressing this ad hoc approach. Implementation of the Framework by schools through a strategic and co-ordinated response to career education and development for students would ensure that a ‘quality approach’ (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training 1999, p. 2) is being adopted by the school.

This whole-of-school approach has been advocated for in a report produced by the AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education 2005, Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008. The Report (2005, p. 3) argued that gains in educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been largely attributed to Indigenous-specific intervention programs. While these programs have achieved some positive outcomes for students, they have also led to a dependence on short-term solutions.

The Report stated unequivocally that education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been ‘bolted on’ rather than ‘built in’ to mainstream effort, becoming the province of specialists and committed individuals instead of systems as a whole (AESOC Senior Working Party on Indigenous Education 2005, p. 3).

Furthermore, the Report argued that not only are their recommendations systemic, they represent a paradigm shift in how education systems and schools respond to the learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Report makes an important distinction between explanations of educational failure which focus on the characteristics of
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As we consider the plight of those students usually assumed to be ‘at risk’, we might well begin by recognizing that what put many of them in jeopardy are not just circumstances of birth or environment, but the school itself. They are at risk of failing not because they can’t learn but because the school has not adequately engaged them … [w]hen we make needed improvements in the way we educate all students, we won’t need special programs for some students (Murray et. al. cited in AESOC Senior Working Party on Indigenous Education 2005, p. 4).

The current study agrees with and supports the Careers Education Quality Framework and the Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008, both of which call for significant and important systemic reform.

The relationship between student attendance and retention and relevant exposure and access to career education and development was another issue highlighted by Career Advisers. Career Advisers expressed their concern at the fact that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students receive limited exposure to career education due to poor schooling attendance and retention both pre and post-compulsory schooling years.

Poor schooling attendance and retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is an issue which has similarly been raised by the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association (2006, p. 4). Highlighting the importance of engagement with the education system, particularly with regard to future participation within the world-of-work, the Association...
argue that in order to develop a competent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force, it is necessary to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from early childhood and support them throughout the education system.

In addition to early engagement and ongoing educational support within the schooling system, there is another element which needs to be factored into the equation. This element was highlighted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2004, p. 233) who argued that the provision of culturally appropriate career services is an important strategy to address the low school retention rate, high unemployment and social disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Moreover, the Australia Country Note of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (cited in The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, p. 233) argued that effective strategies need to be, ‘grounded in Indigenous culture and to include active involvement of parents and families’.

The factors affecting regular schooling attendance and ongoing retention are interlinked and problematic. The impact of these factors, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005, p. 188) argued, will influence the future involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the health and welfare services by, ‘their current participation in health and welfare-related education’. If this is indeed the case, then it is imperative that the underlying causes precipitating poor schooling attendance and retention by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students be identified and a targeted, strategic, whole-of-school approach adopted and implemented in order to address this situation.
Career education is delivered to students via a number of mediums. These include face-to-face teaching in a formal (classroom) and informal (outside the classroom) setting, exposure to career seminars, relevant industry and community guest speakers, and active participation in work experience placements. In addition, much information that students receive is printed matter. To take full advantage of this entire media, the student must be exposed to it.

If students are absent from school and face-to-face career education for long or varying periods, they would still receive written information relevant to career development. How effectively does written material alone inform students about career pathways and opportunities? In view of the varying literacy levels amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, the issue of the effectiveness of written material for career information needs to be taken into account.

Career Advisers also highlighted the issue that the format of printed material is ‘designed for professional people’, and that it is not presented in a manner which ‘the kids understand’. One Career Adviser made the important distinction between how students think, and how Universities think, specifically that, ‘Students think in terms of a job, Universities think in terms of courses’. Another Career Adviser reported that she ‘hadn’t come across too many kids who enjoy the written word’.

This issue has particular importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families and raises the question: how effective is written career information for students? A principle medium of conveying career information to students and their families which is utilised by secondary schools is the school careers newsletter. How
effective a medium is this, in light of the fact that many Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples experience poor levels of English language
literacy?

This is an important issue which highlights the fact that either suitable
alternatives to the written material currently available to students are
sought or conversely that changes need to be made to the material
currently available. This could include material being rewritten in plain
English for example. Implementing these alternatives would contribute
toward ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not
further disadvantaged in comparison to their non-Indigenous peers.

In exploring the nature of health career information received by Career
Advisers, and in particular knowledge of the diversity of health career
paths, a noticeable trend was revealed. Career Advisers demonstrated
little knowledge and awareness of the range and diversity of health career
paths currently available, with the exception of nursing and medicine.
They also revealed that they received little if any material (other than that
relating to nursing and medicine) which informed them of the range and
diversity of health career paths available for Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander students.

If students are to be able to make informed decisions regarding career
paths, they must have access to all available information in a format
which is compatible with their level of education and English language
literacy. Additionally, unless Career Advisers have access to health career
information, then they too are limited in how effectively they can raise
awareness and increase existing career pathway options and opportunities
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
This is an important issue because knowledge and awareness of the diversity of health careers by Career Advisers can have a direct impact on those career pathways being made available to students. Within the context of growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce this is particularly significant. Career Advisers are a gateway for students to the world-of-work and lifelong learning: they play a crucial role in facilitating career education and development. For this reason, it is imperative that in order to support Career Advisers in their role, they need to be kept up to date and fully informed of the diversity of health career pathways and options available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

This situation also highlights the issue of responsibility and raises a number of questions. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that Career Advisers are kept informed? Is it the responsibility of higher educational institutions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (and non-Indigenous) primary health care organisations, or State and Federal Government agencies and peak bodies? Or does responsibility lay with the Career Adviser?

Ensuring that Career Advisers are fully informed about the diversity of health career pathways (other than nursing and medicine) is imperative if they are to be effective conduits for dissemination of knowledge in this area. Exactly how that could materialise for Career Advisers and their students clearly requires further investigation.

According to Career Advisers, individual schools determine when career education commences for students. One Career Adviser advised that Year 8 was when career education commenced because, ‘the people who were
working at DEST felt that too many Indigenous students were not even completing Year 9. Another Career Adviser advised that due to a ‘holistic point of view’, career education commenced in Year 8, becoming more concentrated as students progressed through Years 9, 10, and into Years 11 and 12.

Other Career Advisers reported that Years 9 and 10 provide the major focus for the commencement of career education in their schools. This ad hoc approach toward when career education should commence exacerbates the problematic issue of poor schooling attendance and retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and subsequent reduced exposure to career education opportunities.

For example, Career Advisers reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ retention rates beyond post-compulsory schooling years were significantly below that of non-Indigenous students. This effectively reduces the opportunity for exposure to career education and impacts to a considerable degree on individual career development and opportunities for lifelong learning.

If career education commences in the early years of secondary schooling then access to career education and ongoing career development increases. If however, career education commences in the mid to later years of secondary schooling, then there is greater risk of lack of exposure to career education and lack of access to career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Career Advisers discussed a number of reasons for decreasing attention and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
These included such factors as familial responsibilities, visiting family and not returning to school and in some cases, lack of availability and access to after-hours educational support in the home.

Two Career Advisers highlighted important parental perspectives impacting on educational outcomes for their children. The first was that it wasn’t that parents didn’t want to support the educational needs of their children, ‘its, just that they don’t know how’ (because they have little or no experience of secondary schooling themselves). The second perspective was that because many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are not well educated themselves, they don’t encourage university attendance as an option for their children.

This lack of ‘human capital’ was highlighted by Craven et. al. (2005, p. 23) in their report into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ aspirations. The authors reported that while many parents indicated that they wanted their children to succeed at school, they (parents) had no idea of how to assist them. Significantly, parents reported that due to their past experiences, they felt, ‘… inadequate in providing academic and career advice and support to their children’ (Craven et. al. 2005, p. 23).

Increasing involvement with the student, their family and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community appears to play a significant role in establishing effective and productive educational partnerships between Career Advisers and students. Being involved with the community, being visible within the community and creating appropriate networks and relationships were considered highly effective strategies which were adopted by some Career Advisers.
These strategies are important because they constitute an outreach from the school to the student and then into the community. This outreach cannot be underestimated. It builds trust, confidence and continuity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the school and the wider community. As one Career Adviser indicated, ‘You have to be able to model their confidence’.

Career Advisers frequently discussed the importance of a supportive educational environment as a form of advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families and communities. It became apparent during discussions with Career Advisers (and Aboriginal Assistants) that targeted strategies, combined with a flexible and adaptable approach from within the school which empowers the student, contributes toward ensuring that the diverse needs of students can be accommodated. This is an important component of career development, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students because it builds self-esteem and confidence.

Career Advisers highlighted the diverse nature of this support, which varied from school to school. This included fostering a collaborative relationship between teaching staff and parents, ensuring that students have Indigenous representation at school events, and that students have appropriate career reference points around the school and adequate access to the school Career Adviser.

It is important to realise that paying attention to diversity issues in career development does not mean ignoring difference or overemphasising stereotypes (Kerka 2004, p. 65). What it does mean is that students are not
marginalised because of ‘difference’ and that equity of access to career education and development is available unreservedly to all students.

A core component of the educational support provided by schools is the vital role played by Aboriginal Education Assistants. All Career Advisers without exception discussed the positive contribution and pivotal support provided by Aboriginal Education Assistants, not only toward the learning and teaching environment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but to their own learning and teaching.

Non-Indigenous Career Advisers are very aware of the limitations to establishing effective learning and teaching relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Many Career Advisers acknowledged the fact that they rely on and utilise the relationship between the Aboriginal Education Assistant and the student. This pre-existing relationship acts as an interpersonal framework which enables the Career Adviser to more effectively interact with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so as to build and develop trust and rapport.

It is clear from discussions with both Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants that Aboriginal Education Assistants are a strong link between the student, the student’s family and the school. Many Career Advisers perceived and understood the fact that Aboriginal Education Assistants holistically integrate the school and the family of the student.

This integration is important especially in view of the broader historical context of the relationship between the education system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In this setting, the Aboriginal Education Assistant plays a critical role in mediating between past
historical experience and future educational and learning outcomes of students. This role is critical because of the close nature of their personal working relationships with students in the school environment, and the positive impact of trust which is established between the student and the Aboriginal Education Assistant.

This highlights another issue. During discussions with Career Advisers it became clear that few understood how the historical relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider non-Indigenous community continues to impact upon and affect relationships between the two cultural groups, a fact particularly relevant to the education system. While some Career Advisers did appear to have some understanding of this relationship, the majority did not.

Within the Systems Theory Framework, Patton and McMahon (2006, p. 155) highlight the fact that all systems, and the influences that impact upon those systems are located within the context of time. The past, present and future are, according to the authors, inextricably linked. The past influences the present, and past-present combined influences the future.

It is important to note within the context of this discussion and the current study, that the concept of the past impacting on the present has particular relevance to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The ongoing impact of colonisation, the Stolen Generations, grief and loss issues and socioeconomic deprivation and marginalisation present enormous challenges to not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but all Australians. Furthermore, the impact of ongoing colonisation is something that is seldom understood by the wider non-Indigenous community.
The applicability of the concept of time within Systems Theory to the schooling environment has particular significance with regard to the relationship that develops between Career Advisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, especially because it exists within an overarching context of colonisation. Understanding and appreciating the needs of these students from a systems perspective, in particular how the past (colonisation) impacts upon the present (widespread socio-economic disadvantage) and contributes toward the future (ongoing socio-economic disadvantage) would facilitate a move away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to career education to one which facilitates a deeper, more holistic engagement with career development.

The need to move beyond the ‘one size fits all’ approach was highlighted by Cook, Heppner and O’Brien (cited in Kerka 2004, p. 62) who argued that theories about how and why people choose careers have been based on a number of assumptions. These include; everyone has a free choice among careers; career development is a linear, progressive, rational process for all and individualism, autonomy and centrality of work are universal values.

Systems Theory accommodates diversity. It moves beyond the traditional, and exclusive, ‘person-environment fit theory’ (Kerka 2004, p. 62) to an inclusive model which acknowledges the influence of various phenomena (variables) in the life-sphere of the individual. This accommodation of diversity paves the way for a culturally appropriate career development model which would enable career development practitioners to facilitate inclusive, culturally appropriate career education.
The shift in attitude and understanding which would be required to implement such a model poses a challenge for the Career Adviser in the twenty-first century. Systems Theory necessitates that Career Advisers move from a ‘comfortable traditional worldview’ to the currently ‘emerging worldview with its different account of causality’ (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 158). In order to understand the complexity of the lives of their students, and the diverse range of influences impacting upon them, Career Advisers need to now think in circular rather than linear terms (Patton & McMahon 2006, p. 158).

The importance of understanding the relationship between the past and present was raised by the AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education in their report, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (Ministerial Council for Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2005, p. 7). The Report argued that while community (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) engagement in schooling rests on the cultural exchange of knowledge, most ‘… non-Indigenous educators have limited understanding of and qualifications in Indigenous education’.

The Report also highlighted the fact that many in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community themselves, ‘have limited understanding of western educational systems of schooling and restricted views of their own Indigenous educational process and the linguistic code-switching required to move successfully between the two educational genre’ (2005, p. 7). In order for both cultures to develop a deeper understanding of the other, specialised exposure to informal and structured articulated and accredited training is required. The Report concluded:
Adequate sharing of such deep understanding between professional educators and the Indigenous community is fundamental to enabling exchange and resolution of complex and often mutually incompatible assumptions about education (2005, p. 7).

The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. 2004, p. 148) also raised this issue. The Report articulated, ‘... teachers still need to know their students and where they come from. Many teachers lack Aboriginal cultural knowledge, which translates into different perceptions for them and their students’.

The Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association (2005, pp. 47-48) argued that developing and maintaining a culturally safe environment is important in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in medicine, and that, ‘... beliefs, attitudes, policies and practices of tertiary institutions can often act as barriers to higher education for Indigenous students’. While this argument is positioned within a tertiary learning environment, it has equal applicability to the secondary schooling learning environment.

The Report argued that in order to develop and maintain a culturally safe environment, it is essential:

... for all staff and students [within medical and health faculties] to understand their own cultural identity, attitudes, values and actions; and how these impact on others around them (2005, p. 46).

In order to ensure the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the Report argued for a comprehensive approach
requiring commitment at a number of levels. This included cultural safety training for staff and the adoption of an institutional approach which had cultural safety principles embedded into management and decision-making processes.

The interface of cultural safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples taking up key roles in health care was highlighted by Ian Anderson, Director of the University of Melbourne’s Centre for the Study of Health and Society during the Charles Perkins Memorial Oration 2003 (University of Sydney 2003).

Anderson highlighted the fact that medical providers needed to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and cultural issues and that they needed to work more closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This closer working relationship would subsequently contribute toward developing a viable system that genuinely meets the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

One way to achieve this, according to Anderson was to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up key roles in health care. With less than 1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in health care, the need, according to Anderson, was evident.

The development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force has been placed on the national agenda because it has been identified in numerous reports as a national priority. As an important component of the health work force, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers provide culture-specific knowledge, access and an ability to liaise
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with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about their interactions with the health care system (Darr et. al. 2002, p. 1).

The Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association argued (2005, p. 48) that cultural safety will, ‘not only assist in providing safe environments for Indigenous students but will also contribute to the creation of a culturally competent medical professional workforce’. That being so, efficacy in primary health care service provision and delivery clearly incorporates a number of factors. These include access to culturally appropriate health care services, access to key health care personnel, and access to culturally safe health care environments. It is evident that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care professionals have a significant role to play in delivering culturally appropriate health care services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

There are two critical aspects in this scenario. The first is acknowledging that the future involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the delivery of health (and welfare) services will be influenced by their current participation in health (and welfare-related) education (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 188). The second is that health services that are initiated, controlled and operated by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community have the potential to increase the level of access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by providing holistic and culturally appropriate care (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005, p. 190).

Prior to commencing data collection for the current study, the researcher was of the opinion that Career Advisers were the primary conduit through which career advice and education was delivered to Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander students. To a degree this is correct. In addition to this however, the researcher observed that there were additional elements impacting on career education for these students which Career Advisers were largely unaware of: the nature and impact of the historical experience of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and communities.

While some Career Advisers acknowledged that structural barriers exist for these students and demonstrated some understanding of the underlying issues causing these barriers, most were unaware of how these barriers were created for the student and what it was that enabled these barriers to remain in place. Nor were Career Advisers aware of the impact of these barriers on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This suggests that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not receive the best possible career education in the schooling environment which as a result, may be trying and difficult for both the Career Adviser and the student.

In a metaphorical sense, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and non-Indigenous culture could be depicted as two streams running alongside one another. The streams have separate yet distinct ways of being, of seeing the world, of relating to it. For ease of understanding it could be said that one stream is salt water, the other fresh water. The streams represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students.

There are commonalities, water, movement, yet there are stark differences too. The important consideration is to acknowledge the differences and determine what will work for both. How can the current sociopolitical and socioeconomic environment, which has for its foundation cultural, social, political, and economic marginalisation and suppression, be rendered
equitable so as to ensure opportunity of access to careers education and information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?
Perhaps some of the answers to these considerations can be found in the practical guidance suggested by the Report of the AESOC Senior Officials Working Party on Indigenous Education.

The link between education and employment has been established in that one impacts upon the other. Employment staves off poverty, contributes to individual, community, and national capacity and financial and economic security and independence. Ms Sally Goold, Chair of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses has argued that more support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the education system is essential.

While Ms Goold stated unequivocally that education for Indigenous people needs some fundamental changes before numbers will increase, she also highlighted the fact that, ‘there is poor understanding of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students among academia’ (cited in Armstrong 2004, p. 16). Within this discourse another issue was highlighted which fits into this spectrum of change. This is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are, ‘literally falling through the cracks in a system that is neither responsive nor supportive of their needs’ (cited in Armstrong 2004, p. 16).

Why are students falling through the cracks, and why is ‘the system’ non-responsive to their needs? Furthermore, what are the social justice implications of this situation, particularly for a first-world nation? While the current study has highlighted this important issue, it is beyond its present scope and means to further explore it other than to suggest that
ongoing research be undertaken to determine appropriate preventative measures.

Notwithstanding the fact that this is clearly an issue requiring greater investigation, current opinions, strategies and career development approaches varied enormously between all Career Advisers. Some were empathetic, clearly understood the challenges and barriers facing their students, and addressed the needs of students to the very best of their ability. Others appeared to have a savoir faire attitude, and adopted a ‘one size fits all’ approach toward meeting the career development needs of their students. Despite this, all Career Advisers believed their respective approaches to be generally successful.

While Career Advisers discussed the important role played by Aboriginal Education Assistants, it was alarming to also note that in some instances Aboriginal Education Assistants were employed on a casual or part-time basis only. In some schools funding restrictions (based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student numbers) meant that Aboriginal Education Assistants were not employed at all.

The *Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education* (NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW Education Consultative Group Inc. 2004, p. 188) recommended that regional specialist career counsellors be appointed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This support would be available to students from the time they commenced secondary school.

This raises an interesting consideration. Aboriginal Education Assistants play a vital role in the learning and teaching of Aboriginal and Torres
Despite this fact, students experience an undeniable lack of access, for various reasons, to this support. If the current situation is as it is with regard to Aboriginal Education Assistants, how, where and when will the regional specialist career counsellors mentioned in the Review be available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

**Knowledge and Awareness of Health Career Pathways**

Career Advisers also discussed a number of issues relevant to their knowledge and awareness of health career pathways. These included the nature and extent of health-related career curricula being delivered in career education, and whether or not any of that material was relevant to health career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

While Career Advisers receive large volumes of printed information relevant to career pathways in general, with very little specifically referring to health, it was generally perceived that university engagement with schools in promoting health careers for students was a key networking strategy in raising awareness of health career pathways and options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

A distinction was made however between simply receiving reams of printed information to a preference for a more consolidated approach. This approach includes personal face-to-face meetings between University representatives and Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants, regular and ongoing contact throughout the year and ensuring that university representatives have the opportunity to speak with students in appropriate information forums.
Knowledge of UAI requirements and alternate entrance pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into tertiary study varied enormously between Career Advisers and students. Career Advisers reported that often students were discouraged from pursuing tertiary study due to UAI restraints. This was further complicated by the fact that many students expressed a poor academic self-concept, believing tertiary study to be out of their reach and beyond their capability.

The National Health Strategy Working Party (1996, p. 99) argued that teachers have the potential to increase the learning capacity and academic performance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the use of appropriate teaching methods. While this may be the case, the MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education stated categorically:

> All too frequently it seems that there is acceptance that educational inequality for Aboriginal students is normal. Work done over recent decades to achieve educational equality in outcomes has failed to eliminate this perception (2001, p. 15).

Interlinked with this perception is the issue of poor academic self-concept which is experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Craven (n.d.) argues that previous research has established the causal relation between self-concept and other desirable educational outcomes, including academic achievement. Judge and Bono (cited in Craven n.d.) have demonstrated that components of a positive self-concept construct were among the best predictors of job performance and job satisfaction. Craven concludes, stating that academic self-concept may be a potent determinant of a wide variety of desirable educational outcomes.
With regard to alternate entrance pathways into tertiary study, Career Advisers themselves were largely unaware of these pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This lack of awareness, coupled with the poor academic self-concept that students experience, presents an alarming picture. It can be argued that student exposure to these schemes is reliant upon the Career Adviser as facilitator of this exposure. It can also be argued that responsibility for raising awareness of these schemes lies squarely within the context of effective and targeted career development and support.

This issue was highlighted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training (2004, p. 237). The Standing Committee argued that the expertise of the careers teacher lay in the awareness of available resources and programs. Additionally, the ability to develop a comprehensive and effective course of study which brings together the different elements of career education and responds to the needs of students in particular situations, ‘with a combination of measures’ is paramount.

This requirement was raised by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, and the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in their Review of Aboriginal education. The Review revealed that there was widespread acknowledgement that schools can and do indeed make a difference. Also, effective teachers do adapt and adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, the Review also reported:

... a strong message from the field is that teachers cannot undertake their role in the classroom without good organisational management and leadership at both the school and
regional level. Strategic and innovative approaches to teaching and learning and accompanying support and expertise, including regional and state office support, need to be provided in a coherent, strategic and ongoing fashion (2004, p. 82).

Although the Review was discussing the early years of primary schooling education, the relevance and applicability of this whole-of-school approach across the primary and secondary schooling curriculum is evident.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training in their report, Today’s training. Tomorrow’s skills (1998, p. 53) acknowledged that career guidance, ‘cannot improve until governments provide them [schools] with enough appropriately trained teachers who are equipped with comprehensive and up to date information’. This requirement was also highlighted by the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association.

In discussing school career advice, the Association (2005, p. 31) noted that two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support workers felt that there was a tendency among some school Career Advisers to assume that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were not capable of entering and/or achieving in tertiary studies (and medicine in particular). They felt that this was, ‘partly due to school careers advisors not being well enough informed or committed to advancing career opportunities for Indigenous people’.

On one particular occasion during data collection for the current study, a school Deputy Principal who had chosen to participate in the interview with the Career Adviser and the Aboriginal Education Assistant, felt that the issue was as much ‘political and practical as anything else’, and was of
the opinion that in order to facilitate the entry of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into health careers, the ‘elitist attitude and approach’ that Universities have toward health career study and training, ‘has to change’.

This further highlights the need for a strategic and targeted whole-of-school approach to educate key stakeholders within the schooling environment regarding alternate entrance pathways into Universities and higher education study and training. Additionally further research determining how Universities can develop a best-practice co-ordinated and strategic approach in order to address this issue would prove highly beneficial in highlighting appropriate entrance pathways into tertiary study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

While Universities maintained a relatively high profile in raising awareness of additional educational options for health career development, local Aboriginal Medical Services and Area Health Services did not. It can be argued that local Aboriginal Medical Services and Area Health Services are ideal settings in which to provide culturally appropriate work experience and training by health care professionals in a community setting.

This issue was highlighted over ten years ago by the National Health Strategy Working Party. Recommendation 5 (vii) stated:

> Community health centres and other community placement settings should accept a role in the education of undergraduates and preregistration trainees, be recognised as having that role, be funded accordingly and their staff trained appropriately (1996, p. 96).
This would also seem to suggest the need for the development of industry networking and collaboration between relevant community health care agencies within the wider community and secondary schools. This networking and collaboration could target relevant strategies for raising awareness of health career pathways and options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In light of this, it is clear that further research into determining how to facilitate this networking between relevant health care industry service providers and schools be undertaken.

Knowledge and awareness of the diversity of health career pathways and options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students appeared limited and seemed to be confined to either nursing or medicine. There was an automatic assumption amongst some Career Advisers that pursuing a health career simply meant becoming a nurse or a doctor. There was little, if any, evidence of a broader knowledge of other (allied) health career pathways.

The National Health Strategy Working Party (1996, p. 94) highlighted the issue that during early school years, ‘medicine, nursing and other health orientated courses need to be presented as viable and achievable options to young Aboriginal students, and assistance given where necessary, in those subjects which are pre-requisites to entry into tertiary studies’. It is clear that despite the Working Party identifying this requirement and calling for it, little has been done.

When health career representatives network with Career Advisers in schools they generally come from a particular discipline, such as nursing or medicine. It can be argued that the nature of this level of exposure is limited because it is too specialised and does not effectively represent the
diversity of health career pathways that are currently available. It can also be argued that this situation is at odds with current government policy which endorses developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force at a national level.

A number of government reports have advocated for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force (Australian Qualifications Framework 1995; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Vocational Education and Training 2006; Inquiry into vocational education in schools 2004). The researcher observed that if government policy advocates for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force, why is there so little knowledge amongst Career Advisers regarding the diversity of health careers, and, why do the majority of Career Advisers in New South Wales generally equate nursing or medicine with a health career?

Also, many higher educational institutions, such as Universities and TAFEs, offer study and training in a wide variety of health careers, some of which specifically target the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Are these institutions promoting these opportunities to Career Advisers? If they are promoting health career pathways through higher learning, how effective are these approaches in raising awareness and recruiting students into tertiary study? Conversely, if these institutions offer tertiary study in health careers yet do not promote them in order to raise awareness and recruit students, the question must be asked as to why?
Interest in Health Career Pathways

Career Advisers discussed a range of issues associated with what they believed stimulated interest in health and influenced their students to pursue a health career pathway. Responses appeared to revolve around the key issue of exposure, a primary motivating factor.

This exposure includes the students’ knowledge and personal awareness of the current health status of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, gained either through direct experience or through the media. It also includes exposure to career markets, career expos or career seminar days, and existent familial health occupations.

Career Advisers also highlighted the issue that opportunities for students to gain exposure to health career pathways through participation in current VET programs delivered in schools was limited.

In the context of this discussion it must be noted that a recent developmental report, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Participation in Vocational Education and Training (Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council 2006) has examined the context of improving participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in apprenticeships in the community services and health industries. The Report was a component of an overarching research project which also included the development of high quality comprehensive information resources. According to the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, research indicates that the resources will provide information that will act to support service provision capacity by:
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- Raising awareness of training and employment opportunities in the Community Services and Health Industries from a National Qualifications Framework.
- Provide some hands-on tools to assist in the promotion of apprenticeships in these sectors (2006, ii).

The current study commends this recent initiative and acknowledges the valuable contribution the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council will make in raising awareness of health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and in developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. The use of plain English and clear and concise information, which is presented in a culturally appropriate format, is ideally suited to meet the needs of these students and their families.

The National Health Strategy Working Party (1996, p. 99) argued that teachers have a ‘significant and pivotal role’ in the success of health awareness and health education programs. The Working Party highlighted the relevance of culturally appropriate information, stating that examples and materials utilised must be relevant and meaningful, and should emphasise the principles of self-determination and community control. It is clear that the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council incorporate these principles in their approach to raising awareness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

Recommendation 2 of the Inquiry into vocational education in schools (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training 2004, xxv) recommends that Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and industry jointly fund a promotion campaign. This campaign would
promote careers in areas of skill shortage such as in established trades. It is clear that the Australian Government endorses the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force at a national level as evidenced by the recent report into vocational education and training.

There is an important relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, community, and growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force. Career Advisers highlighted the fact that many of their students had stated that they want to work for their community in some capacity because they are aware of the wide-spread disadvantage many communities experience on a day-to-day basis.

If, as one Career Adviser suggested, appropriate strategies were in place which facilitated ‘broadening their [student] vision to incorporate some of the other areas in health’ then additional career pathway opportunities could be made available to students. Not only would students be working toward and establishing a career for themselves, they would be working as an advocate for the health and social needs of their community as well.

**Strategies to Raise Awareness of Health Career Pathways**

In exploring strategies to raise awareness of health career pathways, Career Advisers suggested a number of approaches which they felt were worthy of consideration. One of these approaches included curriculum development.

One Career Adviser felt that an appropriate approach was to introduce careers through normal classroom lessons. In this context, issues relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health could be incorporated into health lessons, which in turn linked to careers in health. Health is a
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mandatory component of the Year 7-10 secondary schooling curriculum which presents a viable medium and practical opportunity to introduce health careers through linking the career with the topic area.

Career Advisers also discussed the importance of work experience for their students. Work experience is an important opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to showcase their talents, capacity and inherent potential for contributing toward the community, their chosen industry area and the national economy. Work experience facilitates exposure to a variety of career options and develops and enhances skills required in the workplace. Importantly, it is also an opportunity for industry prejudice toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be confronted.

While Career Advisers discussed the advantages of work experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, one Career Adviser and Aboriginal Education Assistant highlighted the fact that schools need programs which link their students with work experience. This would require greater collaboration between the school, industry representatives, and various government and non-government agencies and service providers.

The importance of role models and inspirational speakers from relevant industry areas and from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was also highlighted by Career Advisers as an effective motivational factor in encouraging students to consider a career in health. The benefit of role models is that they can exert a positive influence on the outcomes of students schooling life, encouraging them to, ‘make sound life choices, to progress their educational outcomes and assist them to develop
skills, values and other attributes that encourage citizenship and lead to a full and productive adulthood for the benefit of the community and the economy’ (MacCallum & Beltman 2002, p. 7).

So important are role models considered to be, that the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (2005, p. 13) noted that the lack of role models was considered to be an ‘impediment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in the community services and health workforce’.

The National Report Volume 2 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1996) highlighted the important issue of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation within the schooling system. The Report argued that the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching staff and education workers not only developed positive images of substantive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in education, it provided effective role modelling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

One Career Adviser also discussed capitalising on students’ interest in sport, in particular educating students about the relationship between sport and health and associated health career pathways. This would be a practical strategy which would build on the initial interest of the student in sport, which could then be broadened and developed to encompass that interest with an associated career pathway such as for example, sports physiotherapy.

Other than highlighting these issues, it is clear that further research needs to be conducted to further explore appropriate and strategically co-
ordinated responses which could facilitate the implementation of the suggestions put forth by the current study.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a discussion of the thoughts, ideas, feelings and opinions of Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants. The data were presented according to four primary themes that emerged from the guiding research questions. These themes included ‘Career development context’, ‘Knowledge and awareness of health career pathways’, ‘Interest in health career pathways’ and ‘Strategies to raise awareness of health career pathways’. The following chapter, Chapter Eight, *Conclusions*, will present recommendations drawn from the findings of the current study.
Chapter Eight

Conclusions

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents an overview of the current study. A summary of the career education and development context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondary School students and implications of the research is discussed. Nine Recommendations are drawn from the data and their implication for policy, practice and further research are also discussed.

Introduction

The aim of the current study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisers in New South Wales secondary schools regarding health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This aim was supported by a qualitative line of enquiry which explored strategies for raising awareness and stimulating interest in health career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students.

The research tradition which framed the context and methodology for the current study drew primarily from interpretative-constructivist methods which utilised qualitative data collection procedures. This involved the use of semi-structured open-ended face-to-face interviewing.

It is anticipated that findings from the current study will:

• Build capacity for the New South Wales Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
• Address the political economy of health as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially regarding education, health status and ongoing career development.

• Address issues of access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, particularly exposure and access to health career pathway options and subsequent participation in the health workforce.

• Potentially increase career pathway options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students, particularly health career pathway options.

• Potentially influence health career information in New South Wales secondary high schools.

• Contribute toward existing literature.

Summary

Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants work within a challenging world-of-work context which is continually subject to the ongoing impact of globalisation.

Watts (cited in Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 225) argued that career counselling, ‘operates at the interface between personal and societal needs, between individual and opportunity structures, between private and public identities’. As a result of this interface, Career Advisers are often required to manage competing and diverse curriculum requirements in a highly pressured and time-sensitive workplace environment.

Data analysis highlighted a number of factors impacting on the delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These included poor schooling attendance and retention, limited exposure and
access to career education, appropriateness of career information, institutional racism and discrimination and poor academic self-concept.

In addition, the data highlighted the significant issue that the delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is haphazard, of an ad hoc nature, and largely dependent upon the personal ethos, drive and commitment of individual school Career Advisers and their schools.

The data also revealed the critical role that Aboriginal Education Assistants play in bridging the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with the educational system: a fact which has wider social justice implications. The data also highlighted that other than medicine and nursing, Career Advisers knowledge and awareness of current health career pathways was extremely limited.

**Implications**

The implications of the research and findings from the data are significant because they reveal systemic inequality and lack of governmental support for effective service provision in the education system. This systemic inequality and lack of effective service provision has particular relevance, not only in the short term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students and their families, but in the long term for the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force and the wider national economy.

Moreover, the implications highlight the critical need for ongoing research relevant to current teaching and learning practices for career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary
school students. This includes cultural appropriateness of current career development education practices, access to culturally appropriate resources and ongoing staff development and training for all career development practitioners.

The Systems Theory Framework has practical application to both Career Advisers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and provides a foundation for effective career education and development. Notwithstanding the fact that globalisation may indeed be leading to an ‘increased homogeneity’ and a world view representing the common humanity that binds all human beings together as one species, (Patterson cited in Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 239), cultural diversity must be acknowledged.

It is particularly important, as Meyers (2000, p. 33) highlighted, that career practitioners, ‘look from within the individual and from the world around the individual’. It is clear that current career education and development practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students need to be reconceptualised and repositioned within a multicultural theoretical framework. This framework not only needs to be able to accommodate the diverse range of social, economic, political and cultural influences which impact on their daily lives, it must be responsive to those influences.

Constantine and Ladany (2000, p. 162) argued that the historical definition of multicultural career counselling has gone ‘virtually unchallenged by multicultural scholars and practitioners’. Similarly, Arthur (2005) argued that while diversity competencies tended to be associated with interpersonal skills and the demonstration of cultural sensitivity for working with individuals, increasing attention is now being paid to the
structural barriers that impede the career development of individuals who are disproportionately represented by individuals from non-dominant groups.

While Constantine and Ladany lament the lack of involvement of multicultural scholars and practitioners, Arthur offers more hope in highlighting the fact that awareness of the structural barriers impacting on disproportionately represented individuals is growing. Notwithstanding this fact, it is clear that in the twenty-first century, career development practitioners need to be more fully informed about the systemic influences impacting on career education, development and future pathways of marginalised individuals.

In addition, career development practitioners need to be ‘skilled at designing relevant interventions (Arthur & McMahon, in press). As the authors argue, building from a focus on diversity to one of social justice requires an examination of the competencies required by career development practitioners for working with individuals and groups, instituting institutional change, and for social action at broader system levels.

Within the Systems Theory Framework, Career Advisers and their students are seen as dynamic interactive individual systems existing within other broader systems. Systems are open and permeable, and as such are subject to being influenced by a diverse range of phenomena, such as for example, spirituality, world view, gender, culture. With the emphasis on the individual, a Systems Theory Framework allows for, ‘multiple meanings and explanations of the purpose of work and its significance to people’ (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 169).
The application of a Systems Theory Framework to career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students would address the culturally inappropriate mode of career education and development currently in use. Within systems theory there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. Career development activities are tailored to meet the individual needs of the student, without judgement, discrimination or racism. As Flores, Spanierman and Obasi (cited in Kerka 2004, p. 65) highlighted, culturally competent practitioners recognise ‘how and why’ individuals’ career-related experiences might be different and think ‘outside their own cultural frames of reference in assisting people with career development’.

Present career development services can no longer rely solely on the practices of the past but must be guided by the needs of the future (Patton & McMahon 1999, p. 189). The application of a Systems Theory Framework by career development practitioners to their learning and teaching activities requires a significant shift away from those currently in use. While this may in itself be challenging and difficult, the move would be a beneficial one as they and their clients would be able to construct new meanings for themselves, and work toward new and greater possibilities.

**Recommendations**

As an outcome of the findings revealed by the current study, the following recommendations are suggested:

Career Advisers reported that in many instances, they were not only responsible for the delivery of career education to students, but were required to manage additional learning and teaching requirements within the education curriculum. It was felt that this imposed a time constraint
on the availability and delivery of career education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which may reduce the quality and comprehensiveness of career development.

**Recommendation 1**

*That all schools have a full-time designated Career Adviser whose sole responsibility is to provide targeted career education and development to students, foster post-compulsory lifelong learning and more effectively prepare students for the world-of-work.*

Career Advisers highlighted the critical role maintained by Aboriginal Education Assistants in the learning and teaching experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Many Career Advisers acknowledged that they utilise the relationship between the Aboriginal Education Assistant and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student as a basis for establishing an effective interpersonal relationship between themselves and their students. Despite this, in many schools Aboriginal Education Assistants are employed on a part-time basis, and in some schools, not at all.

**Recommendation 2**

*That all schools with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, regardless of numbers, have a full-time Aboriginal Education Assistant whose sole responsibility is to provide targeted career education to these students and who can work collaboratively with the Career Adviser to specifically support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their parents and community.*

Career Advisers demonstrated little knowledge and understanding of how the historical relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider non-Indigenous community continues to impact
upon and affect relationships between the two. In particular, there was little understanding or awareness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience of the education system and how this experience contributes toward poor academic progress.

**Recommendation 3**

*That in order for Career Advisers to work more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, appropriate professional development, cultural awareness training and peer support be made available on an ongoing basis.*

Career Advisers discussed their concern at the poor schooling attendance and retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students which particularly affected their exposure to career education. Compounding this situation is the fact that across all selected schools in the current study, career education commenced in varying years.

**Recommendation 4**

*That age-appropriate career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commence in Year 7 in order to maximise exposure to career education, foster and support students aspirations and academic performance, and work toward building, developing and nurturing individual capacity.*

**Recommendation 5**

*That in order to ensure equity and access to career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, schools adopt a whole-of-school approach toward career education and implement the Careers Education Quality Framework.*

Career Advisers demonstrated little knowledge and awareness of the range and diversity of current health career pathways, with the exception of nursing and medicine. They also revealed that they received little if any
material which informed them of the range and diversity of health career pathways currently available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

**Recommendation 6**

*That health career resources and materials be developed and be made readily available to Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants which promote the diversity of current health career pathways. These resources should be culturally appropriate and be written in plain English. These resources should include information relevant to health career scholarships, such as the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship, and information regarding entrance pathways into higher learning education institutions.*

Career Advisers stressed the fact that they wanted and indeed preferred on-going face-to-face contact with representatives from key industry and educational institutions throughout the school year, in particular, Universities. This personal approach would serve to raise the profile of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force through visits to schools and attendance and participation in community forums, health career seminars and expos.

**Recommendation 7**

*That representatives from local, regional and metropolitan Aboriginal Medical Services, TAFEs and Universities develop and foster collaborative working partnerships and networks with local, regional and metropolitan school Career Advisers and Aboriginal Education Assistants.*

The relevance of current career education and development practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has been highlighted by the current study. Current models of career development are culturally exclusive and do not accommodate diversity or marginalised populations.
A Systems Theory Framework has application within the schooling environment as well as to the delivery of culturally appropriate career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.

**Recommendation 8**

*That schools adopt a whole-of-school approach to develop and implement a more inclusive model of career education and development. That this model accommodates diversity, and that it facilitates culturally appropriate relationships between the schooling environment and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their families and their communities.*

Career Advisers suggested a number of strategies for raising awareness and stimulating interest in health career pathways for students. This included raising self confidence of students wanting to pursue a health career through appropriate work experience, association with health professional role models and promoting the holistic (spiritual, emotional, community) components of health careers.

**Recommendation 9**

*That as a matter of urgency further research be conducted to determine appropriate programs, learning pathways and partnerships which will link students with work experience and appropriate mentors in the health work force sector.*

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented an overview of the current study. Nine Recommendations have been extrapolated from the findings. These Recommendations relate to improving health career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school
students and to growing and developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health work force.

It is clear that the need for additional and ongoing research into career education and development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students is critical, especially if disparities in educational outcomes are to be overcome. From a social justice perspective, it is also clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s human capital must be recognised, nurtured and developed to ensure that not only students have the opportunity to participate equitably in Australian society, but all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share in the benefits that come from such participation.
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Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Letter of Introduction to School Principals

APPENDIX 2: Permission to conduct research in NSW Metropolitan and Regional Secondary Schools, the New South Wales Department of Education & Training

APPENDIX 3: Permission to conduct human research from the Human Research Ethics Committee, the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX 4: Participant Consent Form

APPENDIX 5: Participant Information Form

APPENDIX 6: Interview Question Schedule

APPENDIX 7: Letter of Thanks to Study Participants

APPENDIX 8: Ethics Approval, the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales
APPENDIX 1:

[DATE]

[RECIPIENT]

[ADDRESS DETAILS]

[SALUTATION]

My name is Michele Knight. I am an academic staff member of the University of Sydney and a post graduate student of Yooroong Garang: School of Indigenous Health Studies, the University of Sydney. I hold a Bachelor of Health Science in Aboriginal Health and community Development, and am currently completing a Masters Degree by Research.

The subject content for the required thesis pertains to health career curricula for Indigenous Secondary School students in NSW state schools. The context for the research is grounded in increasing the Indigenous health workforce. I would very much like to discuss this with you, together with the possibility of conducting, at a later date, some non-invasive research activities in your school (which would involve an interview with your school career advisor).

In support of the project I have attached for your information a copy of the Referee Report which was submitted to the Department of Education, and an information sheet which provides a more comprehensive outline of the study. The report was completed by Mr Kevin Lowe, Inspector Aboriginal Education, NSW Office of the Board of Studies. The NSW Department of Education and Training, and the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee have also both granted ethics approval to the study.

I will telephone in a few days time to confirm receipt of this letter and to also schedule a meeting with you at a convenient time. Thank you very much for your time and attention to my request.

Sincerely

Michele Knight
Encl.

P.O. Box 170, Lidcombe, NSW 1825, Australia
Telephone: (02) 9351-9393 • Facsimile: (02) 9351-9400
E-Mail: yginfo@echs.usyd.edu.au • Website: http://www.yg.echs.usyd.edu.au
APPENDIX 2:

PLANNING AND INNOVATION

Michele Knight
PO Box 1691
Dee Why
NSW 2099

Dear Ms Knight

SERAP Number: 04.146

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled Tracks to the Future: Perceptions and Attitudes of Career Advisors in NSW Secondary Schools about Health Career Pathways for Indigenous Students. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation.

This approval will remain valid until 31 October 2005.

You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools. I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school’s convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to General Manager, Planning and Innovation, Department of Education and Training, GPO Box 33, Sydney, NSW 2001.

Yours sincerely

Martin Graham
A/General Manager, Planning and Innovation

January 05
APPENDIX 3:

02 November 2004

Mr W Losberg  
Yooroong Garang School of Indigenous Health Studies  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
Cumberland Campus – C42  
The University of Sydney

Dear Mr Losberg

I am pleased to inform you that the Human Research Ethics Committee at its meeting on 25 October 2004 approved your protocol entitled “Tracks to the future: Perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors in NSW Secondary Schools concerning health career pathways for Indigenous students”

Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref No.: 10-2004/2/7688  
Approval Period: October 2004 – October 2005  
Completion Date of Project: 30 June 2006  
No. of Participants: 12  
Authorised Personnel: Mr W Losberg  
Dr F Khavarpour  
Ms M Knight

To comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans, and in line with the Human Research Ethics Committee requirements this approval is for a 12-month period. At the end of the approval period, the HREC will approve extensions for a further 12-month, subject to a satisfactory annual report. The HREC will forward to you an Annual Progress Report form, at the end of each 12-month period. Your first report will be due on 31 October 2005.

Conditions of Approval Applicable to all Projects

(1) Modifications to the protocol cannot proceed until such approval is obtained in writing. (Refer to the website www.usyd.edu.au/ethics/human under ‘Forms and Guides’ for a Modification Form).
(2) The confidentiality and anonymity of all research subjects is maintained at all times, except as required by law.

(3) All research subjects are provided with a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

(4) The Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

(5) The following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Sheet. Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney, on (02) 9351 4811.

(6) The standard University policy concerning storage of data and tapes should be followed. While temporary storage of data or tapes at the researcher's home or an off-campus site is acceptable during the active transcription phase of the project, permanent storage should be at a secure, University controlled site for a minimum of seven years.

(7) A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Associate Professor J D Watson
Chairman
Human Research Ethics Committee

Encl. Participant Information Sheet
Participant Consent Form
Interview Questions

Cc: Ms Michelle Knight, PO Box 1691 Dee Why NSW 2099
APPENDIX 4:

The University of Sydney
Faculty of Health Sciences

YOOROANG GARANG
School of Indigenous Health Studies

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ........................................................., give consent to my participation in
Name (please print)
the research project:

TITLE: Tracks to the future: Perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors in NSW
Secondary Schools about health career pathways for Indigenous students.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project have been explained to me, and any
   questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Sheet and have been given the
   opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with
   the researcher/s.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting
   my treatment or my relationships with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information
   about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that I can choose to deny permission for my interview to be
   audio-taped.

Signed: ..............................................................

Name: ...........................................................................

Date: .............................................................................
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to participate in the following study, *Tracks to the future: Perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors in NSW Secondary Schools about health career pathways for indigenous students*, being conducted in a number of Sydney Metropolitan and Regional Secondary Schools. The purpose of the study is to investigate perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors about health career pathways for Indigenous Secondary School students. This study is being conducted to meet the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research under the supervision of Mr Warren Losberg, Chief Investigator, of Yooroang Garang: School of Indigenous Health Studies, the University of Sydney.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview which will take approximately between half and one hour and which will also be audio taped. The location and time for the interview will be arranged so as to be most suitable to you. You will be asked a number of questions relating to the Aboriginal Careers Aspiration Program and health career pathways for Indigenous students. This important information will be used to enhance health career awareness and career options for entry into the labour market.

Any information you supply will be strictly confidential, and only the researcher will have access to the data collected. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The interview will be audio taped, transcribed, analysed and stored in a safe place for 7 years, based on the University of Sydney’s Ethics Committee requirements.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are in no way obliged to participate and if you do decide to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without penalty or prejudice. If you wish to receive an Executive Summary of the study, this will be provided upon completion of the project.

When you have read this information, Michele Knight (0425 203 271) will discuss it with you further and answer any questions that you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Mr Warren Losberg, Chief Investigator on (02) 9351 9837.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research project then please contact the Manager for Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811.

This information sheet is for you to keep.
APPENDIX 6:

Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, how would you describe the nature of your role as a Careers Adviser and the teaching and learning relationship you experience specifically with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participating in career education at your school?

2. In your opinion, how effective do you feel that your role as a Careers Adviser is, specifically in relating to promoting and facilitating the career education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

3. Can you tell me a little bit about the nature of the health-related curricula currently incorporated into career awareness education at your school?

4. Can you tell me, if health-related curricula are incorporated into career awareness education, whether or not that curriculum includes material specifically relevant to health career education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

5. In your opinion, what do you think would be an effective way to specifically stimulate interest and raise awareness of health careers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at your school?

6. In the classroom, and as a consequence of your teaching in areas of career education, do you feel that students are interested in pursuing a career in health?
APPENDIX 7:

[DATE]

[RECIPIENT]
[ADDRESS DETAILS]

[SALUTATION]

Thank you very much for your participation and meaningful input during our interview [DATE].

As I mentioned, I will forward a copy of the transcript within approximately four weeks. A draft thesis will be completed by November 2005, with the final report being made available by August of next year, a copy of which will be forwarded to the school.

Again, thank you so much.

With best wishes

Michele Knight

cc [SCHOOL PRINCIPAL]
APPENDIX 8:

Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of New South Wales

AH&MRC ETHICS COMMITTEE

Ms Michele Knight,
Research Project Officer
Yoorong Garang
School of Indigenous Health Studies
University of Sydney
PO Box 170
Lidcombe
NSW 1825

Dear Ms Knight

Re: Project - Tracks to the future: Perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors in Secondary Schools concerning health career pathways for Indigenous students

Concerning your request for our ethics committee to evaluate and support the above-mentioned health research project the Committee responds as follows:

In all matters requiring ethical evaluation the Ethics Committee is committed to professional projects in essential epidemiological and medical research that increase scientific knowledge, demonstrate benefit to Aboriginal communities and provide transfer of skills to the Aboriginal health workforce.

Included in the criteria used by the Committee to evaluate applications for proposed research and publications of statistical data on Aboriginal health are the following principles which are contained within the AH&MRC publication Guidelines for Research into Aboriginal Health. (www.ahmrc.org.au/Publications.htm)

(i) that in accordance with the priorities set out in the National Aboriginal Health Strategy and the Report of the National Workshop on Ethics of Research in Aboriginal Health, research proposals must advance scientific knowledge to result in demonstrated additional benefit to Aboriginal communities.

(ii) that there be Aboriginal community control over all aspects of the proposed research including research design, ownership of data, data interpretation and publication of research findings.

(iii) that the research to be conducted in a manner sensitive to the cultural principles of Aboriginal society.

(iv) that Aboriginal communities and organisations be reimbursed for all costs arising from their participation in the research process.

(v) that Aboriginal communities and organisations should be able to benefit from the transfer of skills and knowledge arising from the research project.

Funded by NSW Health Department

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Ph: (02) 9698 1099: Fax: (02) 9690 1559: Email: ahmrc@ahmrc.org.au
ABN 69 085 654 397: ACN 085 654 397
Furthermore, the Committee assumes that applicants of research proposals and epidemiological publications of Aboriginal health are conversant with relevant provisions within the following documents:

1. *Report of the National Workshop on Ethics of Research in Aboriginal Health* (NAIHO) [1987]
2. *Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (NH&MRC) [1991]
3. *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Concerning Humans,* (NH&MRC) [2000]
4. *NSW Aboriginal Health – Information Guidelines* (NSW Aboriginal Health Partnership, NSW Health Department/AH&MRC) [1998]
5. *Guidelines for Research into Aboriginal Health* (AH&MRC Ethics Committee) [1999]

With specific reference to your project the Committee responds as follows:

- The importance of the study is acknowledged and it is noted that the researcher is cognisant of the Aboriginal Career Aspiration Program (ACAP) and seeks to ascertain the perceptions and attitudes of Career Advisors responsible for the ACAP and how they perform in encouraging Aboriginal secondary students into the health disciplines and an evaluation of their role as career advisors in this endeavour.
- Some of the questions to be asked of the Career Advisors are considered far too subjective and possibly incriminating if responses to any personal deficiency were answered honestly, thereby lessening the objectivity of any conclusions to be drawn.
- The role of the AECG would have been a valuable source for providing a cultural context in career education for secondary students and career advisors and it would be for the AECG to have vetted the questions for cultural appropriateness
- Perceptions and attitudes are being self-assessed
- Whether any Career Advisor were Aboriginal may have provided a contrasting perspective for the answers.
- The committee would have suggested a more definitive examination on the ‘knowledge’ rather than the ‘perceptions’ of Career Advisors in the subject matter
- Additional inclusion of the Chairperson, AH&MRC Ethics Committee, on *Participant Information Sheet* for complaint mechanism process as outlined in the *Guidelines for Research into Aboriginal Health* (AH&MRC Ethics Committee) [1999] on the web site mentioned above.

The Committee apologises for the inordinate delay in responding to your application. Regrettably, we have encountered serious backlog of work resulting from an office fire that has compounded the onerous workload of the Committee.

By now the work for a Masters Degree is probably completed but the above suggestions are made in the context of providing an additional cultural viewpoint that may be of some assistance in relating the conclusions of the study for positive application within the Aboriginal community. They may also be of assistance for any further academic pursuit that requires an Aboriginal Health Ethics committee perspective.
Following consideration of your application, if it not too late for this response in light of the academic year, the Ethics Committee would have granted ethical approval for your research project, subject to:

- compliance with the above-mentioned criteria, recommendations or deletions;
- copies of any required signed consent forms or requested documentation and endorsement being sighted by the Ethics Committee;
- any changes in circumstances related to the research project, its method or timeframe being conveyed to the Ethics Committee; and
- annual/routine reporting to the Ethics Committee of progress in the research
- a final draft report of the research being provided to the AH&MRC Ethics Committee to be vetted for compliance with ethical and cultural criteria prior to:
  - any submission for publication; and/or
  - any dissemination of the report.

To expedite the research, should the above matters be acceptable and complied with, and the Committee receives formal notification to that effect within three months, prior to research commencing, there is no need to await further response from the Ethics Committee.

We take this opportunity to wish you well in your research.

On behalf of the AH&MRC Ethic Committee,

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Kaye Mundine
Chairperson

15th July 2005